

Crisis Management



Change is ever-present, one of the only true constants of the business world. Sometimes, however, unexpected events create a crisis that demands immediate and effective action. Corporations, industries, and even individuals face times of crisis. It might be an intangible “crisis of confidence” that threatens to undermine your image, or a very tangible catastrophe involving financial loss or risk to human lives. How you respond may determine your success in both the short and long term.

Harris Interactive professionals have counseled clients on managing many kinds of crises by providing both objective, research-based analysis of the situation and strategic and tactical action plans. Some of the challenges we have helped clients successfully navigate:

- Product recalls
- Adverse media coverage
- Regulatory changes or threats
- Legal actions
- Work stoppages
- Industrial accidents



Crisis Management Case Studies

- After a television exposé on the effects of chemicals on our apple supply ignited a national furor, we partnered with the apple industry to do two immediate surveys to measure public reaction. We determined the most effective messages for consumers and tested alternative spokespeople for credibility in message delivery. After the industry began using these messages, our tracking study revealed a significant decrease in negative consumer reaction.
- A misprint of a food company sweepstakes in a regional newspaper made it appear that thousands of people had won new automobiles. Forced to revoke the contest, the company was beset with negative publicity and threats of lawsuits. They responded by giving cash awards to all participants and distributing several times the original number of prizes through special drawings. Our survey confirmed that most people felt they had handled the situation fairly and that long-term damage to company reputation would be negligible.
- A biotechnology firm sought to stabilize public opinion and engender greater public support for the manufacturing of genetically-modified foods. Weekly national surveys of adults were conducted in an effort to understand the relevance and importance of biotechnology and genetically-modified foods to consumers and to assess consumer reactions to articles published in well known journals. Values-based research studies provided insights for the most effective communication strategy. We provided the client with a list of benefits and risks that the public associated with genetically modified foods, giving them the tools to change their operational procedures and create a campaign to sway public opinion in their direction.



- A national blood supplier came under fire in a 60 Minutes segment accusing them of unsafe procedures. We recruited focus groups to view and discuss the program, so we could assess the damage caused by the broadcast and test possible response messages and spokespeople. The organization put our findings to work immediately in a public relations program to restore public confidence.
- The national media publicized an EPA announcement of a pesticide getting into the manufacturing process for a major packaged food manufacturer's flagship product. The challenge was how to respond in the appropriate way and at the appropriate level to restore credibility for the manufacturer. Overnight surveys were completed the same weekend the news broke to assess the scope and seriousness of the problem. We advised the manufacturer, providing a strategic recommendation as to how to react to the announcement in order to salvage company favorability ratings. The company was able to adjust their response through a modification of an internal company response mechanism. The company was enabled to make a sound judgment about whether or not to recall their product already on store shelves, with knowledge of the likely public response.
- A widely publicized aviation accident found our client singled out as the manufacturer of the equipment which caused the accident. To help determine what long-term effects this might have on its corporate image, we interviewed opinion leaders in business and government throughout the country, and identified the company's strongest "image assets" upon which they could begin to rebuild.
- In 1982, widely publicized Tylenol poisoning deaths suddenly made product safety a national issue. A major pharmaceutical firm – one of Tylenol's major competitors – came to us to take a reading of national attitudes on the issue. Our research findings helped the company make key decisions on product re-packaging, advertising and publicity strategies to reassure the public.
- In the early 90's, news reports suggested that newly installed carpeting might emit hazardous fumes, raising consumer concerns about indoor air quality. The US carpet manufacturing industry requested our counsel on how to effectively deal with these challenges. National surveys of homeowners were conducted to assess public awareness of the indoor air quality issue as related to carpets, followed by a large-scale exploration of perceptions about carpeting among key audiences. We recommended proactive steps the client could take to build consumer confidence and alleviate consumers' health concerns about carpet emissions. We recommended the industry emphasize in its communications the positive associations people have with carpet, while at the same time finding ways to help solve perceived problems with carpeting.
- A manufacturer experienced an industrial accident in which poisonous gas was inadvertently released, necessitating an evacuation of local residents. We conducted tracking studies to measure public awareness and reaction to the events. Our recommendations were used to shape corporate communications strategies.
- Media allegations of contamination in the manufacturing process threatened sales of one of the nation's leading packaged food products. An immediate "brushfire" survey was conducted just after the TV stories aired. The poll measured awareness of the reports, association with the brand name, reaction to the company's response, and the scare's possible impact on sales. Further research tracked long-term impact on company reputation.

To learn more about Harris Interactive's crisis management capabilities, contact us at **877.919.4765** or **info@harrisinteractive.com**.