# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS MANUAL

A GUIDE FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN CANNABIS


**National Cannabis Industry Association**

MARKETING & ADVERTISING COMMITTEE

CRISIS MANUAL SUBCOMMITEE


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# INTRODUCTIONS & OVERVIEW

## Chris Foster: Why Crisis Planning is Critical

In today's world of ubiquitous social media and ever-increasing transparency, information can become public overnight and tarnish or destroy even the most pristine reputations. The communications landscape is more complex than ever before. Whether you are launching a new product or service, managing through a delicate public issue or an organizational transition advanced planning and foresight will be key to protecting and propelling your organization when crises occur. We are living in an age where most information moves digitally, and consumers are more empowered and information-hungry. Given this new dynamic, it's more important than ever for executives and brands to manage their reputations, plan for the unexpected and anticipate problems before they arise.

As a veteran of the public relations industry, I've witnessed enormous change and transformation over the last 25 years. However, the one constant in managing a crisis is the importance of preparation. Planning and preparing for the unexpected is a process that most organizations do not make a priority, and while it's impossible to predict the future or plan for every scenario, taking the time, in regular intervals, to access an organization's readiness for issues and crisis is the best defense against managing when a crisis occurs.

For the past eight months, NCIA's Marketing and Advertising Committee worked hard to get this manual together. NCIA is doing a great service to its members by providing this manual, and I hope you all take advantage of it.

**Chris Foster**
PRESIDENT, NORTH AMERICA
*BCW*

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***Chris Foster*** *is President, North America for BCW. Prior to his current role, Foster was Burson-Marsteller's Worldwide Executive Vice President and Chief Business Development Officer. Foster has led national and global public awareness and communications campaigns for organizations such as the U.S Department of Defense, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Social Security Administration, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Amgen, and Intel. He specializes in working with the federal government and private companies on understanding reputation risk and leveraging communications analytics to drive enterprise-wide strategy. In 2017, Foster published his first book, Reputation Strategy and Analytics in a Hyper-Connected World, a cross-disciplinary resource for communication and digital professionals.*

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## Jeanine Moss: Why Us, Why Now?

As wonderful as cannabis is, we'll face a crisis together as an industry way too soon. When it happens, the key will not be when or how it occurred, but how we respond to it. That's why NCIA's Marketing & Advertising Committee thinks it is so important for NCIA members to have an easy and practical guide that can not only help protect them and their business during a crisis, but the industry as well. As head of tourism marketing for New York City, I saw tourism dry up overnight after the New York Post published this headline: *Crack Addicted Rats As Big As Cats Invade Manhattan*. Working with the city, business improvement districts, hotels, and other infrastructures, we turned the situation around. When the time comes, we can do that in the cannabis industry, too. This manual will help you nip problems in the bud, keep issues from spiraling out of control, and share positive messages during times of stress. Let's go forward together.

**Jeanine Moss**
CEO & FOUNDER
*ANNABIS*
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***Jeanine Moss*** *is CEO of AnnaBis, the luxury cannabis accessories brand. Moss is a branding and marketing expert who began her career in new product development for companies like Kraft Food and Seven-Up. As Vice President of Marketing & Communications for the New York Convention & Visitors Bureau, she was responsible for crisis preparedness for major events and directed the crisis response after the first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Moss served as Senior Counselor for Communications at The September 11th Fund and Special Advisor to the Undersecretary for Personnel & Readiness at the Department of Defense. After using medical marijuana to reduce her reliance on opiates following hip surgery, Jeanine became a fervent believer in its medicinal powers and is now a strong advocate.*

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## Put This Manual To Use. Today!

No one wants to plan ahead, but send this document to your team anyway and schedule an hour next week to discuss it. Bring donuts.

Here's what you'll get:

- Ideas about problems you haven't considered
- Thoughts on who could be a good leader during a difficult time
- Clear understanding of what to do first when something goes wrong

If that's all you get, you're already ahead. But you'll get much more if you use the easy templates and checklists and put together a binder for your desk (and on the computer) with everything you need should you be called upon to act. You'll save money and time and gain peace of mind.

**Thank you to the team of experts who worked to develop this crisis manual on behalf of NCIA:**

## 2017-2018 NCIA Marketing & Advertising Committee Members:

*__Lisa Buffo, Co-Chair__ - *Cannabis Marketing Association*
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## Special thanks to our NCIA Liaisons:

**Lisa Dannen, Marketing Director**
**Jeremy DePasquale, Membership Director**

# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CRISIS READINESS

All organizations are vulnerable to crisis. Proper crisis preparedness and management can protect a company's reputation, brand equity and market share, as well as the confidence of its customers, employees and stakeholders.

There are distinct things you should do to prepare for the crisis that will, one day, almost certainly come: develop resistance, prepare to respond immediately and effectively to achieve normalcy as soon as possible, and immediately work to rebuild goodwill and support.

This guide was prepared to give you the perspective, tools and resources to set you up for successful communications before, during and after a crisis occurs.

## 1. Crisis Resistance

- Identify and manage emerging issues before they escalate
- Contain incidents so they resolve quickly
- Establish and manage reputation proactively

## 2. Crisis Responsiveness

- Create a strong, agile crisis infrastructure
- Form a battle-tested Crisis Team
- Develop a pre-established crisis plan with procedures and tools that facilitate, streamline, guide and evaluate response

## 3. Crisis Resilience

- Achieve a swift and sustainable recovery
- Build relationships, goodwill, benefit-of-the-doubt in advance

In other words, preparing for a crisis is not a one-time endeavor. It's not something you can wait to do when a crisis hits.

It requires a continuous and holistic approach.

# WHAT DEFINES A CRISIS?

Regardless of company size or situation, a time will come when it feels like you're dealing with something that could impact your job, company, community, or industry. Any business, especially in the cannabis industry - which is just emerging, still federally illegal, and facing considerable stigma - can face a public relations crisis at any time. The way you respond can either maintain your public image or significantly damage your brand.

With the instant access available through social media and a 24/7 news cycle, crises can go viral almost instantly. Being able to anticipate when a crisis is looming, and having a plan in place to address it, can help minimize the potential impact.

If you believe you may be facing a crisis situation, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this in fact a crisis that needs to be addressed?
- What is the potential scope or severity?
- Is the information source credible?
- What are the potential liabilities?

## Types of crisis.

When a crisis arises, the first step in determining the necessary response is to identify the type of crisis you're dealing with.

**Internal Crisis:** poor financial results, accident, product recall, a merger or acquisition, employee complaint, labor dispute, criminal activity, competitor/industry threat, trademark or patent issues

> If the crisis is internal, consider the stakeholders who should be informed. Most likely it will be employees, executives, boards members, vendors, partners and other individuals and groups that are part of the day to day operations. Bear in mind that any communication you make may (and probably will) be shared externally.

Internal (company) crises may be resolved with a smaller crisis team like a department head, the response team, and relevant internal departments.

**Industry Crisis:** political or legislative action, broad product contamination and recalls, widespread consumer illness or deaths (children, pets)

> If the crisis is industry-based, the audience can be much wider, including media, the community, followers/fans on social accounts, etc. An industry crisis may benefit from utilizing an expanded response team.

**External Crisis:** natural disaster, embargo on product

> External Crises require more collaboration and communication between affected parties, government officials, etc., require a larger team (including PR agency, social media teams and board of directors), and may provide opportunities to deliver key messages that are only peripherally related to the crisis. Industry associations and trade organizations may also provide critical assistance and support.

Anticipating the types of crises you may face, as well as the severity and depth of impact on your organization, can help to determine the level of response required. Understanding different levels of crisis, and having response strategies in hand for each will be a determining factor in your effectiveness.

Regardless of the type of crisis you face, be sure to consider your internal stakeholders and how they can help propel your messages. Board members and employees do not want to learn about important developments from the news. Carefully-timed releases of information to well-defined audiences is key.

The CEO should always be involved in decision-making in any crisis situation and will often be the primary spokesperson. The board should usually be advised, and sometimes the board may participate as decision-makers and spokespeople.

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## Gauging the Impact

A crisis can have varying levels of impact on individuals, companies, and even the cannabis industry as a whole. The effects from a crisis can be both immediate and residual, and may include damage to:

- Reputation (individual, brand, product, company, industry)
- Revenue and profit (sales, sponsorships, endorsements, legal actions)
- Regulatory rulings and amendments
- Attracting, hiring, and retaining employees
- Business alliances and partnerships

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## Define Your Objectives.

Typically, when the crisis stems from the company (internal) or the industry, the overall objective is to address the situation and stop further news from being generated. The story is being told, and your goal is to address it without adding news that would further propel it - thus shortening the news cycle.

When the crisis is external, like a natural disaster (wildfires, floods), the goal is to get the word out about your situation and capitalize on the coverage to place positive messages about you, your company, and how you're addressing the situation.

Common objectives for crisis communications include:

- Controlling the spread of information and/or misinformation
- Protecting the reputation of company, leadership and employees
- Leveraging the media to propel positive messages/influence perceptions

**How bad is it?**

Not all crises are equal. A small fire feels the same as a large fire while you are in the thick of things. If you develop a **Crisis Scorecard** (see page 34) prior to the crisis, it will help you determine what needs to be done and who needs to be informed and when. The framework and valuation should be agreed upon before a crisis occurs.

## How severe is this threat?

With an understanding of the crisis you may be facing, the next step is to define the levels of severity and associated action steps for each level. We are using suggestions to make a point, and some suggestions may not work for your business. Also, you can have as many levels of severity as necessary in order to match your organization's needs, but keep in mind that too many levels can make the process overly complicated and time consuming.

**Level One** - An incident which won't attract attention from either a majority of customers or national and local media. While these situations are often of great concern to just a few individuals, it is important to keep in mind that sometimes a Level One event may escalate to Level Two due to unexpected developments.

**Level Two** - Claims of criminal activity by a key stakeholder, sexual harassment or discrimination class action suits, an accidental death or injury to a customer. These are incidents that, no matter the size or magnitude, must be addressed swiftly by the organization and with the focus of the incident team.

**Level Three** - An incident which will attract the attention of the majority of customers and local and national media because of the number of persons involved or the gravity of the situation (ex. labor action, fires, terrorism, criminal activity).

# THE CRISIS READINESS LIFECYCLE

## 1. Crisis Resistance

**Identify Vulnerabilities**

If you're being proactive and preparing for a potential crisis, gather your internal team for an intensive brainstorming session to identify all of the potential crises that could impact your organization.

Two key outcomes will likely surface as a result of this effort:

1. You may realize that some of the situations are preventable by modifying existing methods of operation.
2. You can begin to think about possible responses, best-case / worst-case scenarios, etc. and prepare for those outcomes as well.

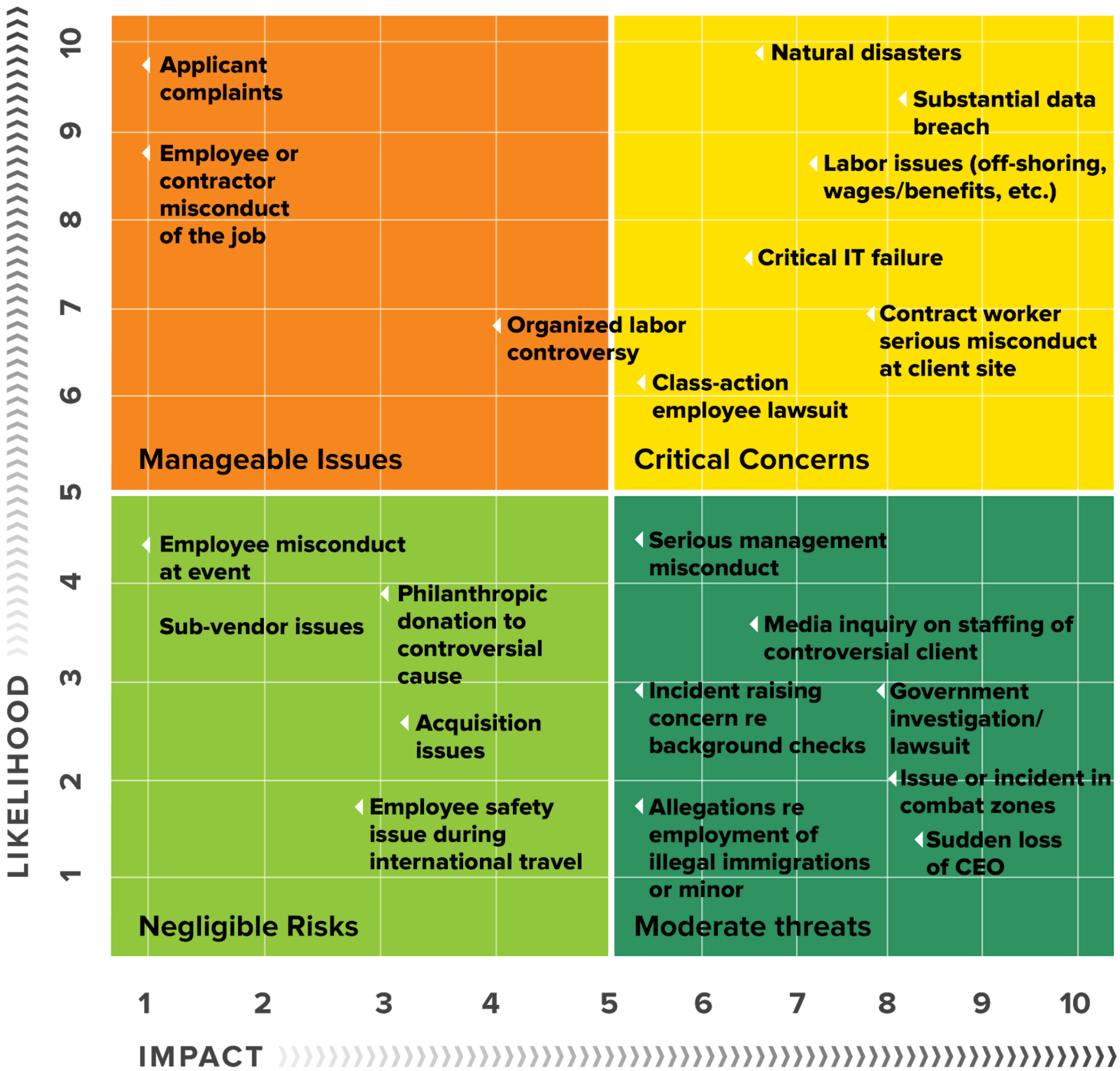
In some cases, you know a crisis will occur because you are planning to create it, i.e. a layoff, facility closure, or major acquisition or sale. While these are the easiest to prepare for because you know they're coming, there is still a chance for negative reaction and a need for prepared, strategic communications.

**Use Risk Mapping**

With your list of identified crisis risks in hand, plot them on a grid according to likelihood of occurrence and potential impact on the company. Get crisis professionals to help you do this.

An example Risk Map is included on the following page. The examples included may not be relevant to your business, but are provided to help demonstrate the grid's use, as well as potential crises/risks you may not have thought about.

## Example Risk Map.



## 2. Crisis Responsiveness

**Communications/PR departments most frequently lead crisis response programs**

### Step One: Build the Crisis Team

Tasks involved in crisis communications include a designating a “gatekeeper,” response coordination, research, writing, internal and external communications management, and legal and C-suite functions. The purpose of the crisis team is to quickly and accurately anticipate and respond to developments across communications channels - and to be good communicators among themselves. By liberally sharing information, strategizing and producing communications as a team, your messages will gain more power, longevity and gravitas.

Typically, the crisis team gatekeeper is a senior member of the communications (marketing/PR) team with direct access to the executive or C-suite team. These gatekeepers are often tasked with:

- Defining a crisis, responding and escalating it internally if needed
- Monitoring potential crises
- Informing the social team and management
- Managing social media and responding to questions
- Determining key messages
- Determining when/if to activate friendly media

In addition to the gatekeeper, the crisis team should be comprised of the following members/roles:

- Internal: Executives (CEO, Communications/Marketing Lead, PR, Legal)
- External: Investors, Board Members, Advisors
- Crisis Coordinator: This person will have all of the phone trees and will gather information for the Incident Scorecard.

### Step Two: Create a Response Plan

Before the crisis hits, be prepared with the appropriate action and communication channels identified and ready to activate. Align the leadership team to define the action plan so you're ready to engage rather than debate about how to handle the situation.

Your plan should be prepared to address four key audiences - and more if relevant:

- Internal stakeholders & decision makers
- Company and related partners, affiliates, and vendors
- Patients and customers
- Media and influencers

**Include a Crisis Scorecard**

The first step in building a crisis scorecard is understanding what factors, risks, and scenarios are relevant to your business. Below we will review a few essential questions that should be on a crisis scorecard. Feel free to change questions or add your own. What is important here is that you plan ahead. (See template on page 34 at the end of this guide.)

## Crisis Scorecard Questions to Consider:

Even a single, seemingly minor incident can spiral into a full-blown crisis if the situation is not addressed in a timely manner. The following questions should be asked and answered as you determine the level of severity and impact of the crisis you're dealing with.

- Is the possible negative impact company-specific or industry-wide?
- How many people have been affected?
- Has anyone died or been injured?
- Is there ongoing danger?
- How many media organizations have reached out?
- How many people have posted on social media (comments, messages, posts)?
- How many people have contacted the organization?
- Does this have the potential to be a local story, a nation-wide story, or a worldwide story?

#### Create an Incident Report

An incident report is a formal recording of the facts related to the event. A good incident report should include a detailed description of the event and the "who, what, when, where, how" of what happened. Incident reporting provides the communications team with facts to help determine any key messages, and the report serves as data to analyze when assessing any core problems related to the business. There are different forms of incident reports, depending on the crisis at hand (see template on page 33). A personal injury incident report will include different information than a technology security breach, but a good report will include as many details as possible related to the people, assets and circumstances of the event so the public relations team can respond appropriately. If there is a specific type of crisis that your business is prone to, you may want to create a custom incident report form related to that issue. Using social listening tools, you can include information about the reach of the crisis, including how quickly the information is spreading.

An incident report form will serve as a central location for gathering the facts of the event:

- **Who** - Who was involved in the crisis? (Who can also mean groups of people.)
- **What** - What was the incident?
- **When** - The date and time of the incident?
- **How** - How did this incident occur?
- **Where** - Where did the incident occur?
- **Why** - Why did the incident occur?
- **Viral** - Who knows about the incident and how many people are talking about it?

#### Develop a phone tree

Using a phone tree, such as the template provided in this document, can help prevent a communications bottleneck when assembling your team and springing into action. This document should be reviewed and updated with current contact information on a yearly basis (at a minimum). See phone tree template on page 32.

#### Assemble a set of key stakeholders

This is a list of people who would spread key messaging to key audiences. Already knowing who these people are, their outlets, and their contact details will be a time saver. Importantly, you should develop messaging ahead of time if possible.

*"In a crisis, you're only as strong as your network (or your agency's network). So, as part of your preparation, identify the people, influencers, and journalists within your realm of operation. They may be friends of your brand, they may be foes of your brand, but they are familiar enough to have had a conversation, written an article, or be quoted in regard to your brand. Once you have 25 to 50 people identified, build your "crisis bucket." Then, when a crisis starts to gain traction, these are the first people you go to. How are they reacting to the crisis, positively or negatively?*

*Are they echoing your narrative or latching onto this new one? It's important to see how they are reacting because they are the ones who have historical context. They can help guide your next steps." **-- A Trendkite Playbook excerpt.***

**Example Stakeholder Messaging:**

| Stakeholder | Additional Message | Tactics | Point Person |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employees | If you have specific concerns or questions regarding the information being reported in the news, or if you have information about the activities noted in the complaint, please alert your manager or local HR representative. | Email or voicemail communication to all employees acknowledging the situation, reminding them of diversity/ inclusion and media policies, providing resource for further questions (e.g. manager, HR)<br>Equip senior leadership with talking points/Q&A for addressing employee questions | TBD |
| Contractors | If you have specific concerns or questions regarding the information being reported in the news, or if you have information about the activities noted in the complaint, please alert your manager or local HR representative. | Email or voicemail communication acknowledging the situation, reminding them of diversity/inclusion and media policies, providing resource for further questions (e.g. manager, HR)<br>Equip field management with talking points/Q&A for addressing contractor questions | TBD |
| Prospective Contractors | [No change from overall message.] | Equip hiring managers with talking points/ Q&A to address questions | TBD |
| Clients | We want to assure you that we are distressed by this news and take these kinds of accusations seriously. | Equip account managers and regional leadership with talking points/ Q&A to address questions | TBD |
| Media | [No change from overall message.] | Draft standby statement in case of media inquiries<br>Activate real-time media monitoring | TBD |
| Government Officials/ Regulators | [No change from overall message.] | Equip key points of contact with talking points/Q&A to address questions | TBD |
| Trade Associations | [No change from overall message.] | Phone call to key contacts at trade associations | TBD |

### Step Three: Developing the Message

The moment a crisis arrives, a placeholder message like "we are monitoring the situation and will be providing information shortly" should go up immediately while the finalized, pre-drafted message is being customized as needed and approved for release.

To develop messaging, the crisis team needs to identify what should be said, and why, how, and what is important to be communicated about the organization for each target audience.

Deeper messaging/talking points should answer specific questions from media or customers, or be used to de-escalate situations from media, customers, stakeholders, and public.

In order to do this, it's important to develop sample crisis scenarios with talking points for each possible situation. To be prepared for any crisis, think of the worst-case scenarios that could happen to your organization. This could include anything from a theft to issues with regulations to the ability to accept payments, to a child accidentally ingesting something with your label on it.

The crisis team should always refer to legal counsel to advise on liability, review messages for adherence to any other regulatory bodies (when appropriate), and review media response messages. Here are the principles you should follow for clear communication in a crisis situation:

## THE FIVE C'S OF EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING YOUR MESSAGE IN A CRISIS SITUATION

| CLARITY | CONVICTION | COMPASSION | CONSISTENCY | CREDIBILITY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Say clearly what you mean | Mean what you say – say it with conviction | Make your message relevant to people's lives | Repeat your message regularly | People have to believe you |

### Developing a statement

In many cases, a statement is all that is needed to communicate with customers, stakeholders, and media. This can accomplish many things: provide media with a statement that can be published that gets a company's message out; buy more time to draft specific messaging and talking points for media interviews; allow companies to control the communications; and provide a tightly controlled message. It also provides what a reporter usually needs: a quote for their article (if they're writing one).

A statement should be clear and concise and no longer than 2 paragraphs. Here are some general guidelines:

- Include the most vital information that people need to know.
- Ensure that the information is accurate as it will all be public information.
- Stick to the facts and don't get caught up in emotionally driven words.
- Use empathetic language and under no circumstances use combative language.

### Step Four: Media Training

Once messaging is developed, someone at the organization or company needs to deliver it. Regardless of the size (small, medium, large) or scope (local or national) of the organization, chosen spokespeople should have a clear understanding of the situation, know how to speak and respond to media, and be media trained.

Again, depending on the type of organization, media training could be done in-house or a company might bring in a professional. If doing media training internally, brainstorm possible crisis scenarios to develop an interactive and useful in-house media training using developed talking points. Based on these scenarios, develop role-playing exercises—with one staff member acting as a reporter— that can help get a company's appointed spokesperson comfortable with speaking to media and answering hard questions. This can be done at any given time, but preferably not during an actual crisis.

Two of the most critical functions of both being prepared for a crisis, and managing the lifecycle of a crisis, are monitoring and identifying potential risks that may arise.

## Possible Scenarios

Here are some examples of fictional crises and possible talking points to illustrate the points made in this guide. *These are examples only*. We recommend doing this as a team exercise and draft it before a crisis arises:

**SCENARIO NO. 1:** A report erroneously claims your producers have been using dangerous chemicals to harvest your product.

Possible talking points:

- We are distressed by this news and take these kinds of accusations seriously.
- We have cut all ties with this producer.
- Our customers come first and we are finding a new producer.
- The report is erroneous, and in fact our producers have a clean record (have facts in hand to prove it).

**SCENARIO NO. 2:** Your competition has accused you of plagiarism or copying IP.

Possible talking points:

- We are aware of this and we believe these claims are false and have no basis.
- As long-standing members of the community, we believe in full compliance.
- We will be fully cooperative with officials and investigators into these claims.
- These claims do not impact our ability to serve our customers, provide quality products, etc.

**SCENARIO NO. 3:** A key executive has been arrested and accused of (fill in the blank).

Possible talking points:

- We are distressed by this news and take these kinds of accusations seriously.
- We are reviewing all possible avenues.
- We will await any additional news before commenting.

### Monitoring & Listening Tools

It is absolutely essential to establish listening and monitoring systems for intelligence gathering for both crisis prevention and crisis response. Knowing what's being said about you in the media or by customers, employees, or stakeholders, and especially online and in social media, often allows you to catch a negative "trend" before it turns into a crisis.

Monitoring systems have to be set up in advance, and can be used to gather information both on your company as well as your competitors. Often these tools can inform you on the volume of people talking about the issues and who are key sharers of the news, and can also assess the sentiment of these online conversations. For online coverage, Google Alerts are the no-cost favorite, while there are a multitude of paid monitoring services that can gather, analyze tone, market share and voice, and provide reports in different formats. Some examples of fee-based monitoring services include HootSuite, TrendKite, Keyhole, Critical Mention, Cision and Meltwater.

## A Word on Legal Risk and Attorney Involvement:

One of the first things that should be addressed when crisis strikes is whether there is a reasonable chance that the crisis could lead to a lawsuit. If the answer is yes, it is even more important to ensure you have an attorney on your response team who is actively providing advice on how to respond to the crisis from a litigation management perspective. Without attorney involvement, a plaintiff will be able to obtain your internal communications discussing the crisis and what to do about it. But an effective attorney can help prevent this from happening, including by invoking the attorney-client privilege to shield many communications from discovery. Protecting communications with third parties such as public relations agencies is more difficult, but it can be done, particularly if you are using an outside attorney who engages the public relations agency directly. If a reasonable chance of litigation exists, make sure your attorney is advising you from the very beginning of the crisis, and have a conversation with them about the strategy for shielding crisis communications from discovery in a lawsuit.

## Implementing on Social Media

Platforms like Facebook have created a tremendous opportunity to get messages out to new audiences. It is common for social media outlets to inconsistently apply vague rules, but in a situation when a company is commenting on itself, using your active social platforms will be an effective way to communicate. But realize this: any social post can receive public comments. This means a person needs to be actively dedicated – and trained – on monitoring the information flow across social channels.

As an organization, it is important to have an internal social media policy in place. This should include:

- Who can/can't post on your social media channels.
- What messaging can/can't be shared.
- How your messaging should be delivered.
- Who should be responsible for running interference and alerting the team.

It's also important to develop a communications team to react and respond during a social media crisis (ranging from a negative comment to a false accusation).

**Replying to negative feedback on social media**

When a company gets negative feedback on any of its social media channels, take the following steps to accurately assess the situation:

**Assess the situation**

- Is the author a troll and trying to taunt you to respond?
- Monitor the comment.
- Ignore and/or delete comment, however be very careful before deleting comments as this can easily turn into a negative situation without firm direction.
- Does the comment have inaccurate information about your company that can be easily fixed with a comment?
- Reply with a polite response and correction.
- Is the comment from an angry customer or stakeholder and can the situation be addressed in the comments or should you take it offline?
- Depending on the level of the situation, you can post an answer or contact directly.

Remember, when communicating on social media, don't be confrontational, be the first to correct your own mistakes, and don't rush with a response. Use the same procedure as when responding to a media request and develop an answer as a team.

## Social Media Dos and Don’ts

- Do always respond to negative comments.
- Do stick to the facts.
- Do NOT get caught up in emotionally driven words and impassioned rhetoric.
- Do use empathetic language and under no circumstances use combative language.
- Do respond quickly.
- Do try to be helpful.
- Do post media statement on social media.
- Do NOT escalate into a war of words (companies will lose this battle).

## 3. Crisis Resilience

In today's digital age, it's not surprising the overwhelming speed at which news spreads. With endless examples of poorly handled situations, there is no hiding a burgeoning crisis. When a crisis hits, it can be overwhelming and many individuals/companies freeze with panic and indecision. Having a well-defined plan in place will ease the tension and help you face the most challenging crisis. Follow the steps above to properly prepare your company and give you a bit of peace of mind.

After the crisis passes, you need to immediately focus on regaining trust from all of your key stakeholders. Your posture should be one of a confident company that stands behind its products. You need to double-down on your proactive outreach, not just to customers, but to all local audiences with whom you have relationships (e.g., local press, regulators and business partners). The name of the game is to, as quickly as possible, get back to where you feel from a reputational basis you were before the crisis, and then even more. Your brand and reputation have taken a hit: that's fine...be aware of it, then use the learnings to your advantage, not just to avoid the next potential crisis but to strengthen your customers' loyalty as a result of how you handled the issue.

# NCIA’S ROLE IN CRISIS

As the cannabis industry’s largest trade association, NCIA leads the unified national effort to ensure that the industry is recognized as a legitimate and professional business community. By bonding together in good times and bad, we will have a unified, coordinated, and industry-led effort to protect, preserve, and enhance our reputation and standing among U.S. businesses.

As a member of NCIA, you are represented alongside other top businesses when concerns of major importance are raised.

Should your member organization be faced with a crisis, NCIA is here to help. Below are some of the ways NCIA members can call on their association:

**Notification**

“If you see something, say something.” While this phrase has become part of our national language, we encourage you to let us know if you see or suspect an issue that could grow into an industry crisis. These types of crises might include recalls, widespread illness or death, or a natural disaster. Should you be aware of anything like the above, please contact NCIA’s communications department to make your concerns known.

**Resources**

Should your company be facing a crisis and you need help, please call our membership department. Your representatives there will help you determine the types of resources you need and will direct you to other NCIA members with experience in the types of issues you are facing.

**Information**

When responding to a crisis, it is critical to use accurate information. When crafting your response, please use NCIA fact sheets and talking points to illustrate the size and importance of the industry. In addition, NCIA and its committees have prepared a variety of white papers on numerous subjects that may inform your response statements and approaches.

Click to visit [www.thecannabisindustry.org](www.thecannabisindustry.org) for NCIA’s website. Below are key phone numbers:

General: 888.683.5650
Media: 202.780.1302
Communications: 303.500.3084

# CRISIS MANUAL CONTRIBUTORS

ANNABÍS

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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A GUIDE FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN CANNABIS

## National Cannabis Industry Association

# QUICK START GUIDE:
# STEP-BY-STEP TIPS TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION

## STEP 1:  GET IT TOGETHER

**Create**

- Internal contact sheets: updated.
- Key contacts for media, social, PR, and key constituents.
- Content sharing platform (Dropbox, etc.).
- Communication channels: Slack, text groups, email groups, etc.
- Designated conference line: only used for crisis meetings. Shared immediately with team.
    - Ensure all social handles are identified for tracking and response.

**Develop**

- Communication plan for internal updates.
- Regional strategy (if a crisis crosses state borders, different streams of response may be needed based on state and local municipality regulations).
- External DropBox to provide external facing materials with information and background (Dropbox or Google Drive). Share if it's determined that it's needed.
- Emergency website page.

**Identify**

- Key spokespeople nationally and regionally.
- Key leaders from any involved partners.

**Confirm**

- Chain of command and messaging approvals.
- Type and magnitude of a crisis.
- Determine when you can downgrade or must upgrade a crisis.

## STEP 2:  FIND OUT WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING

**Monitoring**

- Social, PR, and general sentiment should be monitored until the crisis is no longer determined to be a threat.

- Utilize social & PR listening tools if available. If so, set up streams to monitor keywords, hashtags, company names.

- If listening tools aren't available, assign a few junior team members to supply hourly or daily reports on key KPIs:
    - Tone.
    - Activity (example: more than 5 articles per hour; example: 18 social comments in 20 minutes regarding the crisis).
    - Influencer engagement.
    - Google Alerts can be used and set for a no-cost alternative.
    - Set Crisis Escalation & De-escalation points.
- While tracking, ensure that identified thresholds for escalations are identified and communicated to the internal team.

## STEP 3: PREPARE & SHARE

- Develop a memo to be shared internally regarding response. Refer to the company manual and assume anything you share internally will reach the public/press. Ensure that all areas of the organization are aware of the social media guidelines for the company. Send out a refresher for the company.
- Send company guidelines and recommended path to resolution for all team members: all employees and partners are team members but may have different guidelines.
- Send reminders consistently – if the issue continues to heat or if it calms down. Ensure that all team members know that unauthorized posts or comments should not be made.
- Ensure that partner companies are aware of these guidelines as well.
- PR: remind the company at large that only specifically authorized personnel should be speaking to the press, the public, or making statements.
- Provide the company handbook as a reference or guide if there are any questions/concerns.
- Ensure that the company at large knows where to find basic information about the organization (background, info, etc.).

### Social

- Develop platform specific messaging or roles.
    - Example: Twitter offers real-time assistance and pro-active guidance to respond to hashtags or directed comments (positive or negative). However, this shouldn't be limited to just Twitter. If other customers or consumers engage on Facebook,

    Instagram, or across other platforms, ensure that all are addressed (note: "addressed" does not mean that every question, comment, or statement needs a response).
  - Be consistent: ensure that all crisis messaging is consistent across platforms.
  - If the company has a major statement, provide that statement across all platforms in a non-editable fashion.

**Media**

- Press should be addressed only by senior leadership and the PR leads, as according to relationships and the organization.
- Contact log: ensure your contact log is up to date and shared with the internal. stakeholders.
- PR leads should address via nationally and/or regionally assigned spokespeople.

## STEP 4: PROVIDE CUSTOMER CARE

- Develop and engage a direct 1:1 messaging platform to your core audience. For this, we recommend an email platform utilizing the base you've already built.
- Direct customers or consumers to additional resource contacts.
- Provide initial response direction, set the tone for the response, offer consistent messaging and offers of support.
- Develop a proactive social media plan with core team members within first 3-5 hours. Ensure that PR approves all messaging.
  - Determine social decision tree for crisis planning/response.
  - Establish and publish approval chain.
  - Ensure levels of approvals are set for different scenarios (Internal, Industry, External and/or Level One, Two or Three).
  - Who are your core decision-makers in times of crisis?
  - Who will be responsible for strategy, writing, visuals, PR coordination, and legal approvals?
  - Are teams needed for national, global, and regional responses?

## MESSAGING TEMPLATE

| Audience | Key Message | Supporting Facts | Communication Channel |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employees | | | |
| Partners/Suppliers | | | |
| Clients/Customers | | | |
| Media | | | |
| Government Officials | | | |

# PHONE TREE TEMPLATE

## NCIA - Suggested Crisis Phone Tree Template

Company Name ______________________

*Last reviewed* __________

| CEO | |
|---|---|
| [NAME] | |
| Work desk tel | |
| Email address | |
| Mobile | |
| Home tel | |

In the event [CEO] is unavailable, [COO] will be responsible for contacting [CMO, PR, Legal, HR, BOD, Advisors, Investors and the Crisis Coordinator]. In the event an area manager is unavailable, the member of staff next in line will be responsible for implementing the phone tree to the team. Crisis Coordinator or other support staf may be reassigned to call Internal/external contacts

| | COO - Internal | | Board of Directors - External | | Advisors - External | | Investors - External | | Crisis Coordinator | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | |
| | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | |
| | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | |
| | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | |
| | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | |
| | **Marketing Lead/CMO** | | **Director at Large** | | **Advisor** | | **Investor** | | **Industry Influencers/Media** | |
| 2 | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | |
| | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | |
| | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | |
| | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | |
| | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | |
| | **PR/Communications** | | **Director at Large** | | **Advisor** | | **Investor** | | | |
| 3 | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | |
| | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | |
| | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | |
| | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | |
| | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | |
| | **Legal and/or HR** | | **Director at Large** | | **Advisor** | | **Investor** | | | |
| 4 | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | |
| | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | |
| | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | |
| | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | |
| | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | |
| | **Human Resources** | | **Director at Large** | | **Advisor** | | **Investor** | | | |
| 5 | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | | [NAME] | |
| | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | | Work desk tel | |
| | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | | Email address | |
| | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | | Mobile | |
| | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | | Home tel | |

**(Download Template)**

# INCIDENT REPORT TEMPLATE

REPORTED BY: ______________________________ DATE OF REPORT: _____________________________________

TITLE / ROLE: ______________________________ INCIDENT NO.: _________________________________________

## INCIDENT INFORMATION

REPORTED BY: ________________________________________ DATE OF INCIDENT: ____________________________

LOCATION: _______________________________________________________________________________________________

CITY: ____________________________________ STATE: __________ ZIP CODE: _____________________________

SPECIFIC AREA OF LOCATION (if applicable): _______________________________________________________________

INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

NAME / ROLE / CONTACT OF PARTIES INVOLVED

1. ________________________________________________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________________________________________________

NAME / ROLE / CONTACT OF WITNESSES

1. ________________________________________________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________________________________________________

POLICE REPORT FILED?: _______________________________ PRECINCT: _________________________

REPORTING OFFICER: __________________________________ PHONE: ___________________________

FOLLOW UP ACTION

SUPERVISOR NAME: ____________________ SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE: _______________ DATE: ________

## CRISIS SCORECARD

| Priority 1-5 | Identified risk description | Likelihood from risk matrix | Severity from risk matrix | Responsibil-ity name or position | Minimiza-tion on action description | Contingen-cy action description | Actioned by name | Action date | Reviewed by name | Review date name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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