

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS READINESS CHECKLIST

IS YOUR ORGANISATION
PREPARED BEFORE AN
ISSUE ESCALATES?

PREPARE.
PROTECT.
PRESERVE TRUST.



HOOK, LINE & SINKER

Crisis Communications Readiness Checklist

A practical guide to assessing whether your organisation is prepared before an issue escalates

A crisis rarely arrives with a convenient warning. A cyberattack, operational incident, executive issue, customer complaint, employee matter or social media backlash can quickly develop into a much larger reputational challenge.

When that happens, organisations do not have the luxury of developing their communications response from scratch. The strongest crisis response starts before the crisis, with the right people, processes and communications protocols already in place.

Hook, Line & Sinker has developed this practical Crisis Communications Readiness Checklist to help leadership and communications teams identify potential gaps before they are tested under pressure.

Use the checklist below to assess your organisation's current level of preparedness.

Tick the boxes you can confidently answer yes to.

1. Crisis communications plan

- ☐ Do we have a documented crisis communications plan?
- ☐ Has the plan been reviewed or updated within the past 12 months?
- ☐ Does it identify the types of crises most likely to affect our organisation?
- ☐ Does it clearly explain when and how the crisis communications plan should be activated?
- ☐ Can relevant members of the leadership and communications teams access it quickly, including outside normal working hours?

Did you know: HLS has provided ongoing crisis communications and reputation support to a global software company for more than seven years, providing senior counsel and communications support as complex issues emerge and evolve.



2. Crisis team and responsibilities

- ☐ Do we have a designated crisis communications team?
- ☐ Does every member understand their role during a crisis?
- ☐ Have we identified who has final decision-making authority?
- ☐ Are communications, leadership, legal, HR and operational teams clear on when they need to become involved?
- ☐ Do we have deputies if key decision-makers are unavailable?

Did you know: One of the biggest causes of delay during a crisis can happen internally. If teams need to establish who is responsible, who approves messaging and who communicates externally after an issue has already escalated, valuable response time can be lost.

3. Risk and scenario planning

- ☐ Have we identified the issues most likely to create reputational risk for our organisation?
- ☐ Have we considered scenarios involving employees, customers, executives, products or services?
- ☐ Have we considered cyber, data privacy and technology-related incidents?
- ☐ Have we considered misinformation, social media escalation and third-party risks?
- ☐ Do we understand which stakeholders would be most affected by our highest-risk scenarios?

Did you know: A crisis does not have to begin in the media to become a media crisis. An employee post, customer complaint, cyber incident, leaked communication or piece of misinformation can move rapidly between social media, stakeholders and journalists.

4. Escalation and decision-making

- ☐ Do employees know when and how to escalate a potential reputational issue?
- ☐ Do we have a clear chain of command for urgent communications decisions?
- ☐ Can normal approval processes be accelerated during a crisis?

- ☐ Can senior decision-makers be reached outside normal working hours?
- ☐ Could we approve and issue an initial holding statement quickly if required?

Did you know: HLS has managed a major stakeholder crisis for a nation, using multiple communications channels to reach audiences ranging from communities on the ground to senior business stakeholders and investors. The response required careful coordination across very different stakeholder groups while managing reputation throughout an evolving situation.

5. Spokespeople and media readiness

- ☐ Have we nominated primary and secondary spokespeople?
- ☐ Have our spokespeople received professional media training?
- ☐ Have they practised responding to difficult or hostile questions?
- ☐ Do we know which spokesperson should address different types of issues?
- ☐ Do public-facing employees know where to direct media enquiries during a crisis?

Did you know: A strong spokesperson needs more than knowledge of the issue. Crisis interviews require the ability to communicate confirmed facts clearly, respond to difficult questions and remain aligned with the organisation's agreed position under pressure.

6. Messaging and stakeholder communications

- ☐ Do we have holding statement templates that can be adapted quickly?
- ☐ Do we have a process for confirming facts before communicating them?
- ☐ Do we know who drafts and who approves crisis messaging?
- ☐ Have we identified the stakeholders who may need to hear directly from us during a crisis?
- ☐ Can we coordinate employee, customer, media and other stakeholder communications so that messages remain consistent?

Did you know: A holding statement does not need to provide every answer. Its role is to acknowledge the situation, communicate what can be confirmed and demonstrate that the organisation is responding while further verified information is established.

7. Social media and monitoring

- ☐ Are we actively monitoring traditional and social media for potential reputational issues?
- ☐ Do we have clear criteria for escalating negative online activity?
- ☐ Can we pause scheduled social media content immediately?

- ☐ Do we know who has authorised access to our corporate social media channels?
- ☐ Can we identify misinformation or an emerging narrative before it develops into a larger issue?

Did you know: In a fast-moving crisis, monitoring is not simply about counting negative mentions. It helps organisations understand how the story is developing, which narratives are gaining traction, what information stakeholders need and whether the communications response needs to change.

8. Testing and crisis simulation

- ☐ Has our crisis communications plan ever been tested?
- ☐ Has our leadership team participated in a crisis simulation or scenario exercise?
- ☐ Have we tested how quickly communications can be drafted, approved and issued?
- ☐ Have our spokespeople practised responding under pressure?
- ☐ Do we update our crisis plan using lessons from simulations and real incidents?

Did you know: A crisis communications plan that has never been tested remains theoretical. HLS crisis preparedness programmes can include scenario planning, crisis simulations, spokesperson preparation and communications protocols designed to test how teams respond before they face a real incident.

Final evaluation

Before considering your organisation crisis-ready, ask yourself:

- ☐ Do we know exactly who takes control of communications if a crisis occurs?
- ☐ Can we escalate an issue and make communications decisions quickly?
- ☐ Do we have trained spokespeople and agreed communications protocols?
- ☐ Can we communicate effectively with employees, media and other important stakeholders?
- ☐ Have we actually tested our crisis communications plan under pressure?

Would your organisation be ready by 09:00 tomorrow? If you cannot answer that question with confidence, it is better to identify the gaps now than during the crisis.

Ready before it becomes a crisis? Let's connect, it's what we do best!



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