

CSAA Electronic Security Forum & Exposition, '06

'Media & the Central Station'

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Remember this headline?

'Family members say 12 miners found alive'

TALLMANSVILLE, West Virginia (CNN) – Twelve miners who have been trapped underground for more than 36 hours are alive, their friends and relatives were told. Friends and family members erupted in cheers and the town's church bells began ringing as the report became known.

"Believe in miracles," said West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin, who has expressed optimism throughout the ordeal.

A friend of one of the miners told CNN's Anderson Cooper that a mine official had come out and said, "We got 12 alive!" The friend, who did not give his name, said rescue crews were going into the mine.

Source: CNN.com, posted Wednesday, January 4, 2006

What about this one?

'Twelve Men Found Dead in West Virginia Coal Mine'

TALLMANSVILLE, W. Va. (AP) – Most of the 13 coal miners trapped in an explosion apparently survived the blast itself, retreated deeper into the mine and hung up a curtain-like barrier to keep out deadly gases while they waited to be rescued, officials said Wednesday. All but one were found dead after more than a day and a half.

The miners' families learned of the 12 deaths after a harrowing night in which they were mistakenly told at first that 12 of the men were alive. It took three hours before the families were told the truth, and their joy turned instantly to fury.

The sole survivor, Randal McCloy, was in critical condition with a collapsed lung and dehydration but no sign of brain damage or carbon monoxide poisoning after being trapped for more than 42 hours, a doctor said. At 27, McCloy was one of the youngest in the group.

The last of the 12 bodies were taken out of the mine at midmorning.

Source: www.APS.org, posted January 4, 2006

What Drives the Media?

The consumer media – newspapers, radio stations, television stations, etc. – are extremely competitive.

How do they compete?

- An exclusive story that their competitors don't get...
- Being first to publish or broadcast a story...
- Getting an exclusive AND publishing or broadcasting first...
- Most importantly, a story that "breaks" by containing facts that could potentially damage an individual or a business – or what's better known as **SENSATIONALISM!**

Remember, a **CRISIS** is usually **NEWS**.

Which Story Is More Sensational?

A large apartment building starts on fire. Flames build for a short period of time; then the fire department arrives and subdues the fire. The property manager gives an interview to the local TV reporter that because of the fast-acting smoke detectors and the quick response of his security company and the fire department, the damage to his building was minimized and no one was hurt.

The same building starts on fire, but instead, massive flames build up before people begin exiting. The fire department hasn't yet arrived and newspaper reporters are on the scene. One person who evacuated from the building gives a brief interview, saying that the smoke detectors didn't go off and now several people are trapped by smoke because they had no warning.



What Could Happen?

A CRISIS is an unforeseen event (or series of events) that causes intense public scrutiny and can threaten the ability of an organization to continue operating.
– DPK Public Relations, Dallas

What constitutes a central station crisis?

- A fire, with resulting death(s)
- A burglary or holdup at a high-profile account
- Damage to the central station that might impact alarm response to customers
- An employee issue – someone at your firm arrested or convicted of a crime

"In the business world, crisis is often caused by unexpected events, mismanagement or competition. Chances are money has been lost, legal conflicts are involved and reputations are at stake. A true mark of a business is how it handles adversity, and it's our job to put that to the test when needed. Journalists are not extended promotional arms of companies. It is our job to question why something went wrong and who was responsible, especially if people's health or tax money is at stake. – according to Alexis Mueller, managing editor of The Business Journal serving South Florida, in an interview with Thorp & Company, posted at www.thorpc.com, a public relations firm in Coral Gables, Fla.

You Need a Plan



"Most business owners and operators don't think their organization could ever be thrust into the spotlight of unwanted public scrutiny," reported the *Houston Business Journal* (Nov. 15, 2004). "As a result, when crisis does strike it is typical that crisis planning and crisis response occur simultaneously, which makes well-reasoned decision-making difficult."

IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF IF, BUT WHEN A BUSINESS WILL FACE A CRISIS SITUATION!

- ❖ Have a plan in place
- ❖ Company leaders must embrace the plan
- ❖ Train staff to follow the plan



A survey by the American Management Association shows that 64 percent of American businesses have crisis management plans in place, up from 49 percent in 2002.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

A Crisis Communication Plan is only one aspect of a total Crisis Management Plan, but it is the topic of today's session. As a central station company owner or executive, you are in a critical position because the purpose of your business is to protect life and property.

Your reputation and continued success of your business are at stake during a crisis.

1. **Be prepared.** In advance of any potential crisis, have a public relations firm and legal counsel that you've pre-selected and can call upon at any hour.

Also, in advance of a crisis, identify and establish a crisis communication team from among your employees. Ideally, the team should include one representative from each department who is in the best position to know and understand the operation of your business, and who can be trusted and relied upon. Ensure that all team members are entrusted with contact information for all other team members, and are willing to be available for contact at any time of the day or night.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

2. **Drill your crisis communications team.** Don't just set up a team and leave it at that. Arrange an initial meeting where you review worst-case scenarios and analyze the most appropriate responses.
 - Designate one person to be responsible for creating a press kit and making it available on your Web site.
 - Review expectations, such as what kind of information and actions will be expected of each team member during a crisis situation.
 - Go over logistics, such as how each person will be notified of a potential crisis and how much time they will be given to gather the appropriate information and report back to you.
 - Have your crisis communications team meet at regular intervals, such as quarterly, to update them and go over procedures.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

3. **Get the facts.** Through your crisis communication team, obtain all of the facts about what happened.
 - Who is the customer?
 - What is the status of the customer's account?
 - Had there been any recent service to the account?
 - Was the signal received? When? By whom? What action(s) were taken? When were they taken?
 - What was the result?

Discuss these facts with your public relations and legal professionals, to determine what information can be revealed to the media and what must remain confidential.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

4. **Be Proactive.** "If you don't control the news with an immediate and constant flow of facts, the media may find other sources for the information, which may result in inaccurate information being circulated." – Leyden Communications.

The most important thing you can do to be proactive is create a press kit. Include the following pieces:

 - A backgrounder about your company that states your mission, number of years in business, your involvement in the communities you serve, number of subscribers, any listings and certifications your central station holds, certifications held by your employees, and achievements of your company such as SDM 100 ranking, awards received, and other positive information.
 - A fact sheet about the central station, particularly useful during a crisis that involves alarm signal handling. If approved by your legal counsel, include information about how alarm signals are typically handled, what your central station does to reduce false alarms, and again, listings and certifications held by the central station.
 - A press release about the event that just occurred. Consult with your legal and public relations professionals about what information can be published and what should remain confidential.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

5. **Use the Internet.** Post all press kit material on your Web site under a heading titled "Press Material." Include your company backgrounder, fact sheet, and any press releases.

This can be particularly useful when a spokesperson cannot be reached immediately and reporters are looking for information and calling the central station. Operators can direct reporters to the virtual "press room" on your site, thus giving them time to find the designated spokesperson from your company.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

- 6.** Monitor the news. One of the functions of your internal crisis communication team (or public relations firm, if you use one) is to watch and read all that is being published and broadcast about your company and the event.



If negative or inaccurate news is spotted, you can react quickly by calling the reporter and requesting a correction or follow-up story that more accurately tells the facts of the event.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

- 7.** Tell only the truth. Always state true facts when talking to a reporter. If you have damaging information, you must keep it to yourself. If damaging information has already been let out, and you are asked about it, then you must respond truthfully, but briefly.
- DO NOT SPECULATE about what might have gone wrong. Stick to the facts.
 - DO NOT STATE CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION about your subscriber, if asked, such as the name of the home or business owner, address, details about their security system or status of their account with you. Explain that, as you are their security provider, you must respect their privacy and the trust they have placed in you.
 - DO NOT STATE the names or addresses of employees involved in the incident. Remember, your goal is to protect the reputation of your business, as well as your employees and customers.
 - DO NOT STATE EXTRANEIOUS INFORMATION such as company practices or policies that require operators or other employees to deviate from standard practice.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

- 8.** Designate a spokesperson. Most reporters would prefer to interview the highest-ranking individual at a company. Only the owner or president of a company should give an interview. Designate an alternate spokesperson in the event that the first spokesperson is unavailable.

All employees – not just central station operators – must be made aware of who the official spokesperson is, and how to reach him or her. Give all employees a script for handling media inquiries, such as, "I am aware/not aware of these events, and I will immediately contact our company's official spokesperson. When and where can you be reached? ...in the meantime, please feel free to review the press information on our web site at www..."



Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

- 9.** Keep your tape recorder on. Protect yourself and your subscriber by taping every interview. You will be less likely to be misquoted, and if you are, then you will be in a better position to take action such as demanding a retraction or potentially suing for libel.

Never speak "off-the-record." There is no reason to inform a reporter of anything that you wouldn't want to see in print or broadcast.

Key Elements of a Crisis Communication Plan

- 10.** Make it a positive experience. When dealing with the press, make it a positive experience for the reporters. Demonstrate a willingness to work with them. Portray an attitude that illustrates your commitment to your customers and their safety, as well as to the seriousness of the security business. Express sympathy, if appropriate, and show an understanding of the severity of the situation and your willingness to make things right.



Tips for Giving Interviews

- ◆ Set a time limit for the interview – such as 5 minutes – and stick to it.
- ◆ Put a smile in your voice. Use a positive tone – never defensive.
- ◆ Begin the interview by summarizing your key message points – 3 statements that convey the most important information your company wants to communicate.
- ◆ Speak in brief sentences ("sound bites"). This will ensure that the reporter doesn't lose sight of your key messages.
- ◆ Speak slowly, as it will help you organize your thoughts and each word you articulate. It also demonstrates confidence.
- ◆ Never say, "No comment." This raises a red flag for a reporter and leads them to believe you are hiding something.
- ◆ Never say anything off-the-record. Remember that reports can quote you even after they appear to stop taking notes or turn off the camera.
- ◆ At the end of the interview, restate your key message points, by saying: "The most important thing to remember is..."
- ◆ Thank the reporter and let them know if and when they can call back with questions for a follow-up story.



Thank you for letting me speak to you today!

I hope you have learned something valuable that you can put to use easily at your company.

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