

Rachel's Hall's top tips - Dealing with a business crisis

Look after your customers first

- First and foremost make sure your customers are ok.
- Come up with a regular communications plan:
 1. Face to face as many customers as you can.
 2. Where face to face is not possible phone or email as many customers as you can.
 3. Put regular updates on your website.
 4. Think about the level of communication suitable to the crisis (If I was this customer how often would I want an update) – weekly, daily, or hourly.
 5. Use social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube). This is the fastest & cheapest way to get messages and updates out to your customers.

Looking after your team

- There need to be one leader - this isn't the time to be democratic.
- Regular meeting updates to the team – hourly if required.
- If necessary change your work style.
- Resilience/stress mgmt plan for team.
- Always think a few days ahead and what might be required, pre-empt where you can.
- BBQ conversations – arm the team with information so they are confident to front conversations with friends and family.
- Some team will remain on business as usual tasks, this is important, they need to feel supported.
- Thank yous – sent group email acknowledging key workers.

Spend some time on your key messages and have a plan for handling the media

- If your business is in crisis a call from a journalist could come your way, and it's a very important opportunity to get your side of the story in the news.
- Think about whom would be the right person to front your business that will resonant with customers.
- The first thing to do before, or as soon as a journalist calls, is write down six key facts about your situation: who, what, where, when why, how, these facts will form the basis of your key messages. If you don't know the answer to each, then find out quickly.
- When a reporter calls, answer their questions truthfully, and if they try and bully you, keep calm and stick to your key messages.

Get your products back on the shelves

- This one really depends on your business and the crisis situation you're in but whatever your plan is share it with all – let your customers know how you dealt with the situation, that you are back in business/or the fix to the problem and if customers are still not satisfied what steps they can take. At all stages through this process it's important to let your customers know you want to hear what's not working for them so you can then fix it. Be prepared to also hear about unrelated issues and have a plan to deal with them.
- Update, update, update – use every communication device, conversation, email, phone call, function as an opportunity to update your customers on what's happening. Be honest and stick to the facts.
- Arm retailers with information – email, drop off fact sheets to talk them through conversations with customers, have information on your website, and provide information brochures that they can put next to your product.
- work closely with suppliers to fix it

Out manoeuvre the competition

- In a crisis, take the time to think like the competition, what would I do if I was them? And work towards out manoeuvring them while staying true to your brand values and what your business stands for.
- How to do you do this? Your sources, tap into key customers, websites, events regularly to keep up to date with what your competitors are doing.
- Once you have an idea on what the competition is going to do, out manoeuvre them by talking to the customer first, reassuring them you have a fix or giving them a price/offer better than what you think/know the competition will offer.

Plan how to rebuild your brand and your businesses reputation

- A real risk and also an opportunity when a crisis hits your business is how you survive it and come out better than before.
- Once the immediate problem has been fixed, take some time out to de-stress, take a breather and then try having a good outside the box brainstorming session about what you may need to change.
- Go back to your original business plan and see where new opportunity lies, and how you'll communicate this to your loyal customers and possibly media.

Homework

- Create a crisis plan – one at work, in your diary, one at home.
- Make a list of key phone numbers of staff and suppliers.
- Ensure everyone knows the role they will play.
- Get closer to your competitors.