

CRISIS PR CHECKLIST

FOR BUS & COACH OPERATORS



- 1 Create a plan for how to handle a crisis before you ever experience one. Decide who your spokesperson will be and determine all the media channels that you may need to liaise with, so that it is your message that gets across, rather than the message the rumour mill creates.
- 2 As part of your planning, identify the three crisis threats that are most likely to affect your business and think through what your reactions to them would potentially be. Being prepped and ready to react can be very advantageous. Doing some message mapping and having these thoughts kept on file will be of great assistance should you need to respond to an incident.
- 3 Make sure your voice is heard and your face seen, if you are unfortunate enough to be involved in a crisis. Do not hide away and do not say 'no comment'. That will merely make it appear that you have something to hide.
- 4 It can help you to draft a statement and issue only those words to the media. Keep that statement on file, as a record of what you said. An interim statement can express concern for victims or other injured parties, without admitting guilt. You can use a phrase such as: "We are trying hard to establish the facts and will brief you further when we can", or something such as: "An investigation is underway and it would be inappropriate for us to speculate, before receiving the results of that investigation". If you have legal expenses cover in place, which covers crisis PR help, check your policy terms to check what the insurer expects you to do in the immediate aftermath of an incident.
- 5 Make sure you get your priorities right within your media statement. People/passengers and the public should be your number one concern, with property next in the empathy pecking order and financial considerations way down your list of things to mention.
- 6 Respond speedily. The sooner you issue a statement, the sooner you will get your viewpoint across and prevent others from speculating about what you might say. If you have crisis PR support through Gauntlet's legal expenses cover, notify the provider of the need to activate that element of cover as fast as you can.
- 7 Ensure that you close all possible back-door routes to spokesperson comment. Make employees aware that only the nominated spokesperson should issue any comment and that nothing they say to the media, even in passing, is 'off-the-record'. Also make sure they are equally careful about not providing 'friends' or 'contacts' with the 'inside story'. In the age of Twitter, that opinion can be quickly spread and you will be in 'Twitter Torment' before you know it.

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If you have to talk to TV, make sure your appearance is respectable and professional. You will be judged on how you appear almost as much as by what you say. The more negative the scenario, the more critical and judgemental the viewers will be.

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Monitor all the media channels who may be reporting on the incident. If you see or hear something that is not accurate or fair, ask for it to be corrected, highlighting why it is not true or factual.

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Remember that you may need to communicate the same crisis response messages to other audiences than just the media. Perhaps you have schools that need reassurance that your service is safe; maybe you need to talk to customers or suppliers, or possibly also shareholders?

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If you are later found to be at-fault, immediately issue a statement to highlight what steps you have taken to ensure such an incident never occurs again, or to minimise the possibility of such a thing occurring in the future.

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If you have legal expenses cover through Gauntlet, and access to £10,000 of crisis communications expertise, remember to call upon that if necessary.

Of course, prevention is better than cure when it comes to passenger transport operations crises, so having robust risk management practices in place will help reduce the probability of you requiring these crisis tips. Working with Gauntlet's expert risk managers and health and safety experts will enable you to work on all your weak spots and operational 'potholes'. They can also give you access to driver behaviour tools, e-learning modules and licence checking facilities that can strengthen your hand.

If you manage your risk correctly, you can both reduce the likelihood of damaging your reputation and also most probably reduce your insurance premiums.

Call the Gauntlet team on 0113 244 8686 to discuss the risk management options available to you and to find out more about the passenger-transport-specific legal expenses protection that is available to you, if you recognise the value of having this type of cover in place.