

Communicating in Crisis

Creating an effective internal crisis
communication plan





In April 2017, United Airlines broke the internet. Video footage of a passenger being physically removed from a plane, kicking and screaming, promoted a viral reaction that quickly escalated into a PR crisis for the airline giant.

The incident itself was bad enough; but what really damaged the reputation of the brand was the initial reaction of CEO Oscar Munoz, who offered a limited apology for “having to re-accommodate...customers.” The much-needed heartfelt admission of fault and apology didn’t come until a day or two after, causing significant damage to the reputation and financial standing of the business.

At the height of the crisis, United Continental (UAL) shares slipped by 4% and the top trending topic on Twitter was #NewUnitedAirlinesMottos – with suggestions from the public including “not enough seating, prepare for a beating” or “we treat you like we treat your baggage”. It was, quite simply, an embarrassment.

A crisis can take different shapes and forms, and every single organization is vulnerable - regardless of their size, sector, or ethos. Thanks to the connected nature of a digital world, a crisis also has the potential to become

a global sensation in a matter of minutes. Failing to prepare or respond in the right way will incur even more damage, and in some cases, may threaten the very existence of an organization.

When we consider those corporations that have faced and managed crisis, there is a clear distinction between those that come out on the other side, and those still struggling with the fallout for months or even years after the fact. The key lies in how those brands manage **communications** related to crisis or disaster response, from the inside out. Effective communication with employees both prior to and in the height of a crisis plays a major role in how it’s reflected and managed externally.

In this eBook, we’ll explore the basic steps of creating an effective crisis communication plan. This focuses on the internal plan, response, and communications with employees and stakeholders, and critically, the tools that facilitate and enable this process.



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What constitutes a ‘crisis’?

For organizations, a crisis can be defined as:

“ Any situation that is threatening or could threaten to harm people or property, seriously interrupt business, significantly damage reputation and/or negatively impact the bottom line.

Jonathan Bernstein - Crisis Management Expert

Commonly cited crises range from:

- Natural disaster, such as an earthquake, flood, or extreme weather
- Technological crisis, such as a cyberattack, outage, virus or other interruption to technological operations
- Environmental, such as pipeline leaks, spillage of hazardous materials or waste, or resulting from construction
- Employee or management misconduct
- Leak of privileged or internal information; in contrast to a cyberattack that exposes a technological vulnerability, this is a deliberate act for which someone internal is responsible
- Product failings, faults, or recalls
- Conflict with interest groups; whether political, social, environmental, cultural, or purpose
- Financial, such as significant losses, fraud, bankruptcy, or going into administration

- A crisis of malevolence, when extreme steps have been taken to ruin a competitor for organizational gain
- Organizational misdeeds, including deception, skewed management values, or collective management misconduct
- Process disruption, such as an issue within the supply chain or distribution process, including strike action or poor yield



Some types of crisis can be anticipated or even mitigated during the process of identifying and planning for them. This may be the case for a major merger or acquisition, for example, or a change in senior management, redundancies, or store closures. Negative outcomes resulting from organizational change can normally be managed – or at least minimized – with effective communication.

In a similar vein, some crises are not actually negative in nature – at least, not originally. For example, a new product, or perhaps a rebrand of an existing product, may become a

negative crisis if stakeholders attach controversy to it, or have a long-standing loyalty and attachment to the old brand.

An organization is also not always liable or responsible for a crisis, as is the case with a natural disaster or a physical or external threat, such as an act of terrorism or vandalism. In these situations, the crisis is accidental, and the organization may even be a victim. However, the organization is responsible for how it chooses to communicate and respond in the height of crisis.

Response matters: Pan Am vs. Swissair



Both of these aviation brands were subject to tragic events, but the contrast in their crisis communications and response demonstrates the reputational impact a mis-managed incident can have.

On 21 December 1988, a terrorist bomb on board Pan Am Flight 103 exploded above the town of Lockerbie in Scotland; 243 passengers, 16 crew and 11 people on the ground were killed. Pan Am decided it was not going to communicate about the incident because it was the ‘victim’, not the ‘villain’. No assistance was offered to victims’ families, employees were silenced, and the media was denied comment.

The media response was one of suspicion, and investigative journalism later discovered that all US airlines flying the same route had received a bomb threat, specifying the route and dates of the attack. Pan Am

management instructed employees to identify families of US diplomats on its flight and issue a warning via embassies. Families of diplomats were removed as a result. When it came to light that only an elite group was given this privileged information, there was public outrage. Pan Am moved from victim, to villain.

When Swissair Flight 111 crashed near Peggy’s Cove on the Nova Scotia Coast on 2nd September 1998, the response was a stark contrast. The airline coordinated its internal efforts and mobilized staff to provide support, organizing for families to be flown from Geneva to Halifax and to stay in accommodation close to the incident. Each family was given \$5,000 to take care of their immediate needs and full cooperation and transparency in public communication was given. The organization received very little negative publicity as a result.

Ultimately, what constitutes a crisis can be extremely broad in definition. Having a comprehensive crisis communication ‘plan’, therefore, is not feasible in reality; each and every crisis will be unique and require a tailored response.

However, there is a realization now

that a crisis is no longer something to be responded to as and when it happens; it should form a core part of business strategy. We must establish internal frameworks and best practices to ensure information is distributed effectively, employees respond appropriately, safety is protected, and impact is minimized.

3/4

of board members (76%) believe their companies would respond effectively if a crisis struck tomorrow

49%

of board members say their companies engage in monitoring or internal communications to detect trouble ahead

49%

say their companies have playbooks for likely crisis scenarios

32%

say their companies engage in crisis simulations or training

Source: [Deloitte, Global Crisis Management Survey Report](#)

The role of communications in a crisis

One of the challenges and frequently asked questions we see surrounds responsibility for crisis management. Simply, whose job is it?



Given the potential impact a crisis can have, it's generally accepted that those at the top table – senior executives and board directors who have a responsibility to manage the interests of the organization and its shareholders – must play a primary role in crisis management. When disaster strikes, or an organization is thrust into the spotlight, stakeholders aren't interested in hearing from the PR Manager or Communications Officer: they want the main figurehead; the CEO, the MD, senior leadership.

However, at the very center of effective crisis management lies *communication*. Communicators are the primary link between their organization, its stakeholders and the general public. This means that Communications Teams are not only responsible for the process of anticipating, scanning and identifying crisis risk, communicating that to relevant stakeholders and employees to prevent and mitigate crisis where feasible; they also hold the key to effective management of a crisis when it hits.

Internal communications: the key to managing crisis

When crisis strikes, organizations have a duty of care to their employees. Our staff are also our strongest advocates and ambassadors, or potentially, our greatest liability. However, internal communication is also often neglected as management place priority on the external reputation and message.

The two can't exist independently. Get internal comms wrong, and organizations can undermine all efforts to manage a crisis externally; the resulting lack of trust, low morale, negative publicity or backlash, employee turnover and poor customer relations will compound the crisis.

During a disaster, every employee with a social media account – whether they want to be or not – automatically becomes a spokesperson for their brand. Attempts to halt or silence social media simply aren't feasible; better to equip employees with accurate information, and ensure those messages going external are aligned with the business.

Successful management of a crisis, then, must begin internally. However, ensuring the safety, alignment

and understanding of staff is a tremendous challenge, particularly given that crises, by nature, tend to be time-sensitive with the potential to escalate rapidly. If you're forced to disseminate messages through a manager cascade, wait for IT to grant permissions for a 'send to all' email, or manually call each individual employee to verify their safety, it could be hours - even days - until you've connected with every individual.

For those organizations with up to 75% of their staff based in non-desk roles, out in the field, or without easy access to a computer, this is even more acute. When crisis hits, how do you ensure staff are in the loop?

Ensuring information flows and that the right messages are executed at the right time, to the right individuals or stakeholders, through the right vehicles or channels, can have a significant impact on how a crisis is handled and brand reputation managed. This responsibility ultimately lies with internal communicators.

When employees are left out of the loop: HMV



When music retailer HMV called in the administrators following financial difficulties, job losses were an almost inevitable outcome.

However, it was the lack of effective internal communication of the changes that resulted in a humiliating PR nightmare for the chain, when disgruntled employees took over the company's official Twitter account to express their feelings about the firings, utilizing the hashtag #hmvXFactorFiring.

Failure to sensitively prepare and break the news to employees – as well as embed processes to lockdown internal accounts! - proved hugely detrimental, showing the power of those on the inside to bring down a brand.



hmv

@hmvtweets

We're tweeting live from HR where we're all being fired! Exciting!! #hmvXFactorFiring

16 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

There are over 60 of us being fired at once! Mass execution, of loyal employees who love the brand. #hmvXFactorFiring

15 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

Sorry we've been quiet for so long. Under Contract, we've been unable to say a word, or -more importantly - tell the truth #hmvXFactorFiring

14 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

Under usual circumstances, we'd never dare to do such a thing as this. However, when the company you dearly love is being ruined...

17 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

...and those hard working individuals, who wanted to make hmv great again, have mostly been fired, there seemed no other choice.

16 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

So really, what do we have to lose? It's been a pleasure folks! Best wishes to you all!

11 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

Especially since these accounts were set up by an intern (unpaid, technically illegal) two years ago.

14 minute ago



hmv

@hmvtweets

Just overheard our Marketing Director (he's staying, folks) ask, "How do I shut down Twitter?" #hmvXFactorFiring

1 minute ago

Without adequate internal and external communications:

- Operational response will break down
- Stakeholders will not know what is happening and quickly become confused, angry, and negatively reactive
- The organization will be perceived as inept, at best, and criminally negligent, at worst
- The length of time required to bring full resolution to the issue will be extended, often dramatically
- The impact to the financial and reputational bottom line will be more severe

Source: [Jonathan Bernstein, Bernstein Crisis Management, 2016](#)

We'll now explore the key elements to consider as part of your crisis communication plan, and the role communicators – and particularly those charged with managing internal communication – play, alongside the tools, technologies, and channels available.

Crisis Management: Defining your internal crisis communications plan

It goes without saying that prevention and mitigation are preferable in a crisis situation; but if a crisis does emerge, the organization and its employees must be prepared for it, resolve it quickly, have the necessary information, processes, and channels freely available, and understand what is expected of them.

Each crisis is unique and as such, will require a tailored response. However, we can put in place frameworks, protocols, and a fair amount of the legwork required to make sure things run as smooth as possible if – or when – the time comes. Better now than in the height of a crisis.

#1: Brainstorm and anticipate crises

The ostrich approach of burying our heads in the sand and believing “it won’t happen to us” can prove risky. Taking the time to proactively identify and brainstorm potential crisis scenarios that could impact your organization not only helps pinpoint those situations that may be preventable; it will also help raise valuable questions or vulnerability points that need addressing as part of your plan.

Don’t fall into the trap of keeping this process at a senior management level. Employees can offer valuable perspective and bring different ideas to the table. Including representatives from across your business can help bring these to light.

As part of pre-crisis planning, monitoring processes for identifying emerging risks should be established. This may be as simple as setting up Google alerts for company mentions, establishing a notification or whistleblowing system for ground-level employees, or setting up monitoring of product or service provision to identify any red flags that could indicate a potential crisis.

Not all crises can be anticipated, of course: but those that can should be caught early. Failure to spot an impending crisis not only allows less time to address it, but poses an even greater threat to brand reputation, by making your organization appear incompetent.

#2: Define your crisis team and responsibilities

We’ve already highlighted the need for senior representation to ‘front’ a crisis, but nominating spokespeople is the very tip of the iceberg.

Given the broad nature of a crisis and, typically, the urgency involved when it hits, there are a variety of roles to consider. For example, who will be responsible for:

- Dispensing information in a crisis?
- Fact-checking and verifying information, and standardizing that message throughout the business and externally, to ensure consistency?
- Ensuring that staff are accounted for and notified, and given regular updates as needed?
- Seeing that the correct information is escalated to senior representatives or third parties required to resolve the crisis or take action?
- Taking on the role of ‘backup plan’ if named individuals are on leave or unavailable?
- Having authority and responsibility for making critical decisions?
- Providing input or consulting on those decisions?

Identifying those individuals in vital roles or departments, as well as the appropriate level of seniority, should form the foundation of your plan. Typically, this includes representatives from HR, legal, communications/PR, and senior management.

during a crisis; making an escalation of decisions mandatory can create unnecessary barriers and increase time to resolution dramatically. Does it really make sense to have the CEO sign off on every statement? Does every member of the board need to be consulted on each decision?

Be wary of making things too complicated or instilling too much red tape, however. Time is of the essence

Empowering employees in crisis: Walmart



When Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc in the US in 2005, resulting in 1,836 deaths, one of the notable corporate response success stories was that of Walmart.

Thanks to the coordinated efforts of its Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), Walmart actually reached hurricane-hit areas before government relief arrived, showcasing tremendous logistical efficiency and disaster planning abilities. Alongside its \$3 million donation in donated

items, the company made a cash donation of \$17 million to the relief effort and offered 97 percent of its displaced employees jobs elsewhere.

However, perhaps most notable was their flexibility and willingness to delegate responsibility in order to maximize the efficiency of their response. In preparation, senior executives of Walmart called a meeting in which store managers were given authority to make on-the-ground decisions.

Chief Executive Scott Lee was reported as saying:

“A lot of you are going to have to make decisions above your level. Make the best decision you can with the information that’s available to you at the time, and, above all, do the right thing.

In a further act of employee advocacy, Walmart made local employees available for media interviews, rather than pushing senior leadership. The desire to retain a ‘community feel’ and ensure efforts weren’t regarded as self-serving or promotional showed the corporations’ understanding of the nature of the disaster and how to communicate effectively.

Walmart’s example is a great reminder that even if we have a small, defined crisis communication team, the reality is that during disaster, every individual employee has a role to play.

#3: Map out your employee and stakeholder groups

Every organization has a diverse range of employees, each with different preferences on how they like to (or are able to) be contacted. They may be dispersed across multiple locations, working non-core hours, or frequently based out in the field, perhaps

visiting customers or undertaking sales meetings. Some hard-to-reach employees may have no access to a computer or corporate account, making e-communications redundant in a time of need.



Online Workers

- Buyers
- Finance
- Marketing & Communications
- HR

Hard to reach employees

Transient Workers

- Sales
- Merchandising department
- Area management

Offline workers

- Store workers
- Delivery drivers
- Warehouse operatives

Identifying those different employee groups can help identify any communication ‘gaps’, where individuals may not be easily contactable in a particular scenario or disaster.

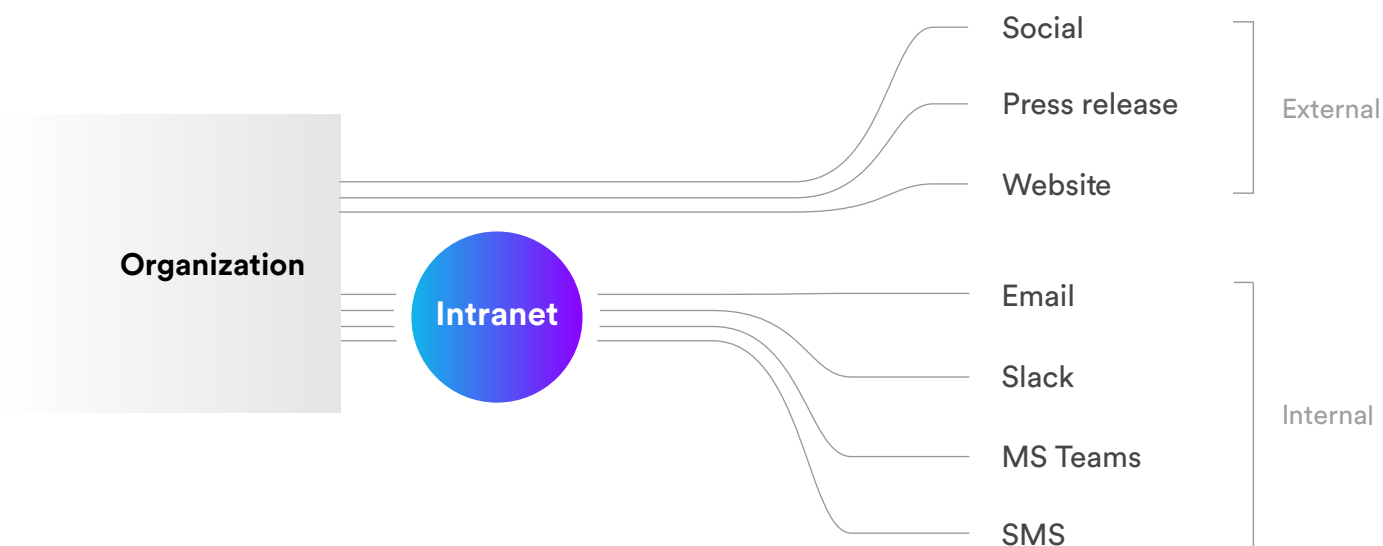
Expand this map out. Potential audiences during a crisis will include those employees’ families, communities, media, customers, government officials and other authorities, suppliers and more. Each has a ‘stake’ during different types of disaster or incidents; identifying who these may be will make responses more efficient during a time of need.

When the Brussels bombings occurred on 22 March 2016, resulting in the death of 32 civilians and the injury of 300 more, a few of our own Interact employees were on a business trip in Belgium, conducting sales meetings. Knowing in advance who and where these individuals were, and the best way to contact them, enabled senior management to reach them and confirm their safety quickly and efficiently, as well as providing guidance and support on what to do next.

#4: Identify and audit your communication channels

It’s time to bid a fond farewell to the traditional phone tree as the sole notification system for your organization during a critical situation. Having identified your employee and stakeholder groups, you should have an understanding of the different channels available – and preferred – for communication.

There is no silver bullet: in a time of crisis, the more avenues or routes to your employees you have, the better. Alongside your go-to channels such as email or phone, consider your social channels, intranet, manager cascades, communal areas, text messaging and more.



When was the last time you took stock of them? Checked that the information stored in them is current and up-to-date? Tested them in a scenario-based environment?

Do the necessary individuals have correct rights or permissions to distribute information through those channels? Speed of communication is critical in a crisis; remove barriers for trusted individuals and prevent

the scenario of having to wait for permissions to be authorised by determining these ahead of time. Ensuring you have comprehensive and regularly reviewed contact information, that the systems you have in place are tested regularly, and your elected communicators are able to distribute information at a moment’s notice, are all critical to efficient communication during a disaster situation.

Confirming staff safety: Cisco



When a magnitude-9.0 earthquake and subsequent tsunami struck Japan in 2011, multinational tech leader Cisco Systems struggled to reach its 1,400 regionally-based employees in a timely manner. Despite the company’s commitment to employee safety, it took over a week for HR staff to locate all of its area employees and confirm their safety.

Learning from their experience, the company implemented a sophisticated emergency notification system which enables HR to draw on updated rosters of employees in affected areas and instantly contact them through various modes of communication: work, home and mobile numbers; work e-mail addresses, and text message.

With the new system in place when the terrorist bombings occurred in Brussels in 2016, leaders were able to account for the company’s 150+ regional employees within 24 hours. Thankfully, all were safe.

It’s also important to remember that internal communication in a crisis isn’t one-way. While top-down information and updates are crucial, it’s equally – if not more – vital that staff are able to get in touch with managers and ensure that information is checked and cascaded correctly. If you send out a message asking staff to confirm their safety or location, or requesting that they read and acknowledge vital information, how do you determine who has seen it?

Functionality such as mandatory read acknowledgements and analytics data can answer this need. The Interact Broadcasts feature, which enables

managers to compose a message from within the company intranet and ‘broadcast’ it across multiple channels, prompts recipients to confirm they have read communications. In the Cisco example, we can understand the importance of knowing who has seen a message: analytics showing who has read, acknowledged, or not yet seen the communication provides an instant overview for those charged with distributing communication. Reminders or additional prompts to read and acknowledge can be pushed to those yet to confirm receipt.

#5: Develop, review, and push out company safety and emergency protocols

While it’s impossible to plan for every eventuality, it is essential to have common policies in place to safeguard staff and provide guidelines for how to respond in a crisis or emergency situation.

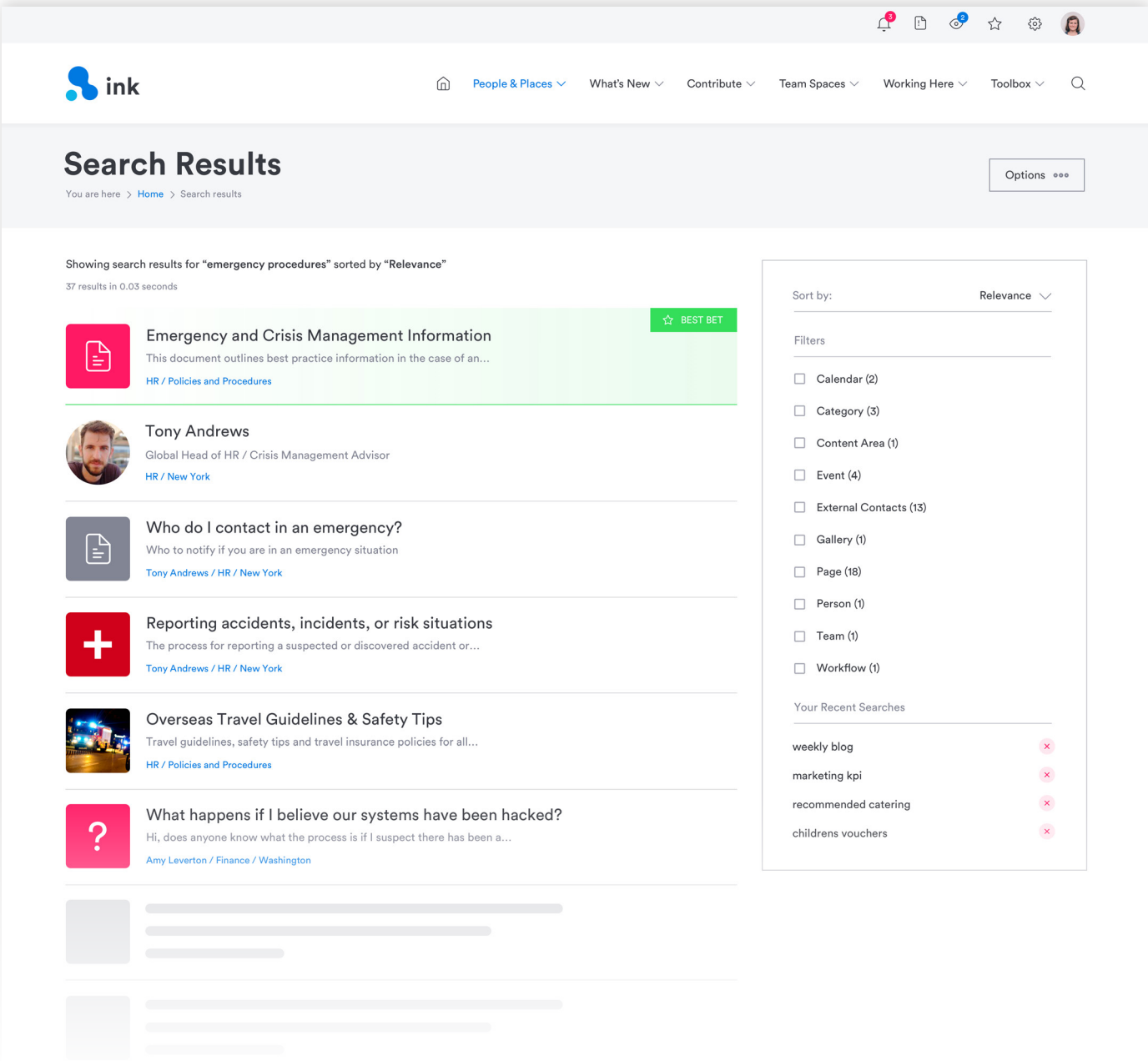
These typically cover everything from how to notify managers or the organization of travel plans or arrangements when out of the office; the process for whistleblowing or escalation of concerns; to response actions in case of an emergency such as extreme weather, fire or damage to company property, or threats made against individuals or the organization.

Establish regular review timescales to revisit and update policies or

procedures as necessary. Integrate them into onboarding processes and perhaps most importantly, continue to educate employees about what to do or where to go for information in a crisis. This may be in the form of periodic training or awareness days, an annual distribution of essential policies requiring a read and acknowledgment receipt, or use of surveys, quizzes, or polls to assess employee knowledge.

Consider the location and accessibility of essential policies or protocols: if staff have to spend valuable time digging through buried HR folders on a shared drive, they’re going to abandon the exercise pretty quickly. Centralized hosting of policies on your intranet with effective use of tagging and keywords, an intuitive navigation

and information architecture, and the use of functionality such as ‘Best Bets’, which pushes the most relevant content to the top of search results for pre-determined keywords, will help staff find what they’re looking for.



#6: Develop holding statements, offline templates, and writing guides

You may not know what the message will be during a crisis, but you can establish in advance how you’re going to communicate it. Standard holding statements can cover you during the ‘grey area’ period before you have all the necessary information to release a full statement or response and can be deployed instantly within a broad range of scenarios. Examples may include;

- “ We have deployed our crisis response plan, which places the highest priority on the safety and wellbeing of our staff and customers. We will release more information and updates via [X channels] as soon as possible.
- “ We are hugely saddened by this news and our thoughts are with those affected. We will be communicating directly with staff members to provide additional support.
- “ We have received warning of [X threat]. We would like to assure all staff that we are looking into this as a matter of urgency and will provide further information via the intranet as soon as it becomes available.

Establishing guidelines and basic templates for internal – and external – crisis communication can ensure you respond more quickly, include all the crucial information required, and align your tone and approach with the company position. In the height of a crisis, it can be all-too-easy to forget simple, yet vital, elements of a message.

As part of this process, define also where messages will be displayed, particularly if you’re going to be

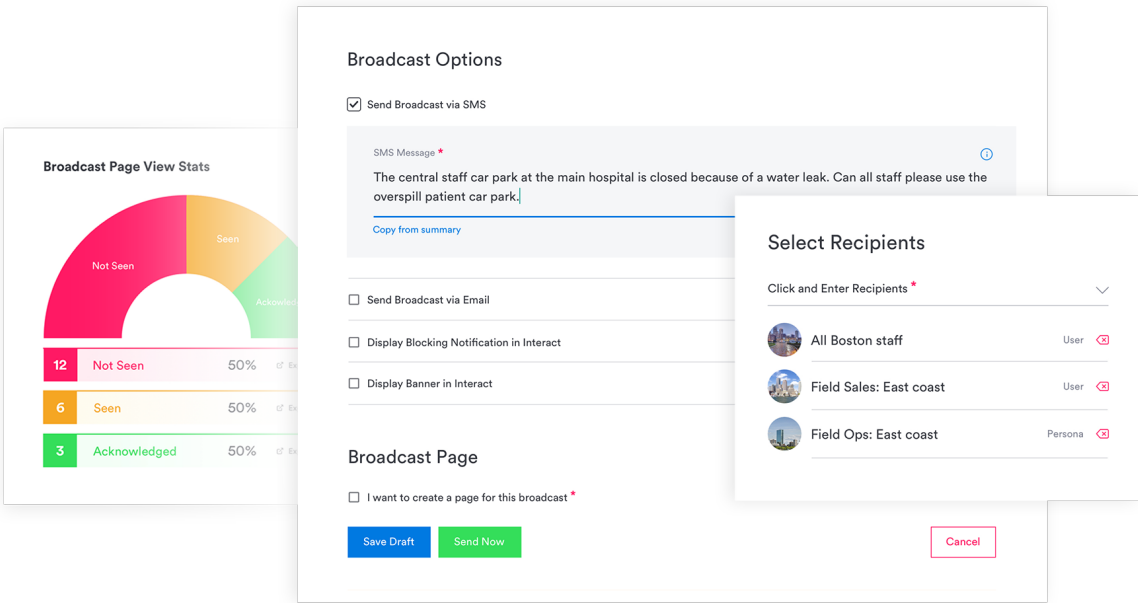
broadcasting information via your intranet. Is there a highly visible and accessible area on your homepage where critical information can be posted, or used to signpost employees? Emergency communications that are hidden within the ‘Company Information > HR > Policies and Procedures > Crisis and Emergency Information’ content area of your intranet simply won’t be seen.

Using your intranet as an internal crisis communications tool

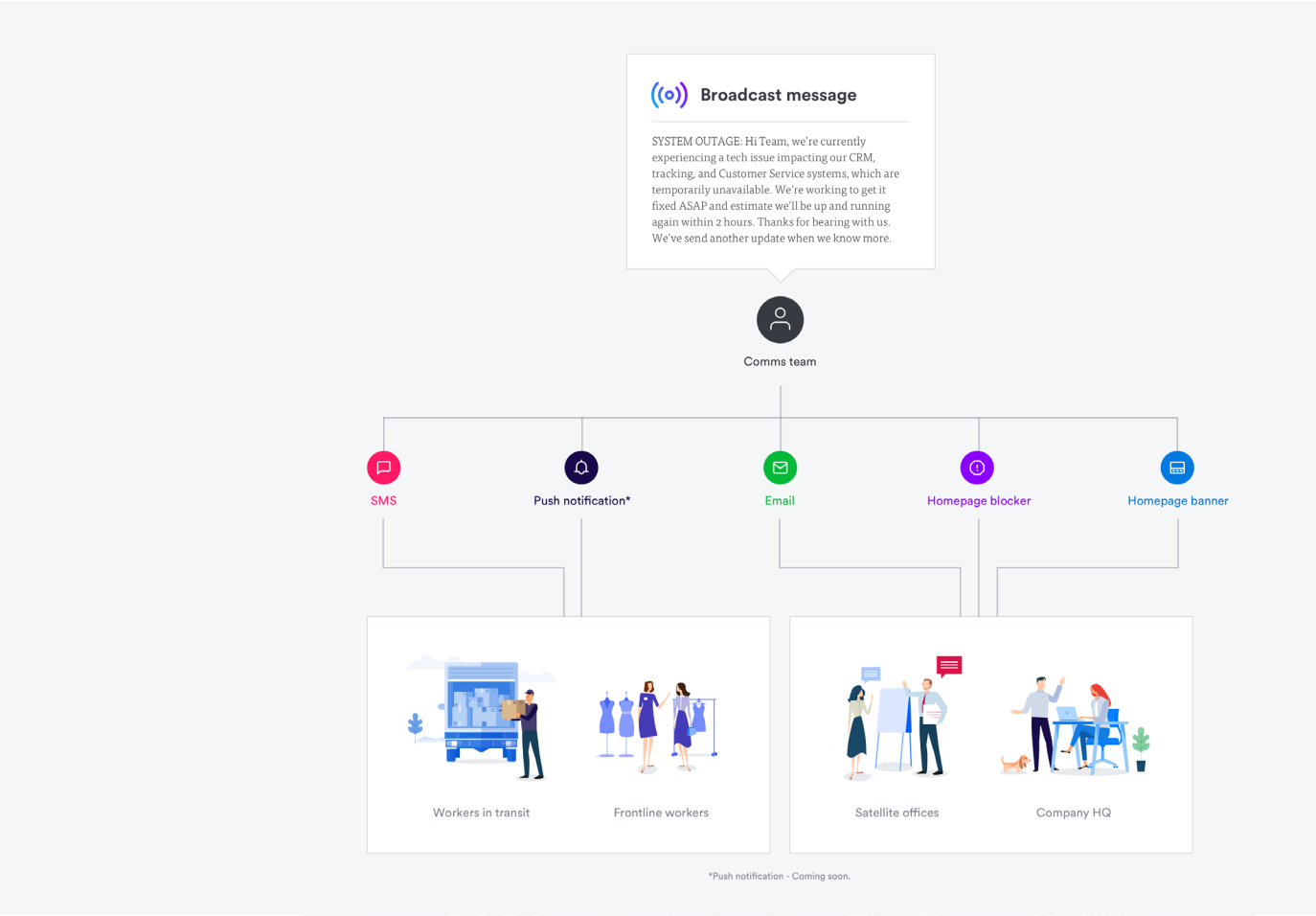
In many organizations, the company intranet is a central information point – and particularly for dispersed employees.

Maximizing the functionality and accessibility of your intranet during a time of corporate need can help ensure the right information flows to the right people, provide a critical touchpoint and checking mechanism for senior management to confirm staff safety, and manage the internal response effectively.

- **News Pages:** share important news and information with employees in a top-down cascade, ensuring a single version of truth by providing this in a centralized location. Reassurance, guidance, and ‘next steps’ from senior management will help employees feel calm and informed.
- **Broadcasts (unique to Interact):** distribute urgent, point-in-time information across multiple channels to alert individuals of crisis, confirm safety, and provide critical information. Interact Broadcasts enable messages to be composed within your intranet and broadcast to staff via SMS, mobile app push notification, email, a blocking notification within the intranet, and/or a display banner.



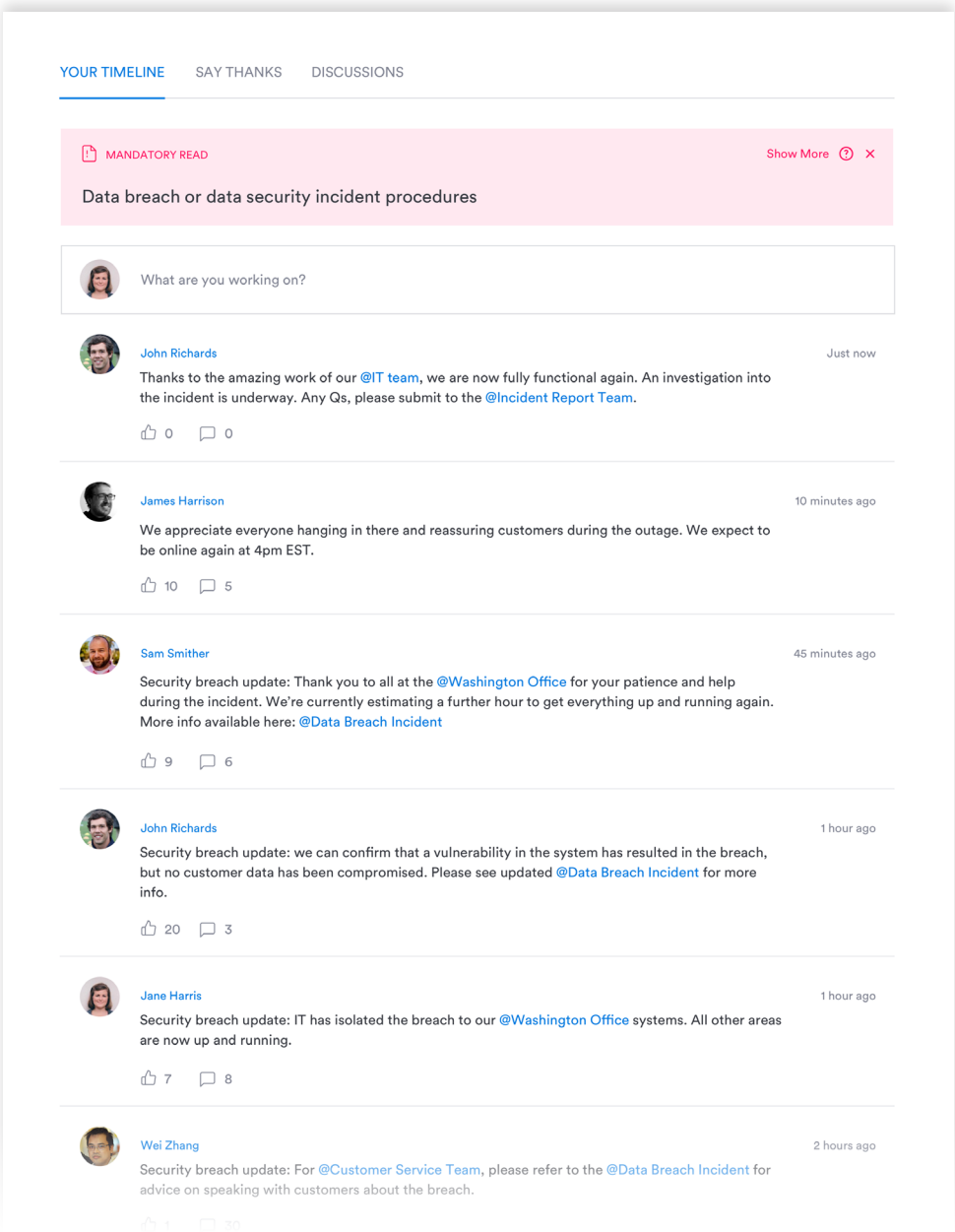
Utilize Broadcasts as a mass crisis alert system to push out notifications across multiple devices and multiple locations, in the case of a serious incident or emergency situation when the distribution of critical information in a time-sensitive way is crucial. By composing a single message that can then be distributed simultaneously across multiple channels to hundreds or even thousands of employees, you save critical time and ensure speed of communication - as well as consistency of message. For mobile or hard-to-reach employees, the ability to send a text message to personal devices or use push notifications can prove vital: 90% of SMS messages are read within three minutes, meaning you can connect with remote employees when it matters most.



If staff are potentially in harm's way and the verification of their location or safety is imperative, Broadcasts can be used to confirm their whereabouts or situation. Employees can be requested to acknowledge they have read a message, with visibility for communicators of who has received and read messages providing at-a-glance status updates. Re-send options to those who haven't yet acknowledged the message provides an efficient way to repeat key messages.

Broadcasts can be tailored to persona, department, location or team, enabling you to target messages appropriately. In the height of a crisis, where lack of information can spark speculation, rumor or even panic, broadcasting regular updates as the situation changes or develops can keep employees informed and prevent things escalating unnecessarily.

- **Timelines and @mentioning:** Provide shorter but frequent updates on any given situation, and ensure the relevant individuals are notified by @ mentioning either by individual, department, location, or persona. Push notifications and email notifications can be set up to ensure those updates are seen.



- **House crisis or emergency protocols, procedures, policies, and documentation:** Utilizing your intranet CMS, or through integration with selected SharePoint folders or your cloud storage provider, you can provide simple, easily searchable and centralized access to critical information your employees need. Use the mandatory read function to ensure employees have read and acknowledged information or push these to your Onboarding homepage to get content in front of new starters.

- **Create a Crisis Management Team:** a dedicated crisis team area on your intranet, or even just adding ‘Crisis Management’ as an additional field or expertise against individuals’ profiles, will enable grass-roots employees to identify and contact those responsible during a crisis quickly and effectively.

For example, a warehouse employee arriving at work and discovering a flood or severe damage to the property will be able to search on the intranet app for ‘crisis management’, identify a team member, and instantly call or message to notify them. That individual can initiate communication and safety protocols accordingly.

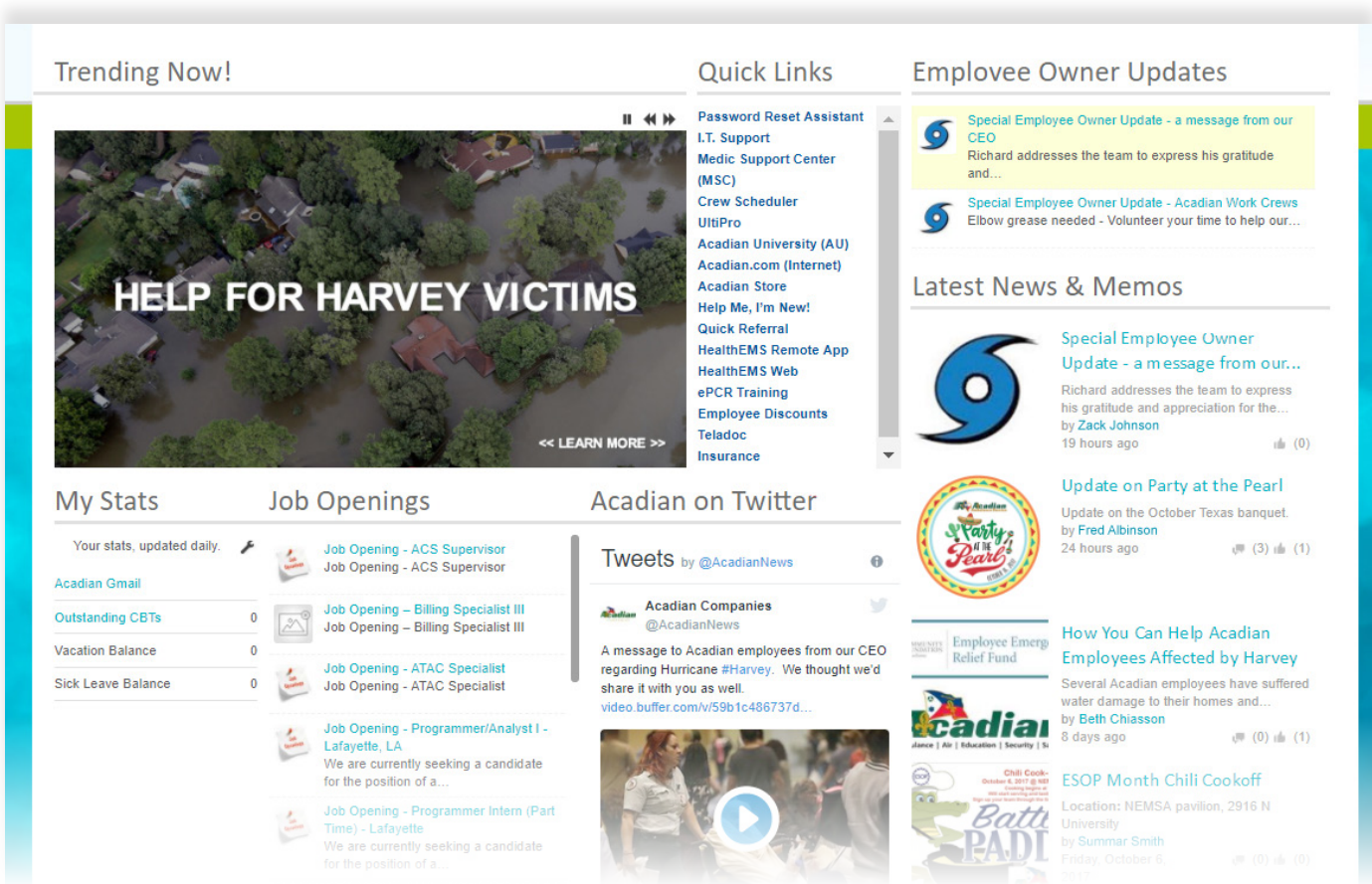
- **Create an ‘employee toolkit’ during a crisis:** We now recognize that there’s no such thing as ‘internal’ anymore; thanks to the connectivity offered by social media, information given to employees inside an organization can become public in an instant. So why not support employees and help align the message by giving them the right tools?

A ‘toolkit’ with items such as prepared or official statements, quotes or shareable information, a Q&A forum, or any images, videos, or collateral the organization is happy to share, equips and empowers staff. This can help prevent speculative or incorrect information entering the public domain, reducing the associated risk of a crisis being escalated unnecessarily.

- **Coordinate assistance efforts or support:** in a crisis or disaster situation that has an emotional, physical, financial or situational impact on individuals – whether colleagues or the general public – we find that the go-to human response is a desire to help. Utilizing a content area within your intranet to create an online ‘volunteer center’ can prove useful to facilitate or answer this need. Forums can be used for staff to request or offer support, pages or blogs can be used to post information about support or relief initiatives, and links can be provided to fundraising efforts and more.

Interact customer, Acadian Companies, utilized this approach to coordinate staff efforts to help Storm Harvey victims, who faced multiple challenges

after flooding gripped the city of Houston in 2017. A link to the content area was hosted on the homepage of their intranet, Acadian Central.



Your intranet is a powerful communications tool. Utilizing it effectively will encourage a calm, informed and supported workforce, which will translate into a more effective external crisis management and a positive impact on organizational brand reputation.

Internal actions have external consequences

In a digital age in which transparency and accountability are demanded by the public, organizations increasingly recognize the irreplaceable value of brand reputation. A risk management strategy that seeks to uphold and protect this, particularly during a crisis situation, will understand that every action undertaken internally has a direct impact on how the organization responds and is perceived externally.

Without an internal crisis communication plan, organizations place themselves at considerable risk. Employees and stakeholders may respond inappropriately or incorrectly, safety may be threatened, and crises can escalate, rather than resolve. The resulting impact on the external brand can prove disastrous; what's more, reputational damage can take months or even years to overcome.

Consider, for example, the Volkswagen emissions scandal of 2015, in which the car brand was accused by the Environmental Protection Agency

of manipulating its engine controls to falsely pass laboratory emissions tests. The scandal was damaging enough; but as the story unraveled, the response of the brand was almost catastrophic. Executives claimed to have no knowledge of the cheating, only to admit they did just days later; statements were released and then contradicted; the response was inconsistent and the PR and communications teams struggled to stay afloat. 3 years on, and the brand continues to face backlash and legal action for its attempted cover-up.

Crises happen. They can't be avoided or mitigated altogether; but with effective planning and preparation, they can be successfully managed. When our employees are informed, reassured, understand their role in a crisis and are empowered to respond appropriately, the domino effect on how a business survives under the spotlight is significant – and worth the investment in creating an internal crisis communication plan.

About Interact

Interact is a global enterprise software company that serves intranet software to over one million users across more than 850 organizations. We specialize in solving internal communication and collaboration challenges by combining our sophisticated intranet software with outstanding professional services, focusing on developing long-term strategic partnerships with our customers.

Interact has offices in **Manchester** and **New York**, and operates across the whole of the **US** and **Canada**, **EMEA** and **Australia**.

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