



Crisis Communication Checklist: Are you ready to **communicate** when **trust** and **your reputation** are at stake?

Use this self-assessment to find out

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Introduction:

What is crisis communication, and how do you evaluate your readiness?

No organization knows when a crisis will happen. But every organization can prepare to communicate quickly, accurately, and responsibly when one does. The fact that news is 24/7, anyone with a smart phone is a potential citizen-journalist, and that a story, rumor, or deepfake can rapidly spread across social media makes it ever more important to have a crisis communications process.

Defining the crisis in crisis communication

In communications, a crisis is an event – large or small – that can adversely impact:

- The lives of your customers, employees, or people in the community
- Business continuity
- Trust in your product or service
- Your organization’s freedom to pursue your goals and operate according to your vision and mission
- Your company’s reputation as a responsible organization, secure employer, and valued member of the community.

The assessment process: green, yellow, red

The following checklists will help you assess your organization’s crisis communication readiness, with a simple green, yellow, or red traffic light system.

- **Green** is “Go,” you can proceed onto the next section of the assessment with confidence.
- **Yellow** is “caution;” you have most of what you need, but there are gaps that could hinder the effectiveness of your communications in a crisis situation.
- **Red** indicates critical flaws or omissions that must be addressed.

The assessment is sequential; each section is the foundation for the next.

- Prerequisites
- The components of a crisis communication plan
- Implementation



The Crisis Communication Plan Components:

The pieces that make it work

A crisis communication plan is the difference between having a smooth process for an unplanned event or scrambling when an unanticipated event occurs. The crisis communications plan is your toolkit to tell your story – especially when the crisis involves victims, property or environmental damage, business interruption, or any serious threat to your reputation. Delays not only make room for assumptions, rumors, and gossip, they allow others to shape the narrative.

The following checklists will answer the question:

Do you have a workable crisis communication plan?

1. Do you have a documented plan?

When a crisis situation arises, there’s a big difference between thinking your organization knows how to respond and having a documented plan to guide that response.

- Does your organization have a documented crisis communication plan for the scenarios common to most organizations (such as accidents, allegations, or damage to a facility) and those specific to your industry or sector and your organization?



If you have a documented plan that is also specific to your industry and organization, you have a solid foundation. Proceed with the assessment to find ways to strengthen that plan.



If you have a generic plan, you could lose valuable time – or fall short of an appropriate response – when you encounter a scenario that’s not in the plan. The next set of questions will help you expand your plan to address your organization’s risks and needs.



If you don’t have a plan, your reputation and the trust you’ve built with stakeholders, as well as your ability to operate, are at risk. The following questions identify the components you need to build a plan.

2. Does your crisis communication plan include these basics?

- ☐ A clear process with defined roles and responsibilities for identifying a crisis, activating the crisis communications team, and confirming the facts?
- ☐ A clear process with defined roles and responsibilities for drafting, approving, and releasing a statement?
- ☐ Criteria for assessing the risk level and the appropriate response?

If you checked all three, you have the key components of a functional crisis communication plan. Proceed with the assessment.

If you checked one or more, you have a good start. Build upon that to add the missing pieces, then proceed with assessment.

If you're missing all three, your crisis plan is not ready. You need these basics to have a workable process.

3. You have the plan, but will it get used?

Crisis communication plans are like fire extinguishers; if people can't find one, or don't use it, they don't do any good. These two questions will let you know if your plan will be used when needed.

- ☐ Is the plan documented and readily accessible to the people who will need to use it?
- ☐ Do you review the plan annually or any time there's a change in leadership, is management familiar and comfortable with the process, and does everyone understand their roles?

If you checked all three, you have the key components of a functional crisis communication plan. Proceed with the assessment.

If you checked one or more, you have a good start. Build upon that to add the missing pieces, then proceed with assessment.

If you're missing all three, your crisis plan is not ready. You need these basics to have a workable process.

4. Are you ready to implement the plan?

If you're green or mostly green with the above steps, you have a plan. The following questions will determine how prepared you are to put it into action.

The following items are essential to implementing a crisis communication plan

Do you have:

- ☐ A media-trained public spokesperson and a back-up?
- ☐ A properly trained media contact?
- ☐ 24/7 offsite access to your digital properties, including website, social media, and internal and external email systems in the event your internal infrastructure is damaged?

If you've checked all three, you have the essentials to effectively implement your plan.

If you can only check one or two, you could face delays implementing the plan. Addressing the missing pieces will increase your confidence level.

If you can't check any of the above, there's a very high risk you'll face significant delays responding to the crisis and implementing the plan.

5. Are you ready to communicate throughout the crisis?

Crisis communication doesn’t end with the initial response. It continues through the recovery process. Do you have:

- ❑ The tools, including AI augmentation, to track media coverage and sentiment?
- ❑ Social media listening, community management, and rules of engagement with human oversight?
- ❑ Do you have a process, including roles and responsibilities, for ongoing two-way communication with employees, families, customers or clients, investors or lenders, government and community leaders, and business partners or vendors?
- ❑ Have you recently assessed your reputation among key stakeholders, and do you know your advocates and detractors?
- ❑ Do you have access to specialized expertise in crisis communications, media relations, public relations, and public affairs?

If you’ve checked all of the above, you can feel confident in your ability to communicate throughout the incident and recovery.

If you can check most, but not all, of the above, you could lose the momentum you established with your initial response.

If you’re missing most or all the above, there’s a high risk the trust you established with your initial response will be weakened as the situation evolves.



Using The Results:
Next Steps To Strengthen
and Test Your Plan

The crisis communication plan often falls to a lower priority, even when everyone recognizes its importance. After all, the communications that are needed now are going to get more attention than a communication plan that might be needed in the future. This assessment is a way to put crisis communication top of mind, and to prioritize your next steps.

- If you have red areas, those need to be addressed now. Putting those off puts your organization at what should be an unacceptable level of risk.
- If you have yellows, review those in the context of your organization’s risks and structure. Decide which should be addressed first. Then, put a place in place – with accountabilities and deadlines – to move your organization into the green.
- If you’re already in the green, congratulations. You should feel confident, but not overly confident.
 - o A third-party review by an outside crisis communications expert can catch things you may have missed. It’s hard to be objective when everyone has the same perspective.
 - o Take a close look at your holding statements. As you’ve seen in news coverage of crisis events, holding statements are very similar. That’s for a reason, the formula works. Within that

formula, the language should align with values, brand voice, and stakeholder expectations. Also, be sure each of those statements has executive and legal/risk approval. Nothing can halt a crisis response faster than someone saying, “We need to review this language ...”

- o Practice, practice, practice. Desktop exercises and scenario simulations pressure test your plan.

How Slice can help

Slice can help organizations assess readiness, identify gaps, develop or refine crisis communication plans, create holding statements, train spokespeople, and run tabletop exercises before a real situation tests the process. Visit our [website](#) to learn more, or [contact us](#) to start the conversation.