



PHOTO © THINKSTOCK.COM

**UNDER THE MICROSCOPE**

# Crisis Management

What to do when you become the news

by Ryan Banfill  
Sachs Media Group

**Y**ou may not like it, and you probably didn't ask for it. One day the phone rang or a report came out, and you became the subject of an aggressive and negative news story.

Don't panic. Sit down, take a breath and count to 10.

While there are many tactics that can be used when you find yourself as the subject of a critical story, here are a few general tips to remember when you become the news:

**BE READY**

You can weather the coming media storm. If you prepared early and created an emergency plan, you are way ahead of the game. If not, you can catch up – but you have to act quickly.

**NEVER LIE**

It is essential that you get the facts of the situation, and get them fast. Always tell the truth. Never lie. If you lie, understand this: You will get caught, your credibility will evaporate and you will have to work 100 times harder just to get back to neutral in the court of public opinion.

**BE THE FIRST TO TELL YOUR STORY**

If you have control of the timing of the story, break your own bad news. Be the first to the airwaves to lay out the facts of the story and frame it in the best light possible. Provide the news media with regular updates on the situation. Be as open as possible and, if an investigation is ongoing, cooperate fully and communicate that to media.

**NEVER SAY "NO COMMENT"**

Two words should never cross your lips when responding to a media query: "No comment." Those words are a one-way ticket to being found "guilty" in the court of public opinion. Always have something to say that either emphasizes the main message of your position or conveys that, even though you may currently be limited in what you can say, you look forward to being able to tell the whole story at the appropriate time.

**KILL REPORTER AGGRESSION WITH KINDNESS**

Don't run away from an aggressive reporter or camera crew who may ambush you in the parking lot or outside your home. And do not put your hand in the camera lens. That's a "gotcha" shot news

people dream of getting. Do not appear to be running away from answering questions. Be calm and as polite as possible, and smile if you can. Let reporters know you want to speak with them and would like to arrange an opportunity to sit down and talk about the situation. Give them your contact information to arrange for the sit-down interview and follow through on your promise to speak with them.

#### **DON'T HESITATE TO PUSH BACK**

The corrections column is among the longest-running features in newspapers. Reporters are people and people do make mistakes. With online publications, a mistake can get amplified rapidly. If a reporter gets the story wrong, be polite and persistent but act quickly to get the mistake corrected. First, start with the reporter and then work up the chain of command until your concerns are addressed.

#### **HAVE OTHER PEOPLE STAND UP FOR YOU**

While more often than not you are your own best advocate, it is still important to have surrogates who can validate your position. Be sure to assemble and activate credible third-party messengers who can back up your side of the story.

Not everyone is a crisis communications specialist, and people react differently when placed under the media microscope. A general rule of thumb when dealing with the news media is that offense beats defense. That means you must seize the story. Be prepared, tell the truth as you know it about the situation, respond rapidly and tell your side of the story, first.

These are just some of the high points for responding when you become the subject of a news story, and you may want more information. If you have any questions, feel free to send me an email at [RyanB@SachsMedia.com](mailto:RyanB@SachsMedia.com). I look forward to hearing from you.

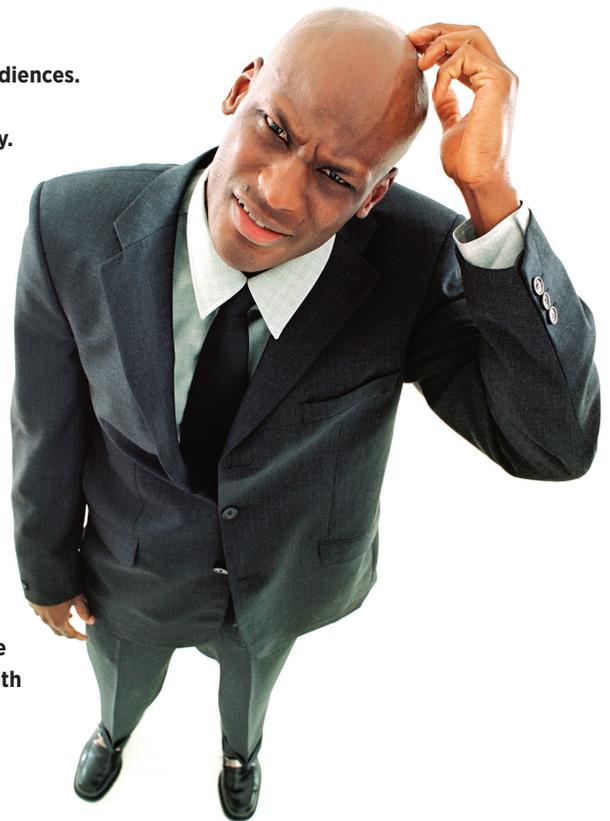
Ryan Banfill is partner and senior vice president at Sachs Media Group. **QC**



# Top 10

## Crisis Management Tips

- 1. Be prepared. Have a plan.**
- 2. Get the facts, fast. Tell the truth. Never lie.**
- 3. Break your own bad news. Define the crisis in your own terms on your own turf.**
- 4. No comment = Guilt.**
- 5. Communicate with all audiences.**
- 6. Keep the media fed. Early. Regularly. Truthfully.**
- 7. Don't be afraid to challenge the media when they get it wrong or are unfair.**
- 8. Take real action steps. Cooperate with authorities. Implement new protocols.**
- 9. Bring in third-party validators.**
- 10. Open a proactive positive track even as you deal with the crisis.**



PHOTOS@THINKSTOCK.COM