



Welcome to *Crisis Response Journal*

Crisis Response Journal is the international, apolitical publication that deals with all aspects of preparedness, mitigation, response, resilience and reconstruction in the face of major emergencies, whether they be natural or man-made.

First published in 2004, CRJ's core aim is to share information – whether between different disciplines within emergency response and management, or between nations and geographical reasons. The aim is also to create a two-way bridge between frontline practice and academic research.

Our readers hail from a wide variety of disciplines, including blue light emergency services (Police, Fire, Ambulance); military; local and national governments; emergency planners; private sector organisations; critical infrastructure installations; non governmental organisations; academia and training institutions; and consultancies.

We are accountable to our readers for the quality of our content; this is why CRJ is available through subscription only.

We do work closely with selected sponsoring partners, all experts in their fields, who use our pages to showcase their thought leadership and developments in a stimulating and thought-provoking way.

We are always open to new ideas for articles, conferences and events, as well as books, podcasts and other collaborations. Contact Emily Hough (Emily@crisis-response.com for more information).

We hope you enjoy this complimentary copy and look forward to welcoming you into the Crisis Response Journal community. Please see our website for special subscription discounts.

Emily Hough, Editor in Chief
 emily@crisis-response.com
 www.crisis-response.com



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PLUS

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Editor in Chief

Emily Hough
emily@crisis-response.com

Design and Production

Tim Baggaley
www.graphicviolence.co.uk

Director

Colin Simpson
colin.simpson@crisis-response.com

Director

Peter Stephenson
peter.stephenson@crisis-response.com

Subscriptions and administration

Emma Wayt
emma.wayt@crisis-response.com

Regional Manager (Australia)

Peter McMahon
peter.mcmahon@crisis-response.com

Subscriptions

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subs@fire.org.uk

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backissues@fire.org.uk

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United Kingdom
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mail@fire.org.uk
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Main photo: NASA / other images: Dreamstime

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MODERATING the Featured Event



on Heritage and Resilience at the 2013 UN Global Platform in Geneva earlier this year truly brought home to me that more must be done to bring together a multitude of seemingly disparate groups to reduce the effects of disasters on the world's most precious historic sites.

In fact, heritage is so inextricably enmeshed in the overall resilience of nations, communities, businesses and individuals, that it might seem surprising we still need to discuss how best to put the subject in its rightful place on the international agenda.

Sites of historic interest – whether they be buildings, parks, monuments or sacred places – are irreplaceable. But they are also evolving dynamic entities, and the people who live in them rely upon them for their livelihoods.

Sustainability is vital. Heritage is not just a passive concept to be protected, but an active resource that can be mobilised and integrated into a risk reduction strategy, a fact emphasised by participants and speakers.

Yet the task ahead is daunting. Time does not stand still and we face a range of threats and hazards, many of which are on a scale that our forebears simply could not imagine, accelerated by climate disruption or through advances in technology or weaponry. All this is underpinned by the fact that there are more human beings on the planet than ever before, and urbanisation is encroaching areas previously considered as being unsuitable for safe settlement.

On the positive side, our ancestors did not have the technology, predictive capabilities or communications systems we have today.

Under these circumstances, the way forward has to be through the commitment, understanding and genuine collaboration of multiple stakeholders – as suggested in the *Heritage and Resilience* background paper prepared for the Global Platform, which we will feature in our next issue.

Emily Hough
Editor in Chief

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MoD



Press conference confidence

Resuming her series on the media, **Anna Averkiou** explains why and how traditional news conferences can still be one of the most effective channels in a crisis

THE SPEED AT WHICH INFORMATION can be circulated via social media has brought a whole new dimension to crisis media management and it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that a traditional style news conference is old hat, particularly during a crisis.

However, organisations are now increasingly judged on their communications as much as the way they handle situations. The public expects and needs reassurance that not only is someone in charge and everything is under control, but that the relevant parties are doing all they can to ensure people are safe and being looked after.

Broadcasting a news conference is still the most effective way of reaching as broad an audience as possible and serves as the main source of official information, which can then be disseminated further via social media.

News conferences must be carefully planned, rehearsed and orchestrated so they can be set up and managed quickly and easily in an emergency. Establishing good lines of communication between responders and communications teams ensures an accurate and speedy flow of information to the media.

As soon as a story breaks, a journalist's priority is the same as yours – to determine what has happened. The basic questions any journalist will ask are: Who? What? Where? Why? When? How? Think about what you would want to know if you were affected and have responses prepared.

Most people only remember the first and last things that have been said, so it is crucial for stakeholders to establish their authority and contain the spread of misinformation and speculation from the start. I always recommend including communications and journalists in scenario-based exercises to help operational teams understand that they too have a job to do and can be useful for imparting information to the public.

In the wake of the 2005 London bombings, it was one-and-a-half hours before Scotland Yard confirmed there had been multiple explosions. Information was confusing and for the first time, media outlets relied on blogs, mobile photos and footage to piece together what was



Appearance is an important consideration. After the damage caused by Superstorm Sandy, we saw US President Barack Obama in formal suit and tie at White House briefings, without a jacket and tie alongside heads of government agencies and wearing a casual bomber jacket when visiting the scene and talking to victims and responders. This all helped to project a sense of confidence, action, commitment, teamwork and, most of all, compassion and empathy

Pete Souza / FEMA

happening, because official statements about a power surge being the cause of the tube disruption contradicted what they were seeing.

However, once there was official confirmation, the Metropolitan Police's emergency media plan for terrorist situations swung into action. This included using a large central London conference venue for the press. Senior police figures not directly involved in running the operation (and who were therefore available at all times) acted as spokespeople.

At least two spokespeople should be selected

and should be supported and briefed around the clock by the communications or PR team. However, choosing the right people is not always easy and formal media training can help to identify the good communicators and enable them to balance the authority, knowledge, gravitas and empathy needed in a crisis.

The public expects transparency and honesty and will no longer be satisfied with just a written corporate statement. Social media allows people to air opinions and fuel criticism which can, at times, be emotionally charged and seem very personal. For some senior management more used to operating away from the public gaze, this is a sea-change that is hard to accept. However, seeing the same face helps to build up trust and familiarity and provides a narrative and structure to the media coverage.

Richard Branson, synonymous with the Virgin brand, is a master of the art of crisis communication. This was exemplified by the

way he handled the media after the 2007 Virgin train crash in the UK in which one person died and dozens were injured (see page 52). Branson and Network Rail CEO, John Armit, were fully briefed, available and quickly at the scene to reassure the public about how the incident was being dealt with while protecting both organisations' reputations. Branson in particular, while visibly shocked, came across as dignified and empathetic. Not many executives would want to stand in front of a disaster scene with their brand emblazoned on the wreckage, but he retained public confidence by providing the context that trains were still the safest form of transport and praising the driver, the design of the train and even Network Rail for accepting responsibility for the incident.

Contrast this with the reaction of Ed Burkhardt, Chairman of Rail World. When one of its trains destroyed the centre of the Canadian town of Lac-Mégantic and killed at least 47 people in July (p5), he was quick to blame anyone he thought might be responsible. He did not visit the scene for days and when he did arrive, he was booed by local residents during a news conference. Needless to say, his behaviour and performance have been widely condemned.

Likewise, BP's former CEO, Tony Hayward, is still vilified for appearing unsympathetic during the *Deepwater Horizon* incident.

During an ongoing crisis, questioning may get more aggressive over what is, rightly or wrongly, perceived to be a lack of progress. Being poorly rehearsed can result in spokespeople appearing hesitant and lacking in confidence and knowledge. Equally, the use of jargon and acronyms so beloved by big organisations and agencies can also have a negative effect.

Focus on public safety first and ensure that all the responders are giving out similar messages. Each new report of a fire or explosion after the Japanese tsunami was accompanied by conflicting details about the extent of the radiation leaks. An increasingly scared public started to panic for fear the authorities were no longer in control.

A united front is vital. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie had been scathing of President Barack Obama's leadership, yet had only praise for the way he handled Hurricane Sandy. There was none of the finger-pointing and attempts at point-scoring seen between Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and then-New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin during Hurricane Katrina.

Appearance is another consideration. During a series of targeted press conferences we saw US President Barack Obama in formal suit and tie at White House briefings, without a jacket and tie when appearing alongside

heads of government agencies and wearing a casual bomber jacket when visiting scenes of devastation and talking to victims and responders. This all helped to enhance the sense of confidence, action, commitment, teamwork and, most of all, compassion and empathy.

Key to Obama's approach was acknowledging the people; what they and their loved ones were going through and how they must have been feeling. This human factor is an essential quality for spokespeople, who need to balance genuine concern, regret, understanding and sympathy without distracting from the operation in hand or falling into legal traps around blame or admitting liability, confidentiality or names of victims, etc.

Demonstrate understanding

Spokespeople must stay calm and not show any signs of irritation by addressing negative comments politely – particularly when journalists will not play ball with lines to take. They are highly competitive and will be looking for their own angles around key messages. Remember, their questions are not personal; they are aimed at getting the information they believe their audiences want. If that happens to tie in with what you want them to say because you've thought ahead, the resulting headlines will be positive. Not only will this demonstrate that you are the person to listen to, but you are demonstrating an understanding of why the questions are being asked.

If you don't know something it is better to say so and that you will report back. Just make sure you do.

Never say: "No comment" – this gives the impression you are hiding something. Only correct misinformation and rumour that is fuelled by social media which you know to be wrong.

Big disasters will attract the world's media and their logistics can become a story in themselves. Some 2,000 accredited journalists descended on Camp Hope close to the collapsed San José mine in Chile in 2010. After a shaky start – not least because the mining company was slow to acknowledge the scale of the problem – Chilean President Sebastian Pinera (a former TV producer) and Mining Minister Laurence Golborne turned what could have been a human tragedy and a PR disaster into a triumph on both counts.

An international press tent was set up and daily press conferences focussed on the miners and their families and detailed all that was being done to try to rescue them. To tell the story, journalists needed power, workspace, WiFi, broadcast platforms, cameras, tripods, satellite dishes, mobiles, laptops, translators/fixers, accommodation

(many brought tents and sleeper vans), food, water and toilets. All this was provided.

The format of a news conference will, to some extent, be dictated by location. If at the scene, spokespeople will quickly be surrounded by journalists and crews. A small platform will provide a bit of distance and allow cameras a clear view of you. Do be careful about what can be seen in the background to avoid nasty

The use of jargon and acronyms so beloved by big organisations can have a negative effect on those unfamiliar with the terminology. Keep It Simple, Stupid (KISS) is the best mantra

surprises, such as bodies being carried off.

Advisories should contain details of who will be speaking and a brief biography to explain why they are qualified to speak, what will be covered and whether there will be questions and answers.

As far as is practicable, stick to the agreed duration to help journalists who have deadlines to meet. Live streaming via a pool feed will ensure that the information gets out to as many people on as many platforms as possible with the first speaker starting five minutes past the hour to allow for updates and headlines.

Ideally, a communications or PR person should facilitate proceedings, ensuring that people and equipment are positioned where they should be, introducing the speakers and chairing questions.

Aim for three new points at each news conference while reinforcing previous messages and safety instructions. Too much detail can come back and haunt you later on. Some journalists will be live blogging – so keep sentences short and focussed.

Speak slowly and clearly enough for them to write down and report your statement accurately.

Done well, news conferences are a vital opportunity to speak to the public, maintain confidence and, in the worst-case scenarios, can prevent widespread panic. CRJ

Author



Anna Averkiou is an international journalist, media consultant and trainer, specialising in strategy and reputation management. She draws on more than 25 years' experience covering some of the world's biggest stories from the Balkans to the Middle East. She is also a part-time journalism lecturer

■ www.averkioumedia.co.uk