

Do the right thing when things go wrong.

Quick Tips:

- Make a plan
- Choose a spokesperson
- Be candid
- Listen for & challenge rumors
- Consider using social media
- Integrity counts



“Take the time to understand your problem fully, come up with a solution and get an action plan in place before you face the media - but don't delay unnecessarily.”

It seems like every business faces adversity from time to time, but damaging press can be especially troublesome to start-ups and small companies. Poor handling of bad news almost always makes matters worse, and smaller companies often lack an experienced PR professional on staff to mitigate such matters. Bad things can happen to good companies; but if prepared, smaller companies may have a hand in framing their news and dealing with the media in a more favorable manner. We have outlined a simple approach to dealing with bad press. Follow these steps and you stand a better chance of putting problems behind you and emerging with your credibility and reputation in tact.

■ Make a communications plan

If there is a serious, negative issue that needs to be addressed, make a plan, set a time table and train a spokesperson. Being straight about your problem is important, but there is no point rushing to talk about your troubles if you don't need to. If possible, take the time to understand your problem fully, come up with some solutions and get an action plan in place before you face the media - but don't delay unnecessarily.

■ Choose your spokesperson carefully

A well-informed, credible and sincere spokesperson will be a blessing in any crisis. A spokesperson that is evasive, defensive and combative can make things worse. It's important to put up a good front but don't be a pollyanna. Most people will understand that you are facing tough times, but they'll welcome credible reporting that a solution lies ahead.

■ Get your message out candidly and without unnecessary delay

Once your story breaks, release all the details as quickly and honestly as possible. One terrible day in the public eye is better than an on-going bad-news feature that unfolds over time. Make sure you correct negative rumors immediately.

■ Listen to the chatter

Listening builds understanding, and responding to what you hear can help build relationships. Always try to look for new information resources; talk to customers, talk to competitors if possible, conduct a quick survey - chat with your employees and encourage them to report what they hear about the matter.

■ **Make the most of social media**

Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs and websites and make it harder to hide bad news, but easier to convey your message. Social media may enable you to frame your story in the way you choose and make information widely available without relying on the filter or bias of conventional media.

■ **Always do the right thing**

This is the best advice if you are serious about building and protecting a good reputation for the long run. Reputable companies all understand this rule: Do the right thing and you will be seen as a company with integrity and credibility. It sounds self evident but candor and speaking the truth in a crisis can provide an opportunity for struggling businesses to display their true character.