



Crisis Comms in a COVID World | June 2021

How To Prepare For And Communicate Through Crisis

Our Time Together



+



Crisis Communication

What's Up **Today**

1. Communicating In Context
2. The Proactive Step Most Brands Miss
3. Preparing For Crisis
4. When Crisis Strikes
5. Final Thoughts and Inspiration



BRANDS CULTURES +
COMMUNITIES
MATTER MORE

From nationally acclaimed brands to your favourite mom and pop shop...

ONEIDA



FANSHAWE



STREETCITY

PSD RESEARCH CONSULTING SOFTWARE



Scotiabank



mainstreet



EXOUS ESCAPE ROOMS



DOWNTOWN LONDON



academica group



STEM camp

GoodLife KIDS FOUNDATION



HUMBER



Seneca



SCOTT PETRIE LLP LAW FIRM



techalliance

IVEY

DIGITAL science



And the local and national charitable brands you know and love



We've worked on hundreds
of projects every year for
the last decade.

You can't deliver **value** over the long term in the **absence of understanding.**

At **sagecomm** we gather
understanding through process.



1. RESEARCH

2. POSITIONING

3. MARKET CONNECTION

No. 1

COMMUNICATING IN CONTEXT

The age of acceleration

The Last **16 Months**

- Global pandemic
- Stock market crashed
- Wealth gap grew
- Environmental disasters + warmest year on record
- Inequality reached unprecedented levels
- Technology adoption leapt 10 years in 12 months
- The nature of work got turned on its head
- Insurrection in the U.S.
- Truth was made visible in Canada
- [Tamarack Institute Webinar](#)

A woman with long hair, wearing a light-colored face mask, is the central focus. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred crowd of people, some of whom are also wearing masks. The overall image has a dark, semi-transparent overlay, making the text stand out. The text is centered and reads:

COMMUNICATION has
become the most important skill
in the world right now.

The world is
changing **FAST**

“

It is our misfortune to live through **the largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race**, a misfortune because surplus always breaks more things than scarcity. Scarcity means valuable things become more valuable, a conceptually easy change to integrate. Surplus, on the other hand, means previously valuable things stop being valuable, which freaks people out.

-Clay Shirky (2009)

year 2000
internet users

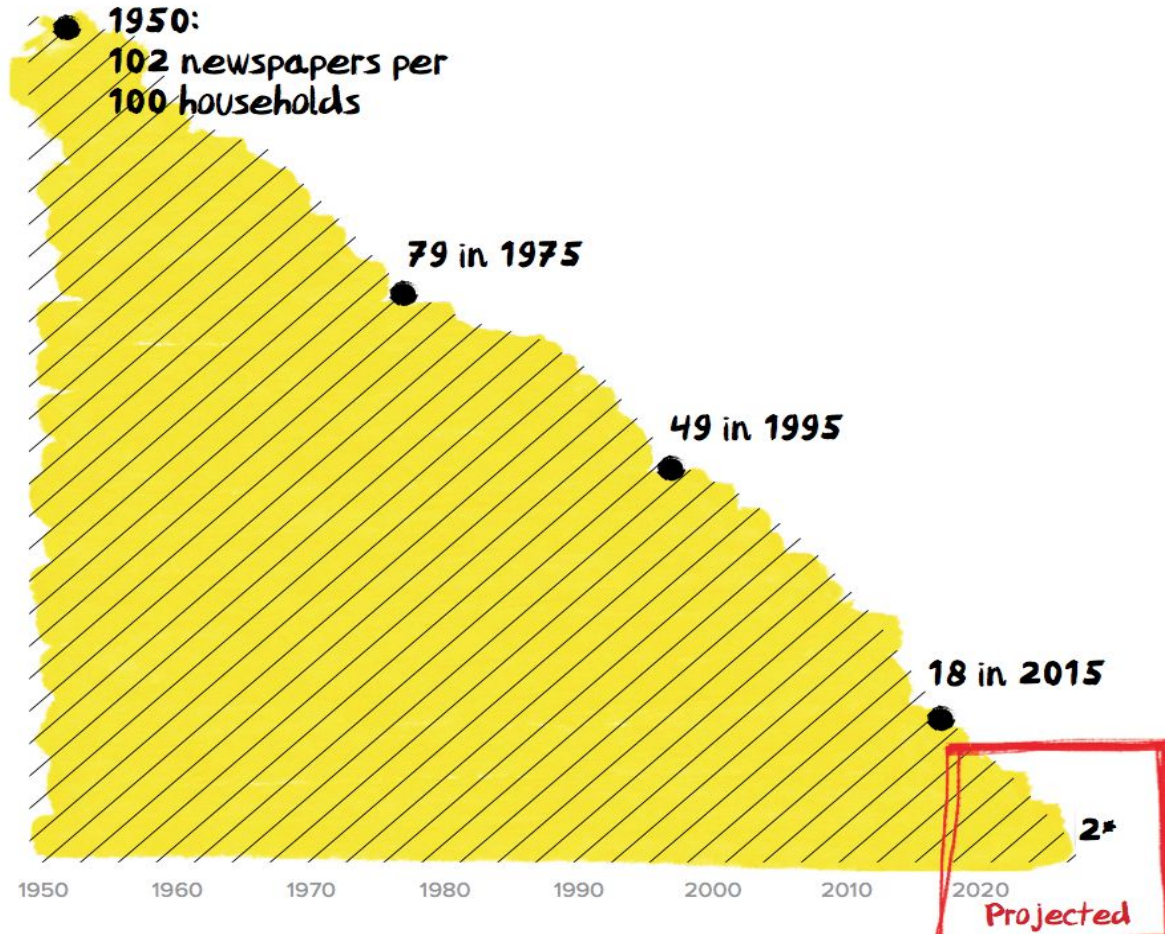
361 million

this morning

5.1 billion

THE VANISHING NEWSPAPER

Newspapers sold per 100 households in Canada, 1950-2015, projected to 2025



The days of traditional
media delivering a common
understanding of complex
issues are **OVER**

Organizations will need to
deliver these messages

THEMSELVES

bottom line

We're communicating more
NOT WELL

A speedometer graphic is centered in the background. The needle points to approximately 45M. The scale is marked from 0M to 100M in increments of 5M. The needle is a dark red color. The speedometer is a semi-circle with a dark teal border.

Everything is
SPEEDING UP

Everything is Getting **Faster**

- Work faster;
- Trade faster;
- Date faster;
- Cook faster;
- Clean faster;
- Communicate faster;
- Consume everything faster. 😞

“

Change is the only permanence
and uncertainty is the only
certainty.”

– Internet

This is causing a **WIDENING
GAP** between our biology and
the way that we live

Anthropologists coined this

**STONE AGERS IN THE FAST
LANE**



Industrial Revolution



Foraging
Society

Pastoral
Society

Horticultural
Society

Agricultural
Society

Industrial
Society

Postindustrial
Society

Our brains aren't built for speed or multi-tasking.

When we communicate too
quickly it often leads to
FAILURE

Fast-paced comms leave us
leaning on our **LEARNED
BEHAVIOURS & BIASES** that
often create the very crisis
they're trying to avoid

Real World **EXAMPLES**

Cringe Worthy Crises



Creating Your Own **Crisis**

Dettol had some cleaning up to do after its ad campaign about getting back to the office backfired.

Dettol | Hygiene Brand



Creating Your Own Crisis

The ads, labelled cringy by a number of Twitter accounts, have left many baffled, with people feeling Dettol failed to read the room by conjuring up an idealized version of an office that doesn't exist - or worse, the office environment that many don't wish to return to.

Dettol | Hygiene Brand

Mike P Williams ✓
@Mike_P_Williams

It's like Dettol hired Jeremy Hunt as their copywriter. These are the most cringe ads I've ever seen.

6:35 AM · Sep 3, 2020

23 2 Copy link to Tweet

Creating Your Own **Crisis**

Some critics misconstrued the ad as UK government messaging to persuade people back to work, rather than being an ad for disinfectant. Others, responded with their own lists of office norms.

Dettol | Hygiene Brand



Kagey
@KageyVision



Systematic racism. Casual racism. Backstabbing colleagues.

Inept managers. Sexual harassment.

"Who you know" promotions.

Mind numbing small talk. Bad I.T.

0.1% payrise, 5% travel fare increase.

Just thought I'd add a few they missed off 🙄👉

4:06 AM · Sep 3, 2020



2.9K



33



Copy link to Tweet

Creating Your Own **Crisis**

A politician in London, Ontario chose to stand on the argument that the community was “not a racist city” immediately following one of the most horrific hate crimes in Canada’s recent history.

Political Leader | Social Media Response



A driver slams into a Muslim family, killing four people, in what Canadian PM calls 'a terrorist attack'

By Rebekah Riess and Gregory Lemos, CNN

🕒 Updated 2:50 PM ET, Tue June 8, 2021



Police officers search for evidence at the scene of the attack in London, Ontario, on Monday, June 7.

(CNN) — Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday called the killing of four

An advertisement for SharpSpring. The background is a dark blue gradient with a faint image of a globe. The text reads: "SharpSpring Marketing team lost that lovin' feeling? Get 50% off onboarding + first month FREE! I've got a need for leads. Act now: June only!" There is an orange button with the text "I've got a need for leads".

Advertisement

More from CNN



Derek Chauvin publicly speaks to George Floyd's family for the...



Anthony Scaramucci testifies that he helped get bank executive...

I take exception to anyone who, in response to this heinous act of terror, characterizes the entire city of [#LdnOnt](#), my city, as a racist city. London is NOT a racist city. This event does not define us. (1/3)



London 'a racist city that pretends it isn't': Former London West PC candida...

A former Progressive Conservative candidate in the riding of London West is calling out the city, and himself, for not doing enough to stamp out the racis...

toronto.citynews.ca

5:05 PM · Jun 9, 2021 · Twitter Web App

26 Retweets **167** Quote Tweets **129** Likes





First Evening Star @OnaagoshinAnang · Jun 10



Replying to [redacted]

This city isn't racist towards you because you have power and privilege as a white man. Black, Indigenous and People of Colour have been speaking up on the racism and xenophobia for years. But it's pretty clear you don't have many of those folx in your circle or they don't /1



1



5



113



First Evening Star @OnaagoshinAnang · Jun 10



feel comfortable discussing it with you - which I would say is linked to your inability to look past your own experiences. Denying the racial issues in this city won't make them go away. It's time for you to sit back, listen and learn. And if you can't do that just be quiet. End



1



2



93



And after hundreds of similar responses came the non-apology, apology.

“

I invite anyone who was troubled by my comments to meet so that I can hear you and better understand how we get to a better place.”

– Politician

Not An **Apology**

- I'm sorry you feel that way;
- I'm sorry you took it that way;
- I'm sorry, but...
- It wasn't my intention to...
- I'm sorry you were offended...

How To Apologize

1. Say you're sorry **without qualification**;
2. Accept **responsibility**;
3. Say **why** it was wrong;
4. Convey **empathy** and **understanding**;
5. Outline your commitment **to do better and then follow through.**

No. 2

THE PROACTIVE STEP MOST BRANDS MISS

*Your best defence is a great
brand offence*

The best way to help manage or mitigate a crisis is to **BUILD A STRONG BRAND BEFORE IT HAPPENS**

Key Truths About **Brand Positioning**

- Very few organizations think about their audiences and speak *to* or *with* them (versus *at* them)
- It's not about what we want to tell people, it's about what they can hear (and hint: it's less than you think and it's about them first)
- Know your audience and what they care about and speak to that more often than you talk about yourself
- Investing in audience understanding and engagement is a critical foundation for crisis management. **How?**

How to Build **Brand** **Strength**

- Do your homework
- Ask yourself
 - Who are your audiences as people?
 - What do they care about?
 - What are their needs and desires?
 - What are their pain points and perceptions?
 - How can you reduce friction for them in understanding this issue?

Not sure? ASK.

How to Build **Brand** **Strength**

- Build a brand position that resonates with your audiences
- A brand position represents what you ultimately want the audience to believe
- Strong positions are:
 - Audience-centric
 - Emotional
 - Remarkable
 - True
 - Focused on “WHY”

can provide hope & safety

TOGETHER
we can ensure survivors are believed

TOGETHER
we can engage men in breaking the cycle

TOGETHER
we can create a revolution that ends gender-based violence in London, for good

anova

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REPEAT. REPEAT. REPEAT.

When you're sick of saying
something your audience is
hearing it **FOR THE FIRST TIME**

No. 3

PREPARING FOR CRISIS

*The best crisis plan is the one you
never have to use*

The best antidote to crisis is
to be **PREPARED**

Crisis Prep Top Five

01

DEVELOP A MEDIA RESPONSE MATRIX: detail the media crisis response process, outline roles and responsibilities, list all stakeholders, communication channels and key contact information, as well as pre-written positioning statements and key messages about your organization

This includes an exercise to **ANTICIPATE THE CRISIS:** brainstorm risks that pose a threat and then plan for them to happen

Crisis Prep Top Five

02

IDENTIFY A RESPONSE TEAM: assign roles and responsibilities including; spokesperson, social media coordinator, media coordinator, scribe etc.

Clearly outline who owns the plan and who is the decider when managing the plan vs. who informs the decisions.

Chaos, and leaked information, ensue when people don't know who is in charge.

Crisis Prep Top Five

03

ESTABLISH KEY COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: Press conference for media? An SMS to employees? Notices on the shop floor?

Ensure the channels you'll need, as detailed, in your plan, are already mapped or established so they are ready to go in a crisis.

“Who has the email list?” is not where you want to be in a time sensitive situation.

Crisis Prep Top Five

04

ASSIGN & PREPARE A LEAD

SPOKESPERSON: Select a spokesperson who has had media training and experience engaging with the media.

If that person doesn't current exist, or leaders don't have the training, invest in it proactively.

Effectively sticking to key messages, even under pressure, is the key skill set and is a tough one to master.

Crisis Prep Top Five

05

SOCIALIZE THE PLAN: Ensure everyone in your organization, from leadership and the crisis team knows that the plan exists and who is in charge of it, including how communications are managed during a crisis.

When a reporter comes calling to a branch or office location, those on site should know how to respond (which is often not responding) and who to direct them to.

Most important message to staff: don't guess, assume or speculate, rather redirect.

No. **4**

WHEN CRISIS HITS

*The three rules of crisis comms
and some tips to help along the
way*

1. What's going on around you?
2. How will you respond?

The Top Three



01. Tell it **ALL**
02. Tell it **FAST**
03. Tell the **TRUTH**

Top Tactical **Tips**

- Prepare a Holding Statement;
- Share the facts and key messages quickly (as much as the situation allows, e.g. with legal or HR considerations);
- Your internal/external stakeholders want to hear the news from you first, not Twitter or traditional media;
- This is the best way to ensure the facts do not get skewed;
- Showing you are proactive, honest and upfront will take you a long way out of the gate.

Anatomy of a **Holding Statement**

- Employs an empathetic, human tone and establishes your values (if applicable)
- Clearly offers facts / 5Ws
- It says, “we are aware of, and addressing this issue and here’s how”
- Set expectations for your comms going forward
- Avoids the disastrous “no comment” or “no one was available to comment”

For Example | Human Health

At [REDACTED], the safety and wellbeing of our clients and participants is our utmost priority.

Like all organizations during this time, we are working hard to manage the evolving situations and challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have instituted our pandemic readiness protocol, which includes the measures that we take to protect clients and staff from virus transmission. They include [REDACTED].

Despite best efforts, we have confirmed a single case of COVID-19 in a staff member at [REDACTED].

We have been working closely with the [REDACTED] and we believe this to be an isolated case. [REDACTED] has been in touch with those who may have come into contact with this individual. Those who have not already been contacted are not considered at-risk at this time.

We will continue to work closely with health authorities and inform our staff and participants if the situation evolves. We are encouraging any staff members who exhibit symptoms to immediately self isolate and to contact [REDACTED] for support.

Yes

STYLE MATTERS

How to Deliver Like a Pro

Delivering **With Intention**

- Be **CONCISE** and get straight to the facts and your key messages;
- Be **CLEAR** on your key messages;
- Express **CONCERN** for everyone involved;
- Key messages can't survive without **CONFIDENCE**;
- You must appear to be in **CONTROL** of the crisis overall;
- Eye contact, breathe, facial expressions, pace **MATTER**;
- If you don't know, **DON'T SAY!**

Content **Must Haves**

- What happened and how we responded
- What's next to manage/mitigate issue
- What policies are in place to prevent this
- Reinforce brand values, purpose of org, overall priorities



Avoid **Media Mishaps**

- **NOTHING is PRIVATE.**
- **NOTHING is off the record.**
- **Reporters are NOT your friend.**

(Even though most of them are not “gotcha” journalists!)

Follow **Through On Your Plan**

- Inform your board and senior management
- Prepare your holder (+ consult your lawyer)
- Inform your staff
- Prepare your spokesperson
- Communicate in every available medium
- REPEAT the message and process as much as necessary
- BE AVAILABLE throughout the crisis

No. 5

FINAL
THOUGHTS &
INSPIRATION

Landing the plane



MISINFORMATION is
penetrating further, faster, and
deeper than accurate
information.

IDENTIFYING TRUTH

now has life or death
consequences.

This is **NOT A DIG** at health professionals, or politicians, or the scientific community, or anyone in particular.

STAYING CONNECTED

and creating value means that professionals need to re-design the ecosystems in which we all communicate.

**MEANINGFUL
COMMUNICATION** is not
about trying to avoid
miscommunication.

COMMUNICATION that
CONNECTS is about being
present enough to know when
you're not connecting.

THE SOONER you know you're not connecting, the sooner you can fix it.

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white face mask, is the central focus. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a dense crowd of people, many of whom are also wearing face masks. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent pink filter. The text is centered over the woman's face and chest area.

COMMUNICATION has
become the most important skill
in the world right now.

Thank You
for your **trust & confidence.**

