

Marketing Through A Corporate Trauma

BY THOM SINGER

THERE WILL come a time when your world will be turned upside down by some sort of bad news. It may not be the sort of corporate scandals that have topped the news in the past few years (if you are lucky). Rather it will be something as simple as having a group of respected professionals announce that they are leaving your firm to join the competition. Such a departure, or other event, can fill the hallways with gossip, uncertainty and despair. None of which are good for your efforts to build and maintain the external brand of your company.

Nobody likes to have to deal with traumatic events; however this can also be a time for you to shine. There are five steps that your firm should take immediately when facing corporate trauma.

1. Call a strategy meeting. If the leaders of the firm do not round up the troops to discuss the situation and develop a plan of action, then you need to suggest the idea. The worst thing your firm can do is to waste time by doing nothing. Your clients, staff and local business community are watching to see how you respond to the bad news. Everyone who oversees a team or practice area should be involved. All professionals who have direct contact with clients should either be present or immediately informed of what was discussed.

2. Never talk badly about those who departed. It is human nature to find the negative in those who caused harm to your team. But to discuss their shortcomings publicly or even inside the office will make you seem unprofessional. Remember, the person was your co-worker the day before. If they were so bad, why were you affiliated with them in the first place? The best response is to simply say that you are “disappointed by their departure, but your focus is on the future of your clients and the firm.” Add nothing beyond that.

3. Develop “Talking Points.” This helps keep everyone focused on the approved message when speaking to the press or members of the public. Assign one person who has been “media trained” to be the spokesperson for any inquiries from reporters. Make sure that everyone in the firm knows not to talk to the press themselves, but rather to direct the media to the spokesperson. Reporters are usually fair, but you should rehearse for the possible harsh questions that will come.

4. If necessary, bring in an expert. If the crisis garners a lot of media attention, you should consider hiring a public relations firm. There are both national and local PR firms that specialize in helping professional services firms manage their communications both during good times and in times of crisis. Get acquainted with one or more experts now, rather than waiting until you are in the middle of a traumatic situation.

5. Stay positive in your internal and external marketing. As a marketing and business development professional it is

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imperative that you keep a positive attitude both inside and outside the firm. People will be looking to you to help set the tone and direction of the firm’s message. You cannot let co-workers, clients or others in your community see anything other than a bright outlook. Save your pessimism for those few minutes a day you are alone. To the rest of the world appear confident in your firm’s ability to overcome any situation.

By following these steps you can help be part of the solution, and not part of the problem, for your firm in its hour of need.

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