

# Crisis Communications

Many businesses now have a documented crisis management plan – a backup strategy **for dealing with a major crisis in the business such as a fire or robbery. However, few** businesses think ahead to an effective communication plan during a period of crisis.

The current world financial crisis is a good case in point. Instead of taking a proactive approach with their clients, many businesses choose the 'ostrich' option. That is, put their head in the sand, hope it will all go away soon and that clients will leave them alone until it's over!

## Be proactive

Being proactive means taking the bull by the horns and addressing those concerns that your customers might be experiencing – before they become a problem. Whether you're offering a product or a service, it helps to walk in the shoes of your customers/clients. With the constant media bombardment of bad news, it's human nature to begin thinking about how that bad news can affect us, individually.

## Address customer concerns

Some of the concerns your customers might be feeling could be:

- Will your business survive the crisis and if not, where does that leave them, the customer?
- If your business is feeling the crunch, will it start raising fees/prices to cope with the squeeze?
- Is there an alternative provider/supplier who might be offering a better deal to get new business during this crisis?

Every business is different but, essentially, the business that doesn't have a proactive communication strategy in place is leaving itself open to the risk of an eroding customer base. Either their customers will begin to look for alternatives 'just in case' or a competitor will be looking for an opportunity to poach new customers.

## Be communicative and confident

A crisis communication plan needs to fit an individual business and should be constructed carefully using skilled communication consultation. As a general guide however, here are some useful tips:

- Increase the frequency of your communications – if you're sending out a quarterly newsletter, for example, you might consider making that bi-monthly or supporting the quarterly news with a monthly E-bulletin.
- Use positive and reassuring language and ALWAYS have a purpose/message for your communication – people feel cheated if they can't identify the WIIFM (what's in it for me).
- Tell your customers what actions your business is taking to cope with the crisis, for example, 'We're reducing expenses by...', 'We've relocated equipment/people...', 'We're outsourcing...'

In essence, be SEEN to be addressing the crisis with confidence.