CREATING CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLANS

IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC CRISES TYPES

Effective crisis communications begins with having a plan in place before a crisis happens. While not all crises can be anticipated based on the nature of an organization, certain types of crises can be more likely to occur than others. There are also some types of crises that have the potential to occur in any organization that involves human beings.

With this information in mind, and based on the recent crisis and the specifics of Blink Industrial products, we have identified the following types of crises that should be considered when preparing crisis communication plans:

- Off-the-shelf product malfunction or fraudulent product claims – product malfunction that negatively impacts users
- Sexual, gender-based misconduct – amongst Blink Industrial executive team, management or employees
- Pilot error – Military pilots or military leadership blaming Blink Industrial technology for poorly trained aviators and the consequences that ensue from pilot errors.

PRINCIPLES

When approaching the development of crisis communication plans, for Blink Industrial or any other organization, certain principles can be considered universally useful.

OWNERSHIP:
- Owning the issue and taking responsibility.

TRANSPARENCY:
- Being transparent about both the crisis/ issue itself as well as how the organization responds to it.

RESPONSIVENESS:
- Communicating promptly with all stakeholders both internal and external.

EVALUATION:
- Evaluate crisis communication response to see how it can be improved next time.

ASSIGNING CRISIS COMMUNICATION ROLES

While, ultimately, the specifics of a particular crisis will dictate the needed responses of crisis communications team members, assigning clear roles and responsibilities for individuals in advance will help improve the crisis communications response when a crisis happens. Taking this step also aids Transparency and Responsiveness.

All communications team members

Key crisis communications responsibilities (proactive)
- Help evaluate the most recent crisis communications response.
- Familiarize themselves with the contents of the crisis communications toolkit, including but not limited to the outline of individual team member roles and responsibilities.
- Have access to a hardcopy of the crisis communications toolkit at both the office and at home.
- Participate in the annual review of the crisis communications toolkit.

Key crisis communications responsibilities (reactive)
- Follow the lead of the crisis communications manager.
- Develop and become familiar with key messages that are specific to the current crisis.
- Periodically update the crisis communications manager.

Media relations manager

Key crisis communications responsibilities (proactive)
- Set up and maintain media monitoring mechanisms to help identify emerging crises.
- Conduct annual media training workshop for Blink Industrial executive team.

Key responsibilities in a crisis (reactive)
- Develop talking points for the media, based on the key messages developed by the crisis communications team.
- Be responsive to all media inquiries.
- When/if applicable write and distribute news releases to the media.
- When/if applicable and in consultation with the crisis communications manager, organize press conferences.
- Prep the chosen spokesperson for media engagement, including providing a detailed walkthrough for the spokesperson of the talking points.

Social media and email marketing manager

Key crisis communications responsibilities (proactive)
- Set up and maintain social listening mechanisms to help identify emerging crises.
- Set up infrastructure that facilitates prompt suspension of scheduled content sharing on both social media and email marketing platforms.

Key responsibilities in a crisis (reactive)
- When/if applicable, suspend content sharing on social media and email marketing platforms.
- Monitor stakeholder sentiment on social media platforms.
- Monitor and respond to those impacted by the crisis who are active on social media when/if appropriate.
- When/if applicable create and share periodic and frequent updates about the unfolding crisis on social media platforms.

Crisis communications manager

Key crisis communications responsibilities (proactive)
- Lead efforts to evaluate the most recent crisis communications response.
- Lead efforts to create and finalize the criss communications toolkit.
- Generate buy-in from company leadership regarding the importance of crisis communications and the utility of crisis communications plans.

Key responsibilities in a crisis (reactive)
- Lead the development of key messages specific to the current crisis.
- Delegate duties within the communications team as/if needed.
- Maintain an understanding of the big picture of how the team is responding to the crisis and the effectiveness of the response.
- In the context of crisis communications, make executive decisions when there is not a clear course of action.

Internal communications manager

Key crisis communications responsibilities (proactive)
- Ensure current internal policies and procedures including anonymous feedback and official reporting pathways are accessible to employees.
- Monitor the general sentiment and cultural climate within the organization through bi-annual meetings with employees at various levels, surveys and other mechanisms.

Key responsibilities in a crisis (reactive)
- Disseminate key messages to internal stakeholders.

- When/if appropriate, send messages of support and/or confidentiality policy reminders and updates to internal stakeholders via Slack channels and employee email lists.

RESTORING BRAND PERCEPTION

RESTORATION STRATEGY OVERVIEW

Two prongs

Our approach to restoring brand perception will be two-pronged. (1) We will take action to maintain any remaining Blink Industrial brand equity by distancing Blink from the newly created AlphaScan brand – we are doing this because Blink Industrial is larger than AlphaScan technology and has its own established history/value. In concert with this, (2) we will also take action to restore and build-up Blink Industrial brand equity by reminding stakeholders how it became so strong in the first place.

Lean heavily on military client testimonials

The two prongs of our approach also function as the main strategy statements that will guide the development of the brand restoration digital campaign. In addition, campaign messaging will focus heavily on testimonials from previous/existing customers, particularly those in the military, in order to leverage their credibility and reaffirm the strong positive brand associations between Blink Industrial and the U.S. Armed Forces.

These testimonials will be the core of the digital content strategy for the campaign. Through video and imagery, members of the U.S military including both the aviators themselves as well as the officers involved in green-lighting adoption of Blink Industrial simulation training systems will be featured.

Utilizing client testimonials in this way engages the authority principle of persuasion outlined by Cialdini (2006) by employing two of the three main types of authority symbols – titles and clothes/uniforms, Each element carries with it strong associations of credibility.

The liking technique, also outlined by Cialdini (2006) is also employed by drawing upon the factors of association and familiarity that consumers have with the U.S. military. In short, Blink benefits from the positive, strong associations the people have with this group.

Radical transparency

Blink Industrial, as a publicly-traded company, will provide open access to its up-to-date corporate information including its financial performance and "radically transparent" statement addressing this crisis and the proactive strategy Blink is implementing to course-correct and prevent recurrence in the future. The Blink Industrial website will be updated to have information front and center, and "town hall" style listening sessions can be held with various stakeholder segments.

This strategy can further entail hiring a V.P. of Ethical Compliance to run the process outlined and be a credible spokesperson to internal and external audiences, or hiring an external agency to take on this role but also incorporating the voice of Blink Industrial's leadership and key decision-makers in accepting full accountability, problem-solving, and defining a new path forward for the company. The new V.P. would initiate a survey of operational flaws that led to this problem and another survey that captures stakeholder viewpoints so that they can be engaged and addressed head on; and co-create and implement the checks and balances collaboratively that will prevent the recurrence of a similar crisis. This effort can also involve revisiting how Blink's business model and technology can optimally serve society and building out an authentic Corporate Social Responsibility strategy for the immediate and long term future.

Creating distance from AlphaScan with a new look

AlphaScan was created as an individual brand, and Blink Industrial will be leaning on those differences moving forward to create a distance between this sub-brand and the original brand. Unfortunately, within the AlphaScan branding there are connections to the overall parent company, such as a similar and shared color scheme which will be an obstacle to create distance from a visual brand perspective. While key branding elements of AlphaScan, such as the newly designed logo, will be retired and direct ties to the product, such as social media pages, will be removed, Blink Industrial will need to go a step further to encourage users to mentally separate the brands.

Moving forward, Blink Industrial will takes steps to refresh and rebrand its organization. While there are currently several internal changes happening, there will be impact to the public facing aspects as well. Blink Industrial will be taking the opportunity to refresh its logo, change its color palette, update brand typography, and reconsider packaging in an effort to estrange itself from AlphaScan. While these two brands cannot be entirely separated, changing the branding elements and giving Blink Industrial a new look will create a visual difference that will help disassociate them in the consumer mind.

ASSIGNING BRAND RESTORATION ROLES

All communications team members

Key brand restoration responsibilities (proactive)
- Provide input in the development of a brand restoration strategic plan, including the development of key messages and especially input on development of tactics that are specific to each team member's area of expertise.

Key brand restoration responsibilities (reactive)
- Periodically update the crisis communications manager and/or communications team leader.

Media relations manager

Key brand restoration responsibilities (proactive)
- Set up and maintain media monitoring mechanisms to specifically track any ongoing or follow-up coverage of the recent crisis.
- Apply a brand restoration "lens" when writing all news releases or engaging in public relations-related activities.

Social media and email marketing manager

Key brand restoration responsibilities (proactive)
- Set up and maintain social listening mechanisms to specifically monitor social media activity related to the recent crisis as well as general brand sentiment,
- Implement social media related brand restoration tactics.

REFERENCES

Cialdini, Robert B. Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion - Revised Edition. New York, NY: Collins, 2006. Print.