Whitepaper
Crisis communication in a digitalised world

Maintaining reputation and facing the challenges of social media and co.

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Business Continuity Management

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Content

Introduction

"One cannot not communicate." We often hear this mantra, but what does it mean for crisis communication? And how do companies react correctly in a crisis? A company's crisis communication plays a key role in determining the course, perception and therefore the success of crisis management in exceptional situations! Professional crisis communication can protect a company's reputation, maintain trust and avert damage to the company.

A crisis is often characterised by great uncertainty and a high level of information requirements from internal and external stakeholders. This makes it all the more important to prepare for crisis communication in advance, as the room for manoeuvre in an emergency is often limited and the scope is considerable. A quick and targeted response is required to avert negative developments in the best possible way. This often presents companies with challenges, but it is possible to prepare for them in advance.

When preparing for crisis communication and setting up structures, it is necessary for companies to consider the changes in communication due to digitalisation. Social media and digital platforms in particular have emphasised the need for an effective and efficient response in crisis communication. Professional crisis communication requires dealing with a variety of structures and topics in advance. These include, for example, early warning systems, contact lists, role allocations, wording and text modules, analysing stakeholders and developing communication strategies. Norms and standards in the field of business continuity management and crisis management also deal with structures in crisis communication and offer companies assistance.

In this white paper, we provide a brief overview of the right communications response during the crisis, taking into account key changes and challenges posed by social networks and 24/7 reporting.

Crisis communication 2.0: meaning, changes and their dangers

Communication has changed dramatically in recent years. This is due to the globally net-worked society and media landscape as well as new channels of communication. To what extent have these changes had an impact on crisis communication?

Changes in crisis communication and their significance

Crisis communication has changed fundamentally in recent years due to digitalisation and social media. The effects are manifold and central to the successful preparation, implementation and follow-up of crisis communication. Among other things, the following must be taken into account:

- The focus of communication today is much more on public claims and the targeted demand for information.
- Today, a company's communication no longer comes from just one central spokes-person. Especially in exceptional situations, information is shared via various chan-nels.
- There is no waiting for a central spokesperson to share this information. Instead, an often global network is already actively involved in discussions and speculation, even before initial communication by company spokespersons.
- Organisational management in crisis communication has changed from a centralised to a decentralised management structure.
- The media landscape has changed. This means that today it is no longer just mass media that are considered, but also minorities and micro-media and, of course, so-cial networks.

So what must contemporary crisis communication take into account?

Crisis communication 2.0: meaning, changes and their dangers

How social media significantly influence crisis communication

Communication is increasingly linked to images. This means that images and videos of events can be disseminated in the media at enormous speed. This has often led to scandals or further fuelled crises. The link to images also offers opportunities for crisis communication. For example, statements can be conveyed authentically in videos and it is possible to reach a wide audience quickly. However, companies urgently need to consider the benefits, the objective and a professional video and multimedia design.

The pressure from social networks today often requires more than just a quick response in a crisis. Companies should therefore take a much closer look at the use of social networks as an established communication medium. In addition to obtaining information and conducting research, the Internet is now also used to exchange and share information. It has therefore become important to integrate social networks into corporate communications and to build up a community that is actively enthusiastic about the company. In a crisis in particular, this community can provide important support in the networks and can also be used to follow up on the crisis

The integration of social networks into crisis communication requires a carefully developed strategy. Social networks offer considerable potential for the effective management of crisis situations. In particular, they act as valuable sources of information for companies. In times of crisis, they enable the prompt tracking and anticipation of developments. Social media monitoring plays a key role here. It enables relevant information to be filtered and the mood and concerns of the target group to be understood.

Crisis communication 2.0: meaning, changes and their dangers

Skilful and targeted use of social networks during a crisis can make a significant contribution to managing the situation effectively and minimising the extent of the crisis. It also offers the opportunity to quickly identify false information and clarify correct facts. A well-thought-out strategy ensures that communication on social networks is seamlessly integrated into the company's overall crisis communication.

Digitalisation, media and the demand for transparency

The media share everything 24/7 in real time and the shared information travels around the world in no time at all. Even information that is partly unverified and unfiltered is shared and disseminated. The first few minutes of crisis communication are therefore important for the further course of the crisis. Even if companies cannot always be as quick in their communication as the first posts and media reports appear, it is important to adapt the response of crisis communication to the media requirements. Proactive crisis communication is therefore required. To this end, it is necessary to prepare action scenarios in advance, for example by:

- Text modules for different crisis scenarios for internal and external communication, e.g. for initial and further information
- Various crisis communication strategies, such as mitigating or neutral strategies for crisis management
- Darksites for different scenarios
- A social media strategy and content for online crisis communication

This makes decision-making easier and faster. The decision and use of suitable monitoring tools should also be considered in advance.

The changes brought about by digitalisation have contributed to the fact that media dynamics are not only taking place in the mass media, but on many different channels. Any content can be used and displayed on various social networks or online platforms on a wide variety of devices.

Crisis communication 2.0: meaning, changes and their dangers

Social networks are often the initial driver in the dissemination of information, which is then picked up by the online media via blogs and ultimately finds favour in the traditional media. Such a dynamic in crisis events can only be contained if companies show their presence online and offline and can therefore already intervene in the crisis events in the social networks.

Transparency is a fundamental pillar of successful crisis communication. Transparency is also indispensable under high pressure during a crisis. Pressure is exerted on a company from various sides during a crisis: the media, politicians and, in particular, social networks can exert enormous pressure and actively demand information. If the information is not shared by the company, it will be sought elsewhere. Lack of transparency and dishonesty on the part of companies represent a major risk and should be avoided as a matter of urgency.

So how do companies prepare themselves professionally for crisis communication? And how can they meet the challenges of modern crisis communication? Important signposts include norms and standards that show companies how crisis communication can be implemented and what needs to be taken into account.

Norms and standards

Many norms and standards in the field of business continuity management and crisis management contain recommendations for the establishment of professional crisis communication and thus emphasise the importance of crisis communication once again. They serve as important signposts and provide assistance in setting up effective and efficient structures. The following overview provides an overview of the norms and standards that deal with the topic of crisis communication. The specific content in relation to crisis communication and the focal points are presented below:

BSI-Standard 200-4

Instructions, food for thought and recommendations are given for the following topics:

General rules on communication:
- Definition of binding rules for tasks (internal communication, external communication by employees, by corporate communication, regulations, contact with police, authorities, aid organisations, reporting obligations, media monitoring, fail-safety, redundancies)

Internal communication:
- Early and appropriate
- Share not all, but necessary details
- Share at least the same information as with the public

External communication:
- Task of informing all external interest groups in a manner appropriate to the target group
- Analysing the interest groups
- Creation of a communication concept
- Presentation of various interest groups, their communication needs, communication channels and responsibilities
- Communication channels
- Communication with the media and media monitoring, including social media

Norms and standards

Focus and main features:
- Designation: Emergency and Crisis Communication (NUK)
- Note Crisis communication guidelines of the BMI
- Subdivision of internal and external crisis communication
- Different interest groups and their communication needs
- Communication channels
- Media monitoring, media communication, shitstorms

ISO 22361:2022

Instructions, food for thought and recommendations are given for the following topics:

Definition of the contents of the communication plan:
- First draft statements
- Guidelines for employees who answer calls
- Information sheets and press kits
- Venues for press conferences
- List of media channels to be used
- Tools and systems for monitoring and integrating social media
- List of the groups involved and their tasks and functions
- Contact information for resources, including contact persons

Objectives Communication plan:
- Provide a structured concept for the implementation of communication
- Clearly assign competences and responsibilities
- Establish procedures and best practices for notices
- Identify the options for providing resources to meet high demand

Measures to safeguard reputation:
- Communicate with stakeholders
- Engaging with the media
- Addressing different media
- Include the concerns and needs of stakeholders
- Identify, categorise and prioritise key stakeholders

Norms and standards

Roles in the communications team:
- Head of Communication
- Press spokesperson or press office
- Recorder
- Media Relations
- Social media
- People who answer calls
- Internal communication
- Stakeholder communication
- Important: Training and preparing the press spokespersons

The development of a communication strategy should include the following points:
- Incorporating the needs of employees and stakeholders
- The formulation of key messages for different stakeholders, media and scenarios depending on the strategy
- The identification of primary and secondary means of communication
- The goals of crisis communication
- The risks to reputation

Key principles of crisis communication:
- Preparation, timeliness, monitoring, updates, consistency and continuity, transparency, accuracy and accountability, prioritising information, empathy, consent

Further contents:
- Presentation of the crisis communication process
- Typical mistakes in crisis communication
- Dangers and opportunities of social media for crisis communication

Focus and main features:
- Crisis communication plan
- Stakeholder analysis
- Crisis communication strategy
- Allocation of roles in the communications team
- Media relations and social media
- Key principles
- Crisis communication process
- Mistakes in crisis communication

Norms and standards

Basic economic protection (Wirtschaftsgrundschutz) Standard 2000-3

Instructions, food for thought and recommendations are given for the following topics:

Crisis communication plan regulates the following contents:
- Objectives of crisis communication
- Area of application
- Interest groups
- Roles in crisis communication
- Communication tools and materials

Relevant areas:
- Internal communication
- External communication
- Media monitoring (print, online, social media)

Roles in crisis communication:
- Head of Crisis Communication
- Press spokesman
- Media observer
- Telephone switchboard/telephone operators
- Supporting units

Analysis of interest groups:
- Distinction between two groups: directly and indirectly affected
- Predefined characteristic criteria: demographic, socio-economic, geographical, psychographic, relationship, media use, situationally characterised groups
- Exemplary questions for analysis are provided
- Presentation of the matrix of interest groups

Analysing communication tools and materials:
- Presentation List with the means of communication and the respective descriptions of these

Focus and main features:
- Crisis communication plan
- Roles in crisis communication
- Analysing the interest groups
- Analysing the means and materials of communication

Norms and standards

Crisis communication guidelines BMI (Leitfaden Krisenkommunikation BMI)

Instructions, food for thought and recommendations are given for the following topics:

Differentiation and definition of risk and crisis communication:
- Definition and principles
- Demarcations
- Analysing crisis communication
- Crisis communication planning
- Implementation of crisis communication
- Evaluation of crisis communication
- Crisis communication within a crisis team

Crisis communication tailored to the target group:
- Basics of target group-orientated crisis communication
- Crisis communication with internal target groups (definition, relevant aspects)
- Communication between those involved in crisis management (definition, relevant aspects)
- Crisis communication with external target groups (definition, relevant aspects and preparation for the media, citizens and stakeholders)
- Crisis communication and social media (goals, content, strategy development)

Crisis communication plan:
- Preparatory measures (content, implementation & follow-up)
- Components Fundamentals of crisis management
- Components of public relations regulation
- Content and strategy components

Focus and main features:
- Crisis communication with target groups
- Crisis communication plan
- Social media and crisis communication

Norms and standards

Each company must decide for itself individually which norms and standards are important and which structures should be implemented in crisis communication.

But how do companies decide on the right structures? In any case, the corporate culture and corporate goals should be integrated into this decision. Similarly, the planning of available resources is of great importance for crisis communication and should be taken into account when selecting the right structures. The following section outlines what should be taken into account in order to be able to communicate professionally during a crisis.

Crisis response: Communicating correctly in a crisis

In an acute crisis, it is important to react quickly and always appropriately (also in the corporate context). Crisis communication plays an important and central role here. The aim is to provide the stakeholders analysed in advance with the best possible information, protect the company's reputation and minimise the negative impact on the company. As part of the crisis response, there are three central pillars of crisis communication that must be observed:

- **Awareness:** As a company, it is highly relevant to deal with the topic of crisis communication in advance and to prepare in terms of content and structure. This also includes internal interface management and the implementation of this in crisis communication. The following questions, among others, need to be considered: Who provides internal support for crisis communication (e.g. sales/customer service for communication with customers or the HR department for communication with employees)? Who receives what information? And who disseminates this information? It is equally important to involve employees and raise their awareness of standard guidelines and confidentiality, to carry out crisis exercises and to train company spokespersons in crisis communication.
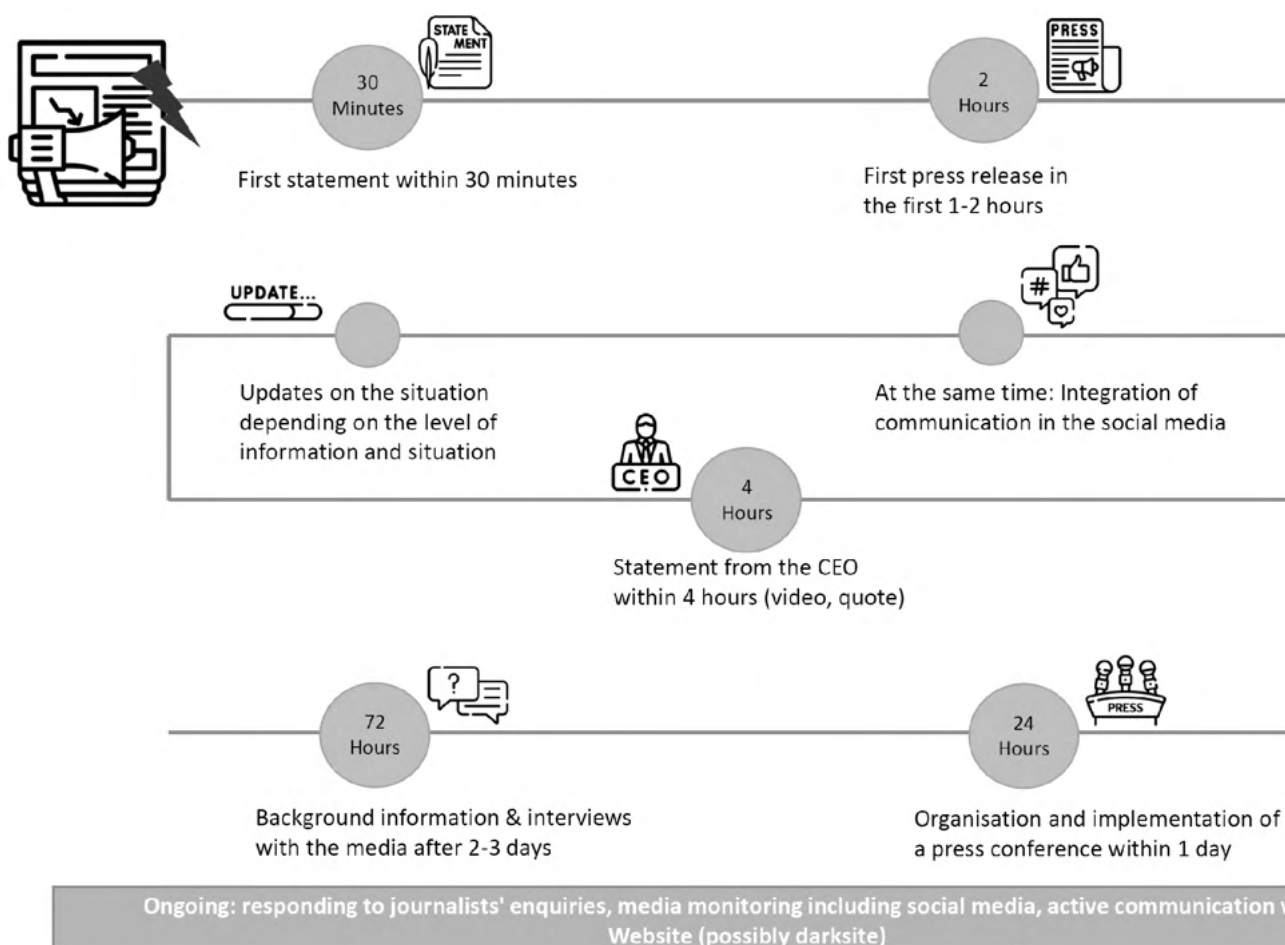
- **Crisis communication plan:** A crisis communication plan with a clearly defined structural and procedural organisation is one of the most important tools for professional crisis communication and enables an effective and efficient response in a crisis. This crisis communication plan must be regularly reviewed, constantly updated and linked to the crisis management organisation

Crisis response: Communicating correctly in a crisis

- **Definition of roles:** The allocation of roles in the crisis management team with regard to crisis communication serves to ensure short communication and decision-making channels in the event of a crisis. In addition, the responsibilities and associated alerting channels for internal and external communication should be defined within this framework, i.e. the support team. The one voice policy[1] applies to crisis communication. Resource management and therefore the planning and distribution of the available and necessary personnel resources for crisis communication is also fundamental to the definition.

In addition, it can be helpful for the acute crisis response to define a timetable for the media work in advance. The following timeline should be observed:

30 Minutes — First statement within 30 minutes

2 Hours — First press release in the first 1-2 hours

UPDATE... — Updates on the situation depending on the level of information and situation

At the same time: Integration of communication in the social media

4 Hours — Statement from the CEO within 4 hours (video, quote)

72 Hours — Background information & interviews with the media after 2-3 days

24 Hours — Organisation and implementation of a press conference within 1 day

Ongoing: responding to journalists' enquiries, media monitoring including social media, active communication via the Website (possibly darksite)

[1] Definition of a one voice policy: In other words, communicating with one voice in crisis communication means that everyone in the organisation communicates the same messages and information to the press or stakeholders.

Crisis response: mistakes that should be avoided in crisis communication

In order to be able to react professionally and successfully in a crisis, companies should also look at the typical mistakes made in crisis communication. Among other things, it is helpful to recapitulate your own crisis communication from past crises and learn from mistakes (lessons learnt process). This can be an important step in identifying gaps and weaknesses in crisis communication, analysing them and determining potential for optimisation. What mistakes should companies avoid at all costs in their crisis communication in order to optimise their crisis response as much as possible? Relevant questions can also be derived from the mistakes of other companies.
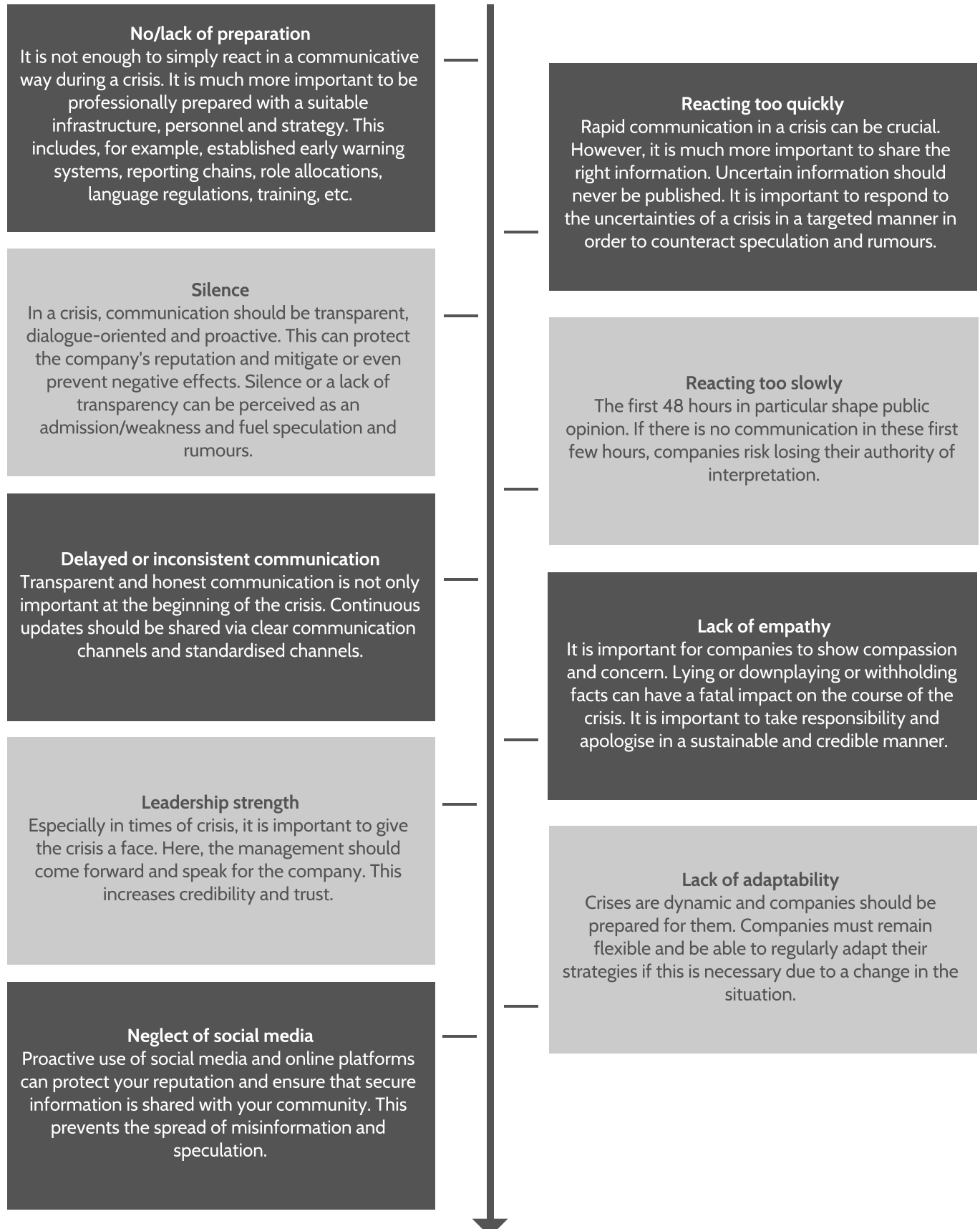
On the next page, we present a few classic pitfalls of crisis communication.

Crisis response: mistakes that should be avoided in crisis communication

No/lack of preparation
It is not enough to simply react in a communicative way during a crisis. It is much more important to be professionally prepared with a suitable infrastructure, personnel and strategy. This includes, for example, established early warning systems, reporting chains, role allocations, language regulations, training, etc.

Silence
In a crisis, communication should be transparent, dialogue-oriented and proactive. This can protect the company's reputation and mitigate or even prevent negative effects. Silence or a lack of transparency can be perceived as an admission/weakness and fuel speculation and rumours.

Delayed or inconsistent communication
Transparent and honest communication is not only important at the beginning of the crisis. Continuous updates should be shared via clear communication channels and standardised channels.

Leadership strength
Especially in times of crisis, it is important to give the crisis a face. Here, the management should come forward and speak for the company. This increases credibility and trust.

Neglect of social media
Proactive use of social media and online platforms can protect your reputation and ensure that secure information is shared with your community. This prevents the spread of misinformation and speculation.

Reacting too quickly
Rapid communication in a crisis can be crucial. However, it is much more important to share the right information. Uncertain information should never be published. It is important to respond to the uncertainties of a crisis in a targeted manner in order to counteract speculation and rumours.

Reacting too slowly
The first 48 hours in particular shape public opinion. If there is no communication in these first few hours, companies risk losing their authority of interpretation.

Lack of empathy
It is important for companies to show compassion and concern. Lying or downplaying or withholding facts can have a fatal impact on the course of the crisis. It is important to take responsibility and apologise in a sustainable and credible manner.

Lack of adaptability
Crises are dynamic and companies should be prepared for them. Companies must remain flexible and be able to regularly adapt their strategies if this is necessary due to a change in the situation.

Summary

Crisis communication in a digitalised world is facing new challenges that companies can meet with a well-thought-out strategy. In times of 24/7 media and globally networked societies, professional crisis communication is becoming increasingly important. It serves not only to manage exceptional situations, but also to protect reputations and maintain trust.

The changes in the communications landscape, particularly through social media and digital platforms, have significantly increased the requirements for effective crisis communication. Early preparation is crucial, as the room for manoeuvre in the event of a crisis is often limited. A quick and targeted response is required to ward off negative developments in the best possible way.

The integration of social networks into crisis communication opens up great potential for companies. They serve as valuable sources of information and allow developments to be tracked and anticipated in real time. Social media monitoring plays a central role here.

Norms and standards in the field of business continuity and crisis management provide companies with valuable guidelines and support them in establishing effective communication structures.

In an acute crisis, fast, structured and transparent communication is crucial. Awareness, a well-developed crisis communication plan and a clear allocation of roles play a central role in this.

Summary

Helpful tips for effective crisis communication

1. **Early preparation:** Develop clear communication structures in advance, create a crisis communication plan and define clear responsibilities. It is best to carry out stakeholder analyses and draft crisis communication strategies.

2. **Regular training and exercises:** Train your employees regularly in crisis communication and carry out realistic exercises to improve their ability to react.

3. **Social media expertise:** Ensure that your employees are familiar with the special features and mechanisms of social networks so that they can respond effectively to online challenges.

4. **Transparency and honesty:** Communicate transparently and honestly, even if the information is limited. Avoid misinformation at all costs.

5. **Fast response times:** Respond promptly to developments and enquiries to maintain information sovereignty and counteract rumours.

6. **Communication training for speakers:** Ensure that your speakers and management are well trained and can convey messages clearly and empathetically.

7. **Regularly update the crisis communication plan:** Regularly adapt your crisis communication plan to current developments and circumstances in order to remain capable of acting at all times.

Continuous analysis and optimisation of crisis communication enables the best possible crisis response and makes a decisive contribution to the success of crisis management. Overall, professional crisis communication is a decisive factor in protecting a company's reputation in the digitalised world.

We advise companies with our diverse service portfolio to facilitate the implementation of professional crisis communication. Please feel free to contact us: www.controll-it.de

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