

COMMUNICATION & CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Reputation *on the line*

In outdoor, hospitality and tourism, a crisis never gives warning. The Stance is the strategic ally you need to anticipate it, get through it and come out stronger.

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Reputation isn't won in the boardroom. It's won live.

An accident on a via ferrata, a scathing review posted after one night at a hotel, a photo that spreads at the worst possible moment of high season: in outdoor, hospitality and tourism, trust is built and lost in front of customers, in real time.

This guide brings together the essential markers for anticipating, getting through and growing from a reputational crisis. It is written for executives, communication leads and operations managers at outdoor businesses, hospitality establishments, tourist offices and tourist destinations.

Inside, you'll find a clear framework, a typology of crises, a list of concrete reflexes and illustrative scenarios directly applicable to your business.

01

Why these industries are especially exposed

Five characteristics make outdoor, hospitality and tourism structurally more vulnerable to reputational crises than most other industries.

01

A lived experience, and so a visible one

The customer is physically present. The smallest failure, whether logistical, human or material, becomes a story they tell, live or afterward.

02

Physical safety at stake

Accident, injury, weather or technical incident: the stakes go beyond brand image, they touch people's physical safety. Communication must always come after care for those affected.

03

Seasonality that compresses time

A crisis at the peak of the season can weigh on an entire year's results. The window to respond well, and fast, is far shorter than elsewhere.

04

The weight of the online review

Customer reviews, social media, booking platforms: reputation perceived online weighs heavily on the purchase decision, often before any other factor.

05

The destination effect

A property, a resort or a site can be linked, rightly or wrongly, to the image of an entire territory, and can just as easily inherit its crises.

02

Three families of crises

The crisis communication theory developed by researcher W. T. Coombs distinguishes three families of crises according to the organization's perceived level of responsibility. Identifying the right family immediately shapes the tone and strategy of the response.

LOW RESPONSIBILITY

The victim crisis

The organization is perceived as a victim of circumstance: extreme weather, an unfounded rumor, an act by a third party.

Posture: empathy, factuality, visible support for those affected.

LIMITED RESPONSIBILITY

The accidental crisis

An unintentional event occurs: technical failure, an isolated human error, a logistical incident.

Posture: swift acknowledgment, clear explanation, visible corrective measures.

HIGH RESPONSIBILITY

The preventable crisis

A known, unaddressed failing, negligence, or inappropriate internal conduct is at the root of the crisis.

Posture: full accountability, a sincere apology, concrete repair, no minimizing.

03

A five-step framework

From anticipation to learning, five steps structure a solid crisis response, whether it lasts a few hours or several weeks.

01. Anticipate

Map the risks specific to your business: weather, safety, online reviews, seasonality, destination image. Set up a crisis unit with defined roles, and prepare talking points for the most likely scenarios.

02. Detect

Set up active monitoring of online reviews, social media and local press, and establish a clear trigger threshold: at what point a weak signal becomes a crisis.

03. Respond

Respond quickly, on the facts, with a single voice. Acknowledge what is confirmed without speculating on causes. Show empathy for those affected before speaking about the organization itself.

04. Remedy

Implement concrete, visible actions: corrective measures, support for those affected, adjustment of procedures. Keep stakeholders informed of progress.

05. Learn

Debrief once things have settled: what worked well, where the blind spots were. Update the crisis plan and internal procedures, and share the lessons with your teams.

04

Ten reflexes to keep in mind

Keep this within reach for the day you'll need it.

☐

Never improvise the first message. A short, honest message beats prolonged silence.

☐

One spokesperson, one version of the facts. Contradictory messages always make things worse.

☐

People's safety and wellbeing before image. Always, without exception.

☐

Don't deny, don't downplay. Both almost always backfire.

☐

Document every step. Who knew what, when, and what decision was made.

☐

Respond to negative reviews calmly and with a concrete offer. Never on the defensive.

☐

Align internally before going external. Your teams should never learn about the crisis from the press.

☐

Never cut communication once the media peak passes. Follow-through matters as much as the initial response.

☐

Anticipate hard questions rather than suffer them. Prepare answers to the three most uncomfortable questions.

☐

Turn every crisis you get through into an asset. A sharper protocol, a better-prepared team for the next one.

05

“It's almost never the incident itself that costs the most. It's how it's handled.”

01

Prolonged silence

While waiting for perfect information, the space fills with speculation, and silence itself becomes a message.

02

Defensiveness as a first reflex

Protecting the organization before its people shows, and it's remembered for a long time, by customers and teams alike.

03

The gap between the message and the ground truth

Reassuring communication that contradicts what customers actually experience on site undermines trust more than it restores it.

06

Three scenarios, for illustration

These situations are composite scenarios, built from cases representative of the industry; they do not depict any specific establishment.

OUTDOOR

A customer is injured on a guided hike after a fault in equipment rented on site.

Response: visible medical care as the first priority, swift acknowledgment of what is confirmed, transparent communication about the source of the fault, immediate review of the equipment inspection protocol.

HOSPITALITY

A video showing questionable hygiene conditions in the kitchen goes viral on social media.

Response: swift fact-checking, a public response owning what is confirmed, a visible action plan including an independent audit and staff training, public follow-up on the measures taken.

TOURISM & DESTINATION

A mountain resort is linked, in the national press, to a safety incident that actually occurred at a neighboring site, outside its own grounds.

Response: swift, well-sourced factual clarification, coordination with local stakeholders, setting the record straight without engaging in the controversy.

07

A well-handled crisis doesn't destroy trust. It reveals it.

Organizations that come out stronger are rarely the ones that never faced an incident. They're the ones that turned a moment of truth into proof of how seriously they take their work.

No one should face these moments alone.

Fifteen years leading communication strategy in demanding environments, including a crisis unit run under real conditions: The Stance is the strategic ally for leaders, brands and organizations who refuse to let a crisis dictate their future.

THE STANCE

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Need a crisis plan in place before it happens? Let's talk.