

Vicarious Times

Vicarious Productions, VP Public Relations

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Controlling the Narrative During Crisis and Controversy

Foresight: Be Proactive, Not Reactive

As leaders, it is crucial to have the foresight to determine when an issue, circumstance or event has the potential to gain media attention.

Think ahead to the possibilities and begin to plan out what your message would be if, or when, the first reporter calls for a comment or more information.



The 'War Room', When it's Necessary

It may sound like a serious move, but utilizing trusted advisors can help leaders maintain a well-rounded perspective during a crisis. If an issue or event has the potential to grow into something more, bring the team together to discuss, plan for media questions and develop talking points.



Develop a list of talking points that outline and highlight information relevant to the situation, circumstance or event.

New Media Over Traditional Media?

Compared to even a decade ago, there are at least a dozen new mediums and channels that information can be communicated through.



These include self-published articles (also called blogs), social media and websites. Television and radio, and even print media, have arguably met their match.

Feed the Beast: Set Expectations

The media can become insatiable when a big story breaks, so continue to feed them. Be prepared to release as much information as possible, and remember to set expectations as to when the next update will happen. And be sure to stick to your promise.

Simply letting the media know you are aware they want information, and will provide it when you are able is half the battle.



Media Interview or Press Conference? That is a Question.

A one-on-one interview with the media can help to set the tone for your narrative in a more controlled setting.

When demand is high from several media outlets at once, the most efficient method is a press conference. Be sure to keep control!



First: Recognize When a Situation Will Likely Escalate

Think through the possibilities.

Examples of potentially escalating situations that would draw media attention include (but are not limited to):

- Deaths: Homicides, Suicides
- Potential Threats to Public Safety
- Any Issue or Event Involving the Safety/Welfare of Children, Elderly, Disabled or Other Populations
- Police, Fire, Public Works Issues that Affect Traffic, Neighborhoods and Businesses, Services
- Questionable Issues Surrounding Elected Officials, Municipal Employees and Related Individuals
- And others....

Motorist killed when train strikes SUV in Arlington Heights



Crime | updated: 1/10/2018 1:56 PM

Report: Police on scene of Hoffman Estates shooting

Facebook | Twitter | Email | Print | Comments



Hoffman Estates responded this morning to a reported shooting at a home on Ash Road in Hoffman Estates.

Mark Welsh | Staff Photographer

Daily Herald report

Police are on the scene this afternoon of a reported shooting at a residence near Bluebonnet Lane and Ash Road in Hoffman Estates.

Yellow police tape surrounded the home and police were keeping media and others from getting close.



Police on the scene declined to provide details of what occurred, but said they expected to release information later today.

Motorist killed when train strikes SUV in Arlington Heights



Motorist killed when Metra train strikes SUV in Arlington Heights on Thursday, Jan. 21, 2016. (WGN-TV)

By Karen Ann Cullotta - Contact Reporter



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From this article



<https://goo.gl/j3A3aM>

How Will You Execute Your Messages?

Local government - for the most part - used to rely more heavily on the news media to disseminate timely information and messages intended for the general public. **Leaders now have additional tools at their fingertips** *the media can be referred to...* such as the organization's website, social media channels, self-published articles, and even emergency notification systems, for when information is flowing quickly, and demanded on an immediate basis.

It is entirely appropriate to refer the news media to the organization's website, with regular (mirrored) updates to social media, self-published articles-even *in place* of traditional media efforts such as press conferences, media interviews or a press releases. **It is important to ensure all channels carry congruent messages.** By choosing the forum in which to communicate, the organization can maintain a higher level of control.







Traditional News Media



New Media



Determine what **New Media Channels to Utilize**

- Facebook  Largest audience is women ages 25-45 with children, younger populations are moving away from Facebook, ages 50+ users are growing.
- Twitter  Use hashtags # to create a 'catalog of information' that when people search it, will contain all information related to your topic. Example, **#LisleExplosion**
- LinkedIn  More of a 'business-focused' social media channel, but still another way to get messages out to the public.
- NextDoor  Newer kid on the block, keeps neighborhoods in the loop and growing quickly due to it being based on geographic location-can sweep your residents in. Solid tool.
- YouTube  A video update can be posted live on the organization's YouTube channel (or other social media channel) to convey messages to the media, when necessary.
- Instagram  Picture-centric social media channel, where younger population is moving to... information (with pictures) can also be posted here to reach a younger demographic.
- Self-Published Articles Information, in the form of an article, can be published directly to most news media websites, or submitted to them.

The Media Interview



- Plant seeds where you can-keep the media close, but not too close. This can include conversations prior to, even during reach out.
- Review talking points prior to interviews.
- When you are with the media, remember the 'mic' is always on.
- Choose your demeanor wisely when you are near the camera - every moment you are in the presence of the media – ensure your expressions match the tone of the topic.

**Headlines
Do Matter**

Headlines Do Matter

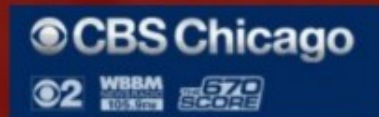
The Headline Could Have Been

Village of Buffalo Grove Pulls Crossing Guards: Jeopardizes Safety of Kids

The Headlines Were....



NBC 5 CHICAGO Home News Weather Investigations Entertainment
Buffalo Grove Crossing Guard Dispute Upsets Parents
By Kate Kim



CBS Chicago
WBBM 2 670 SCORE



Daily Herald
Dist. 21, Buffalo Grove at loggerheads over crossing guards



Suburb: School District Hasn't Paid Its Share For Crossing Guards
By Steve Miller August 20, 2015 at 4:46 pm



NBC 5 CHICAGO Home News Weather Investigations Entertainment
By Kate Kim
Published on 08/19/2015 at 10:58 AM | Updated on 08/19/2015 at 10:58 AM
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NO CROSSING GUARDS

"With the district being two years in arrears, which equates to about \$24,000, we notified them in June that they would need to become current in order for us to continue to provide the service."

He adds: "They notified us in writing that they wanted to continue in the program, but they did not want to pay for it."

Bragg says the crossing guard cost-sharing is working with two other school districts.



All media is not created equal....

What is Your Narrative?

Develop it During the 'War Room' Meeting

Determine Who Needs to be in the Room

- Invite different/valuable perspectives pertaining to the topic.
- Keep the number relatively small.
- Develop talking points.
- Gather supporting documentation, ready it for distribution, if needed.



Create a Plan for Publishing/Dissemination of Information

Will the information be posted to the organization's website? Will a separate press release be sent out? Will you add in other media, including New Media?

Determine with what channels you will disseminate information.

Set expectations for the media, wherever it makes sense, if possible, e.g.

*"This is the latest information available. The next update is expected tomorrow, Saturday, February 10, 2018 at 10:00 a.m. Please refer back to this page, and our website at **anytownUSA.org** for updates prior to that time."*

Feed the Beast: When a Press Release is Necessary



- Press releases should provide as much information as possible, without comprimising--anything.
- It should 'cover all bases' to prevent/curb additional questions before the next update...**aka** answer the who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- Include when the next update will occur.

*You can provide small updates...
'ration' the information when
necessary.*



In Summary:
How to Control
the **Narrative**

In Summary: How to *Control* the Narrative

- 1. Be Proactive:** Be aware of when you *may* have a situation on your hands.
- 2. Begin [Real] Planning Early:** Gather different perspectives from trusted advisors, develop organized talking points, background supporting materials (where applicable) that can be published on a website, or readily available for news media and others, on request.
- 3. Utilize Self-Publishing Tools Where Applicable:** This can be done prior to a press release send out, in conjunction with it, and/or as a supplement to information that is released. Website-self-publishing tools - social media.
- 4. Press Releases:** Utilize when the information is relatively straight forward, and little, to no cause for conjecture or innuendo. If future updates will happen, let the media know *in the release*. Address who, what, when, where and why. Leave no open questions, even if you can't answer them presently. *Just say you can't...*
- 5. Press Conference:** For higher profile incidences and events, ensure the right person is 'controlling the media' e.g. limiting answers, or stating there will be no questions-let the media know who is in control, and when the next update will occur. **Media Reach Out:** utilize 'close, but not too close' relationship rule-invite media in for an interview when necessary, if there is potential for conjecture or inuendo. *Create* the narrative.

Questions?



Thank you!