Batten down the hatches!

Lessons learned in a water crisis

Ellen Coren, President & CEO
Chesapeake Public Strategies
MACO Summer Conference
August 16, 2018
Agenda

- Mental Noise
- Messaging
  - Three key messages
  - What not to say – United Airlines
  - Message mapping
- Social Media
- DC Water
- Checklists
Mental Noise in a Crisis

- Ability to process info drops by 80%
- Harder to hear, understand, remember
- Greater focus on negative than positive
- Comprehension level drops four points
Three Key Message Themes

The Crisis Trust Factor

- Listening/Caring/Empathetic: 50%
- Honest Open: 15-20%
- Dedication Commitment: 15-20%
- Competence Expertise: 15-20%

In normal situations, perceptions of trustworthiness are based on competence & expertise.
Three Key Message Themes

1) **Express sincere empathy**, caring for the people impacted

2) **Take responsibility**
   - Don’t pass on blame

3) **Describe next steps**
   - The resolution
   - Process to investigate and fix
   - How to avoid in future
What Not to Say
This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation.

- Oscar Munoz, CEO, United Airlines

“Re-accommodate”

- All about United
- Legal language didn’t address issue
- Didn’t recognize impact on passengers
- Didn’t discuss next steps

Value of United dropped by $750 million
What Not to Say

United Airlines is pleased to announce new seating on all domestic flights- in addition to United First and Economy Plus we introduce....

Fight Club
"Board as a doctor, Leave as a patient"

New Spirit of United
What Not to Say

@Reflog_18 Continental Airlines pilot vs United Airlines pilot:

5:03 PM - 11 Apr 2017
What Not to Say

New photo of United Airlines asking for volunteers to deplane
Message Mapping

Mapping Process

- ID stakeholders
- ID stakeholder questions
  - Analyze questions for underlying concerns
- Develop key messages
  - Develop supporting facts
- Deliver through appropriate channels
Answering Questions

- Limit to 3 key messages
- Maximum of 3 supporting facts for each
- Most important messages first and last
Water Contamination Emergency: Top 12 Questions

1) How long until tap water is safe?
2) How do we get safe water?
3) What can we do at home to make it safe?
4) How dangerous is contaminant?
5) What is the contaminant?
6) Who is affected?
7) What if I drank the water?
8) Symptoms & long term effects of exposure?
9) Plans and processes for restoring water?
10) Where to get more information?
11) What uses of tap water are still safe?
12) How long has it been in water system?
Social Media

- Only one tool in toolbox but increasingly vital
- Key information resource for journalists
  - 25% of Twitter's users
  - More than 50% are regular users
- Fastest method of disseminating information
Social Media

- Helps maintain “partner” relationship w/ public
- Can be early warning signal from community
- Provides key influencers with information
- Excellent educational tool
Social Media

- Post ASAP
- Continue posting & monitoring
  - Message can deteriorate in seconds
  - Reply quickly
  - Frequent posts showing progress and status
- All posts from one central source
- Must be 24/7, at least in a crisis
- Cancel pre-scheduled posts if not relevant
- Retweet trusted sources
Crisis Within a Crisis

D.C. officials defend not issuing landline, cell alerts to warn of water problems

- Drop in water pressure
- Tested positive for coliform
- 100,000 residents impacted
- Boil water order issued
Crisis Within a Crisis

- DC Government
  - No reverse 911 calls although EPA recommended
  - Alert DC text-emails
    - Only 14% of population enrolled

- DC Water
  - Media
  - Twitter, Facebook
  - Robocalls
    - Took 8 hours, missing breakfast and lunch hours
    - 34K customers called, only 22K working numbers
  - Website crashed
Crisis Within a Crisis

- Other-language community outreach lagged
  - First tweet by Latino Affairs 3 hours behind
  - Linked to English-language website
  - Additional 3 hours to post precautions in Spanish

- Scant responses on Facebook
  - Residents replied to other resident posts due to vacuum
Pre-Crisis Checklist

✔ Lay solid foundation of trust
  ✔ Insights into operations throughout year

✔ Anticipate different scenarios
  ✔ Staff roles
  ✔ Messaging & deployment

✔ Establish approval processes & decision trees

✔ ID alternate communications staff in case of absences

✔ Create key partner/agency coordination processes

✔ Establish employee media policy
✓ Schedule periodic list updates
  ✓ Media
  ✓ Government officials
  ✓ Partners
  ✓ Key stakeholders
  ✓ Third party validators
  ✓ Target audiences
  ✓ Resources for the community
Pre-Crisis

- Create messaging library
  - Use Message Mapping process
  - Pre-written & approved
    - Initial announcements
    - Holding statements
    - Core messaging
    - Instructions for residents
    - FAQs
    - Message templates
    - Social media posts
    - Press releases
ID channels of communication

- Dedicated phone line
- Website
- Blogs
- Media
- Social Media
- Email

- Site visits
- Presentations
- Internal communications
- Reverse 911
- Text messages
- Bill stuffers

What are customers’ primary sources of information?
Immediately Before Crisis

- Use all appropriate communications channels to inform stakeholders of steps you are taking
- Provide preparation guidance to stakeholders
- Inform stakeholders of all resources for ongoing information
During Crisis

✓ Take ownership
✓ Communicate first and often
✓ Be transparent
✓ Provide guidance
✓ Maintain strong social media presence
✓ Use the opportunity to educate
During Crisis

✓ Use external validators
  ✓ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
  ✓ Public health agencies
  ✓ Universities
Three Key Message Themes

1) **Express sincere empathy**, caring for the people impacted

2) **Take responsibility**
   - Don’t pass on blame

3) **Describe next steps**
   - The resolution
   - Process to investigate and fix
   - How to avoid in future
EPA: Effective Risk & Crisis Communication During Water Emergencies

American Water Works Association Emergency Planning

In a crisis, don’t hide behind anything or anybody. They’re going to find you anyway.

Bear Bryant

EllenCoren@ChesapeakeStrategies.com