

Top do's and don'ts for handling an organisation's reputation crisis

 By [Azure Fey](#)

16 Jul 2020

Organisations all over face the challenge of reputation crises. The rule of thumb is 'when' not 'if'

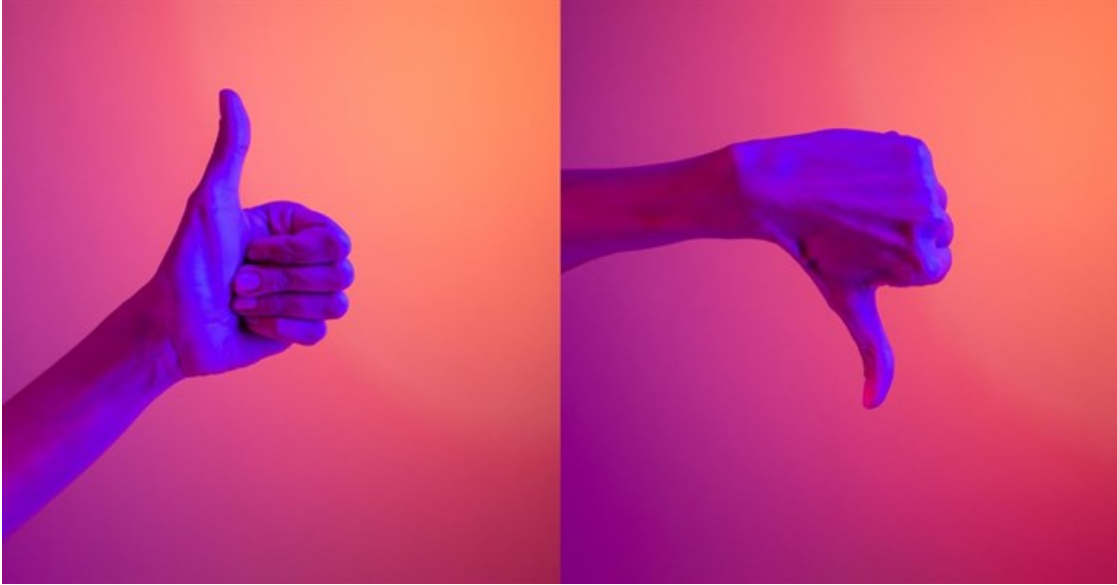


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Forward-thinking companies prepare as best as possible for the worst-case scenario on issues within their control and are ready at the wings to tackle the unexpected.



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No two crises are the same and there is no A to Z formula for dealing with them. Each must be assessed on its merits to soften, reduce or avoid a blow to reputation.

Here are my top 5 **do's** and **don'ts** when dealing with an organisation's reputation crisis.

1. **Do** liaise closely with your internal and external legal counsel on the matter but **don't** respond to media and other stakeholders using legalise. Always balance the legal and human element of the issue and find the middle ground for effective and authentic messaging.
2. **Do** use your most senior leadership i.e. the MD or CEO, as a key spokesperson during face to face engagement on dire crisis matters with media, supported by the Head of Communications and their team. This creates transparency and the understanding that the organisation is taking the matter seriously. **Don't** have your legal department, a junior employee or an individual irrelevant to the matter speak on your organisation's behalf (it happens more than one thinks).
3. **Do** respond in writing to questions on the matter even to on-camera interview requests if you cannot do one (**Don't** tell me that you are "not doing any interviews"). **Don't** speak off-the-cuff on any matter that is potentially an issue of reputation or refuse to comment. Putting pen to paper when responding to a question on the unravelling crisis or when you are in the eye of the storm ensures that your message is clear and cannot be misinterpreted or misquoted. If your spokesperson must field face-to-face questions during an interview (press conference or broadcast interview, etc.) ensure that they are well prepared to respond in a transparent manner to high-risk issues the organisation may not be prepared to address proactively.
4. **Do** be gracious and non-defensive, and well-prepared in the face of harsh criticism or questioning for your actions or those of your organisation, depending on the matter at hand. **Don't** refuse to engage under the circumstances or abruptly end an interview, especially during broadcast interviews (live or recorded) – it will live in social media hell for an eternity and you and your organisation will forever be associated with this and will damage reputation and trust even further.
5. **Do** consider the interests of your primary stakeholders and your good or necessary relationships with when determining a response tone to a difficult issue. **Don't** attack your stakeholders in public, no matter your frustrations. It's good form and protects you and them from a breakdown in relations and reputation.

ABOUT AZURE FEY

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