



Internet Marketing Consultants

This is one of the 'Best of' articles written by Barry Welford. The current portfolio of these articles is to be found at <http://smmbc.ca/portfolio/>

How to Respond to a Social Media Crisis

Originally published in Social Media Examiner and can be found at

<http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/defend-your-social-media-reputation/>

Does your brand have a **crisis response plan** in place?

Do you know what tactics to use to defend your reputation online?

In this article, you'll **discover three examples of reputation crisis response and seven steps for defending your own reputation online.**

Why Reputation Matters

A **global survey by Deloitte** ranks reputation as executives' top strategic risk. The study found most reputation management programs don't support their business strategy well.

It's important to understand the way online conversations roll out.

Here are some key factors to consider:

- Anyone's voice in social media can be heard.
- Companies can have more difficulties than individuals in avoiding bad news.
- Due to online **social and web search**, kindred spirits can easily become aware of others who share their criticisms.
- Bad news travels faster and further than good news.

Keep these factors in mind as we **explore three case studies of companies with major reputation management problems** and how they handled them.

How Buffer Responded to Crisis

Buffer, the online social media scheduling site, **was recently severely hacked**.

Buffer became aware of the problem very rapidly and took immediate action to handle the problem. You can see a full account of their actions during the 24 hours immediately following the hack on **their blog**.

They were quick to inform their customers of the problem and explain what they were doing to fix it before most of their customers were even aware there'd been an attack. Here is just one of the messages they sent via Facebook.



Buffer

October 26, 2013 near San Francisco, CA

Hey everyone! We greatly apologize for this big mess we've created. Buffer has been hacked.

You can do the following to end this asap:

- Change your password on Facebook or Revoke Buffer as an app.
- Delete the spam posting from your FB timeline.

Again, hugely sorry for this, we're working hard on resolving this right now! - Leo

Like · Comment · Share

106 31 184

Buffer tells their community on Facebook about their crisis.

Needless to say, if their customers had lost faith in Buffer's security and reliability, then a major erosion of their customer base would have taken place.



Fans show their support for how Buffer handled this crisis.

Because their response was timely and appropriate, they now have even more loyal customers.

How Fontaine Santé Responded to Crisis

Fontaine Santé Foods Inc. is a Montreal-based North American food company whose hallmark is quality ingredients and preservative-free, ready-to-eat produce.

In December 2011, they **detected the possibility of *Listeria monocytogenes* in their prepackaged salads**. The potentially contaminated salads had already been distributed and purchased by many consumers.

Not only did this present a potential social media crisis, but also the possibility of a major lawsuit. Major repercussions could've potentially destroyed the brand's long-lasting credibility and reputation.

Their crisis plan was simple, timely and effective.

Fontaine Santé utilized traditional media and their social media channels to spread the message about the possible contamination and make sure that all consumers were aware of the situation.

The brand posted the following well-written official response on their corporate website.

******IMPORTANT NOTICE TO OUR CUSTOMERS******

We have discovered the possible presence of listeria in some of our salads. Upon learning this information, production was halted immediately and all salads were recalled from the retailers.

We want to reassure consumers: nobody has been affected and we invite those who still have the products identified by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to bring them back to retailers to get reimbursed. We are working closely with the CFIA to ensure this problem does not happen again.

You can contact us by email at info@fontainesante.com or by phone at 1-888-627-2683.

Fontaine Santé kept their customers informed.

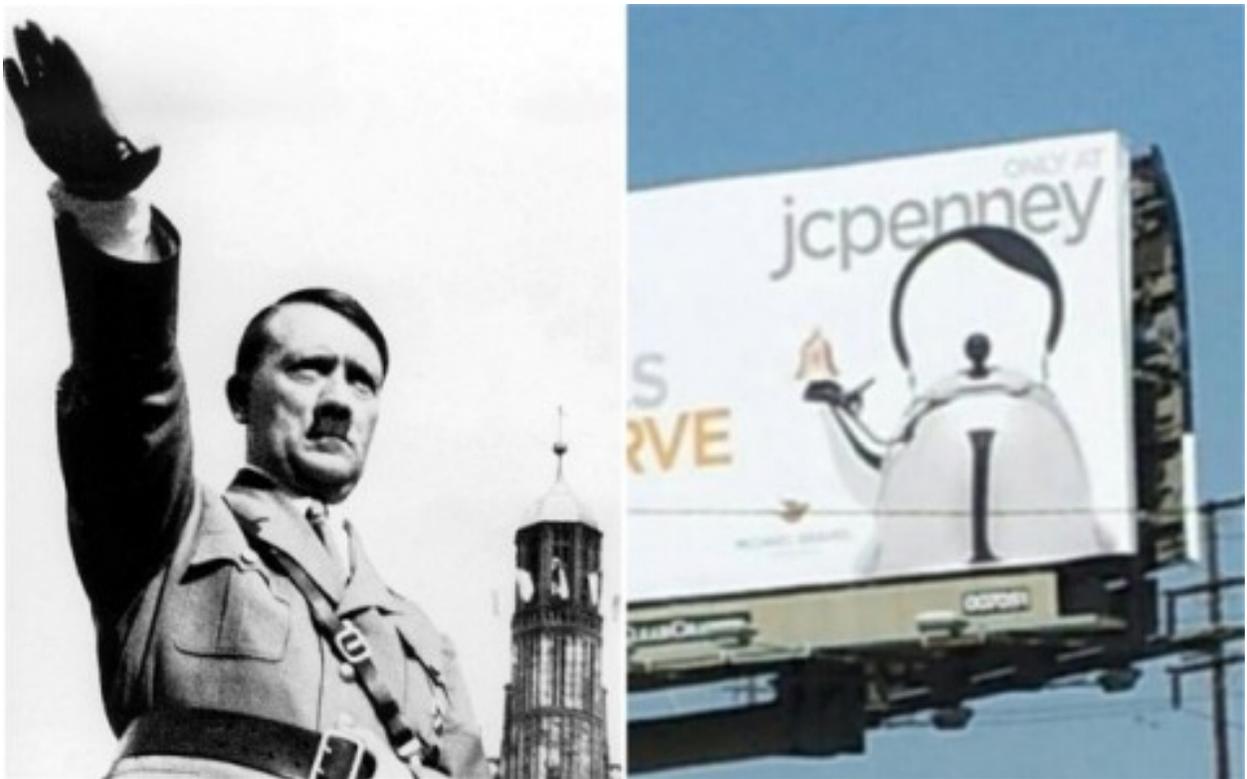
Thanks to their quick action, all potentially contaminated produce was quickly recalled with no reports of illness.

Because Fontaine Santé was open and honest about the possible contamination risk, their loyal customers rallied around to praise and defend the brand.

How J.C. Penney Responded to Crisis

In May 2013, J.C. Penney had what could be described as a tempest in a teapot that received international attention.

The Telegraph declared that **J.C. Penney had a problem with its teapot** as it was depicted in a huge billboard advertisement on Interstate 405 near Culver City, California. Some people saw the image as a subtle depiction of Hitler.



The offending billboard.

This is obviously a matter of personal perception and the result of an innocent creative mistake. The issue could've become a crisis unless J.C. Penney took very prompt action.

Because J.C. Penney's response was rapid and appropriate, a crisis was averted.

7 Steps to Defend Your Own Reputation

The case studies above provide you with useful examples to refer to as you **develop your own reputation management strategy**.

Before you begin to build a plan, you need to be sure that you **maintain shared standards within your company**. Shared standards give you the strongest basis for an **effective crisis response strategy**.

Your company's culture should **emphasize the policies the company has developed** for all aspects of its operations including:

- Quality standards
- Customer relations
- Human relations
- Safety standards
- Emergency responses
- Environmental concerns
- Privacy standards, etc.

Every member of your team should understand these policies and commit to them to **put your company in the best possible state of readiness** in the event a crisis develops.



Crisis management in action. Image source: iStockPhoto.

#1: Act Quickly

Although it's tempting to hold back until you're sure you understand exactly what's happened and who's to blame (as your lawyers might counsel), those impacted by the crisis want answers fast. Better by far that your company **provides those answers before anyone else.**

#2: Take Charge

The attitude should be that your company will **manage the crisis**, rather than allowing it to control the company. There are risks associated with both being prompt and being tardy with your responses. **Move as fast as possible**, rather than **waiting for more information to come in** before you act.

#3: Handle Reality

It's important to **deal with the real facts**. Social media makes it easy for whistle-blowers to reveal the truth as they see it. 'Fess up to what's really happening and don't attempt to maintain a charade that could collapse at any time.

#4: Engage the Nay-sayers

When you follow the previous steps, you can deal directly with any critics you have. Old-style PR often suggested laying low until the heat blew over. Because the Internet gives visibility to critics, it's much better to **deal with criticism as it arises**.

#5: Spread the Word

To **avoid any misconceptions** or incorrect interpretations by others, your company should **use all means at its disposal to communicate** what has happened and what you're doing about it. This includes using your website, company blog, social media pages and media releases.

#6: Encourage Dialogue

Any successful company will have **defenders among its various stakeholders**, including customers. **Provide your supporters with an online space where they can express their views** on what the company means to them and how they see the company's response.

By encouraging positive sources of information about your company, you **ensure that good opinions can far outweigh any negative information** that shows in searches.

#7: Deliver on Your Word

At the heart of any crisis, there's a real incident acting as a trigger. It's important that your company **ensure there are appropriate responses** to that incident, and that outsiders acknowledge your company as handling the situation well.

Over to You

Don't wait until the threat to your reputation becomes visible. Events in a crisis move quickly online and only by preparing can you **successfully defend your company's reputation**.

Use the examples and strategic tips in this article to help you **build a plan that prepares you to withstand a crisis**.

What do you think? Has your brand had to defend its reputation online? What strategic tactics did you use? What other advice can you offer? Please share your opinions in the comments below.