

# How to Make the Web Work for You in a Crisis

By Kevin Richardson

How to Make the Web Work for You in a Crisis

Kevin Richardson  
krichardson@medrocket.com

MedRocket <http://www.medrocket.com>

HOW TO MAKE THE WEB WORK FOR YOU IN A CRISIS  
[http://www.medrocket.com/tools/articles/article112601\\_01.html](http://www.medrocket.com/tools/articles/article112601_01.html)

By Kevin P. Richardson  
Healthcare Marketing Consultant  
President, MedRocket, Inc.

The Chinese character for crisis -- "wei ji" -- consists of two parts. The upper character represents danger or challenge, while the lower character conveys a hidden opportunity.

Your Web site can play an important role as a central source of information whether the crisis relates primarily to your organization, such as a labor conflict or protest gathering, or whether the crisis is more immense and devastating like a natural disaster or the World Trade Center attacks.

### The Opportunity Arises

Depending upon the nature of the crisis, an "opportunity" arises for your organization to provide expert information, opinion, and resources for addressing the situation. It may also represent an opportunity for telling your story in the best possible light.

With proper planning and preparation, you can quickly transform and use your Web site as a public relations "crisis center" to handle many types of crisis situations.

Here are several techniques that you can use to roll out your online crisis communication program on short notice

1. Formalize your crisis response plan.

This article isn't meant to show you how to handle crises - you already know how to do that, no doubt. Does your organization have a written crisis response plan? The plan should incorporate the roles that the public relations staff will play in the crisis. This may include meeting to define strategy, responding to media inquiries, setting up an onsite media center, and much more.

You'll want to add the Web crises center component to the plan, as well as who is responsible for what. Practice your plan and have a back up for critical roles and functions in case something comes up -- which it will.

## 2. Your Web site has to be easy to update.

Crises don't always occur during normal business hours. In order for an online crisis communication plan to work, you have to be able to flip the switch quickly. This means that if you have been relying on external Web help to update your site, you'll need to find a way to handle at least this aspect on your own.

In fact, even if you rely on internal Information Systems staff for Web development, you might be out of luck if a crisis happens in the off hours. Cross-train staff on what's required to bring the crisis communication system online. Then practice doing it on a testing server. Also practice it from home using your dial-up AOL account or whatever Internet access you have.

## 3. See what others are doing online.

The basic vehicle that you would use for online crisis communications is a media center. This goes beyond just placing news releases on a page of your Web site. You need to consider ways to allow media to access background information, images, audio, position statements, and many other types of information.

Take some time to visit other Web sites and look at their media areas. The Nemours Foundation has a good example: <http://www.nemours.org/no/news/index.html> . Also visit sites that are dealing with crises as we speak. Stroll over to the Centers for Disease Control communications center at: <http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/> .

## 4. Keep your crisis center in the wings

Build the HTML framework for your crisis communication center -- whether it's one page or 20 -- and keep it ready to go offline in a password-protected area of your server. You'll remove the password when you're ready to go live.

The basic framework should have all of the necessary components and pages set up: news release archive, event timeline, expert bios, backgrounders, e-mail alert system sign up form, and more.

You can't plan for every eventuality, I realize, but if you know a labor dispute or protest, or some other potentially explosive situation is in the offing, then get to work preparing the necessary background information and identify the experts and other key players.

#### 5. Open a crisis center doorway.

Make it easy for the media and the public to find the crisis communication area when you place your crisis information live area of your site. One of the best ways to do this is by inserting a banner or prominent headline or news item on your main page that serves as a doorway to the special crisis center. Take a look at the Firestone Web site at <http://www.firestone.com/> for an example.

#### 6. Notify the media of the resource.

Let your key media contacts know about the availability of the media center. Call them or e-mail them with the Web address. Explain what's in the area and why they might find it useful.

#### 7. Post daily updates -- or more frequently.

Post updates as often as possible with new or revised information. As soon as you have new details, post them to the media area. Once again, you need a mechanism or the ability to be able to post this information yourself, rather than relying on another department or external resources. Timeliness is crucial.

#### 8. Identify your designated spokesperson.

For different types of crises, you will have different experts available to the media to provide details, opinion, and analysis. Prepare to provide a biographical sketch of these individuals, their credentials, exact title, and a photo. A high-quality JPEG photo that can be downloaded by the print media is also very useful. Let the media know how they can set up an interview with the expert.

#### 9. Create a Frequently Asked Questions list

Some questions will come up again and again while you are fielding media calls. Place these questions and your answers into an evolving FAQ page. This will provide a

useful service to media. You can also use the answers to refocus the question on an important point that a journalist might not have considered.

#### 10. Media alert e-mail list signup.

Create a special e-mail list sign up form in the media center. The purpose of the e-mail list will be to alert media when new information is posted. Use a broadcast e-mail program to send out the emails. Be careful not to overdo this notification -- no one in the media wants to get 30 emails from you in a day. If you've added something important, send the alert, otherwise save up a few items and send the alert at the end of the day, or first thing in the morning. Just remember in your timing, that different media have different deadlines.

#### 11. Backgrounders, position statements, and news releases

Draft a backgrounder on the issue -- e.g. a labor dispute - - and place it in the media area. Provide as much objective background information as possible. Position statements or news releases quoting senior management are also valuable to include in this chronological archive.

#### 12. High quality MP3 audio briefings

Occasionally you may make available a special audio briefing by a senior official. This can be posted to the site as a streaming audio file. Radio journalists on deadline may find some useful sound bites in the piece that can be used in their on-air pieces. Record high quality audio and encode it as an MP3 audio file, which will have the greatest fidelity for on-air reproduction.

#### 13. Audio briefing transcripts

Transcripts of the previously mentioned audio briefings are useful for print and radio journalists to quickly scan the briefing for quotes or audio bites to pull for radio broadcast.

#### 14. Timeline of events

A chronology of events for a crisis can offer a useful perspective for journalists. It may even be picked up as a sidebar to a story on the issue. If you have time and resources to create graphics to accompany the timeline, provide these as JPEG files for download.

#### 15. Internet Links

Provide links to other Web sites with useful background

information, e.g., refer media to the CDC site for information on Anthrax exposure.

## 16. Media Contacts

A complete list of media relations contacts for your organization is vital. Offering multiple ways to contact your organization can mean the difference between getting an interview or not. E-mail addresses, pager operators, telephone numbers, and fax numbers are commonly given. Let media know how to reach you outside of regular business hours, too.

\*\*\*\*\*

Kevin Richardson is a healthcare marketing consultant, executive coach, and writer who provides fresh perspectives and expertise about online healthcare marketing. Subscribe to his "MedRocket Ezine" newsletter and discover how to profitably attract and serve healthcare consumers online. Subscribe free: <http://www.medrocket.com>

\*\*\*\*\*

[Get-Articles.com](http://www.get-articles.com) : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)