

# BE PREPARED IN A TIME OF CRISIS

## Why a crisis communications plan should be a key part of your business

BY JEFF LAKE, APR

I have developed a deep admiration and respect for companies that, when faced with serious issues, commit to open communications to protect their brand.

When seven people died from ingesting cyanide-laden Extra Strength Tylenol, the CEO of Johnson & Johnson invited CBS *60 Minutes*' reporter Mike Wallace into a boardroom meeting where they were discussing the future of the brand. The company pulled 31 million bottles of tablets off of retailer shelves, and introduced tamper-proof safety measures to protect consumers. Tylenol remains the number one pain medication sold in North America.

In the summer of 2008, there were 57 confirmed cases of listeriosis, resulting in 23 deaths linked to cold cuts from a Maple Leaf Foods plant in Toronto. President and CEO Michael McCain said in his televised apology, "It's not about money or legal liability; this is about our being accountable for providing consumers with safe food. This is a terrible tragedy. To those people who have become ill, and to the families who have lost loved ones, I want to express my deepest and most sincere sympathies. Words cannot begin to express our sadness for your pain."

McCain was the face and voice of this crisis for Maple Leaf, and he is hailed for the way he accepted the company's responsibilities and for the transparent way he communicated with media and consumers. Like Tylenol, Maple Leaf has implemented stringent food safety measures to protect consumers as best as possible. Maple Leaf Foods' crisis communications is widely cited as the gold standard for other companies to follow.

### Why does a franchise need a crisis communications plan?

If your franchise has ever gone through a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger requiring difficult or important decisions to be made, you know what it's like to go through a crisis. It's definitely not fun.

And when a crisis hits, it's no time to be asking, "What do we do now?"

If you don't know what to do, immediately contact your public relations agency so you can have a professional team onsite to help you manage your crisis communications.

If you are part of a major multinational franchise, or even a small company with three franchises, implementing a crisis communications plan early on will play a key role in protecting and restoring faith in your brand when an issue strikes. We live in an ultra-connected world, where an offensive story or photo can reach millions of people around the globe in minutes.

Franchises are linked in a unique way: each unit is accountable for the other, and that goes for every location to every employee, from the CEO at head office, down to the part-time staff. Franchises are only as strong as their weakest link. So, if a couple of rogue employees decide to post videos wherein they willfully contaminate fast food before it goes to a customer, or leak videos to media of fresh meat being stored beside a dumpster, their act will have a direct impact on all of the good franchisees under your brand who run exemplary businesses that follow best practices to the letter.

Today's reality is an online world can wreak havoc on a brand, which is why speed, honesty, and having a plan you can execute

are all central to an effective crisis communications program. Even one statement taken out of context or made by an employee at the crisis scene can have a devastating impact on a brand's bottom line.

And then there's an even bigger game changer – social media. Everyone with a smartphone has the ability to send a video or photograph which could end up being seen by millions of consumers around the world in an instant.

This is why the entire company, not just the communications staff, must be ready for a crisis. Being prepared means creating a crisis communications team that will manage the development and implementation of a crisis communications plan.

## What are the components of a crisis communications plan?

A successful crisis communications response for franchises relays the right key messages to all stakeholders as quickly as possible. This can be problematic at times if your legal counsel insists on issuing a terse “no comment” to media or stakeholder inquiries. This isn't the time to remain silent.

I much prefer franchises that take charge and have a bias for action during a crisis. This means assuming a leadership position. Case study after case study shows companies that take a proactive approach to crisis communications have better outcomes than those that hide from the public and media, or worse, take a hostile or defensive approach to communications.

Here are “3Rs” to remember:

**Responsibility.** Whether the problem is a franchisee's fault or not, take responsibility for solving it. Your actions will reinforce your words and demonstrate your honesty and commitment to consumers and your brand. The key element here is your determination to address and solve the issue, not necessarily accepting responsibility for the underlying cause.

**Regret.** Even if it is not your fault, express regret that the problem has developed. This can be achieved without sacrificing any legal rights.

**Response.** Timing is extremely important. Your employees, media, customers, and the general public must know you are taking steps to deal with the issue and working hard to ensure it will not be repeated.

Always remember it is the first public statements given within the first 24 hours that will receive the most media coverage.

So, when to start developing your plan?

The best time for franchises to begin setting up their crisis communications response teams and developing a crisis communications plan is during a time when senior management can be pulled together without interference.

Here are some questions to consider when forming a crisis communications team:

- What will individual roles be?
- Who will be the crisis communications team leader?
- Who is the best spokesperson?

- Who will manage media communications?
- Who will manage internal communications?
- Who will monitor the news?
- Who will develop key messages and a holding statement?
- Who will manage the flow and distribution of information?
- How do you manage false reports about the crisis?
- Who should issue updated media statements?
- What role does legal counsel have?
- Besides media, who do you need to contact? (e.g. medical authorities, police, elected officials, or government departments?)

Once the crisis communications team has been formed, it's now time for the team to look at potential crises that could affect your franchise, including:

- food poisoning
- mistreatment of customers
- workplace violence or harassment
- employee with disease
- unsanitary conditions
- corrupt employees
- shoddy workmanship
- layoffs
- sexual harassment
- franchisor/franchisee relations
- controversial advertising
- employee strikes
- robbery or burglary
- customer lawsuits
- accidental death
- protests or demonstrations

This is now the best time for the communications professionals to step in and assist franchise systems and franchisees with developing a crisis communications plan. The process can take a month for smaller franchises and several months for large multi-unit franchises, because of the level of detail and information required.

A professional crisis communications plan will establish a proper protocol to follow and will be of particular help to companies in managing the crucial early days of a crisis. We always recommend holding a mock crisis to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities and to determine the areas that need to be improved.

A crisis communications plan will prove to be an invaluable resource for franchises that may be operating without a plan in place today, which would be similar to driving without insurance. 🌟

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Holy \$%&\*! Is this a crisis?!

How to implement crisis monitoring to ensure you aren't caught unprepared

BY MARY FEARON

**A CRISIS:** it's big, it's bad, and it's usually a surprise. And, it requires immediate and decisive action to manage the impact of this crisis on the organization and its stakeholders. With the future viability of the organization and its value to stakeholders in your hands, the opportunity rests in the quality of your response.

We've all witnessed crises from afar. Just a few years ago, our region was at the centre of public attention as a result of the allegations surrounding Mayor Rob Ford. And even currently, Wells Fargo has created a disaster for itself with the unauthorized bank account scandal. These are huge crises where reputations were severely affected, and, in the case of the latter, millions of people were cheated out of millions of dollars.

Thankfully, situations of this magnitude don't occur every day. There are, however, many issues and events with serious implications for which organizations are all too often unprepared. Although not every crisis can be prevented, regardless of the level of preparedness, many issues can be averted or at least alleviated. If the thought of a potential crisis has ever crossed your mind, the question you should be asking yourself is, how can you prepare, prevent, and anticipate potential issues before they occur?

## Recognizing crisis challenges in franchise systems

In many ways, franchise organizations are not unlike any other organization in crisis. A situation hits a critical turning point and all stakeholders – corporate, franchisees, employees, partners – throughout the network feel the impact and become part of the response plan.

The franchise business model does, however, present some unique challenges within the crisis management context, including but not limited to:

- The size, scope, and complexity of the network itself
- Decentralized ownership and decision-making ability
- Perceived and actual levels of control and influence within the independent franchise unit and the network
- Effectiveness and efficiency of communication flow throughout the network
- Trust levels within the network

Managing a crisis in these environments requires a comprehensive crisis plan clearly outlining roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the franchisor and franchisee.

Jeff Lake discussed these considerations, along with the importance of crisis communication planning, in his "Be Prepared in a Time of Crisis" article in the Summer issue of *The FranchiseVoice*. And there is nothing more valuable in times of crisis than the roadmap for the who, how, and what of managing the impact. Yet

sometimes the biggest challenge can be recognizing whether or not you're having a crisis in the first place, and determining the nature and level of response required. Your crisis plan will provide a framework for action, but only a deep understanding of your environment and risk factors will tell you when to trigger action.

## Crisis monitoring framework

Issues and crises fall on a continuum defined by the order of magnitude, the gravity of the situation, and the response required. A crisis can come from within the organization, or be driven by external factors. It can hit like a tornado or, like global warming, slowly evolve over time. All levels and situations require management, the question is: how can you be prepared for when a situation hits, assess its position on the continuum, and take action to prevent or minimize negative impact?

Continually monitoring and assessing the environmental forces in your business against this continuum will shape your understanding and guide your response as risks escalate to issues and potentially crises.

Figure 1. How do you know if you're in too deep?



## 1. Know what to look for: Define potential themes that matter most to your business.

Crises come in many forms – use the various categories of crises to outline potential risks specific to your business. Identify practical and potential risk scenarios and the information you would

need to determine whether risks are turning into issues or issues into crises.

**Crisis categories**, defined by experts Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger:

- **Intentional** – terrorism, sabotage, poor employee relationships, poor risk management, hostile takeovers, unethical leadership
- **Unintentional** – natural disasters, disease outbreaks, product failures, downturns in the economy

Which can be further broken down by:

- **Natural** – storms, earthquakes, fires
- **Technological** – contamination, spills, meltdowns, explosions
- **Confrontational** – internal or external disagreements that lead to confrontations amongst employees, or between organization and public stakeholders
- **Malevolence** – malicious acts, terrorism
- **Management failure** – misconduct, deception

**2. Employ crisis monitoring systems.**

One of the gifts of a highly connected world is the availability of feedback. Countless data sources and communications channels are firing feedback on a 24/7 basis. All you have to do is listen. Having a pulse on actions and conversations will not only make you aware of any issues or crises in action, but will also provide insight into the nature of issues and concerns to support your response.

Figure 2. The chart below is an example of what you might see in a monitoring framework at a food service franchise.

CATEGORY OF CRISIS	POTENTIAL PROBLEMS	INTERNAL MONITORING	EXTERNAL MONITORING
<b>NATURAL</b> Disasters or "acts of God"	Storm, flood, disease or fire, all impacting delivery, product/service quality	Suppliers, network of delivery drivers	News, partner communications
<b>TECHNOLOGICAL</b> Failure of technology and/or safety protocols	Accidental contamination, equipment breakdown, food packaging failure, explosions, spills	Preventative maintenance schedule, safety reports, WHMIS training	Customer reviews, health inspections, news
<b>MALEVOLENCE</b> Malicious acts, terrorism	Intentional contamination, sharing proprietary information, bombing, location robbery	Customer service emails/phone line, quality assurance	News, financial reports
<b>CONFRONTATIONAL</b> Confrontations between organizations and public	Disgruntled customer, inappropriate posts or allegations through public forums, special interest groups	Customer service emails/phone line, HR reports, employee/customer surveys	Social media monitoring, Google alerts, forums, franchise Facebook groups, Twitter accounts, mystery shoppers
<b>MANAGEMENT FAILURE</b> Misconduct, deception	Employee theft, failed health inspection, serving alcohol to minors, harassment of employees or customers	Intranet, security cameras, HR reports, internal surveys, franchise hub	News, liquor licensing, vendor contracts/evaluations, mystery shoppers

**Internal feedback**

Leverage any existing internal communications channels (e.g. intranet, franchise hubs) to raise awareness and understanding among employees and franchisees about the potential risks and expectations for communications.

Develop protocols for managing different levels of risk and exposure to crisis. Set expectations for reporting risks, issues, and crises. Risks will often first emerge at the front line of customer

service. Without clear expectations in place for sharing and reporting, unaddressed incidents can snowball into greater issues.

If internal communications infrastructure is lacking, you can leverage, at little to no cost, sharing platforms to create private feedback pages and discussion forums (e.g. Facebook).

**External resources**

Never before have organizations had more access and insight into their external stakeholder environments. Ultimately, you're looking for changes, like increases in negative media coverage or conversations.

Monitoring industry and trade media can help you stay on top of macro issues at the industry, category, and brand level. In addition to scanning for specific brand mentions or risk themes, follow the issues and topics covered by key media and opinion leaders to identify new risks as they emerge. Even the simple act of setting up Google alerts can help you stay on top of relevant stories or mentions that could impact your brand.

**Social listening**

Social media is an interesting area. Often, our clients will look at an issue that percolates within a social channel as a 'social media' issue, when in fact, social media issues are a symptom of something greater. An immediate influx of negative communication could trigger, or be an indication of, a possible issue or crisis. It's important to keep on top of all comments and, where issues do arise, do the work to understand the root cause. And remember, everything in social channels is public in one way or another. Companies need to do more than just listen on these platforms; they need to be responsive and react appropriately to any issues that may come their way.

**The power of search**

A less commonly used, but highly valuable reference is search terms. If you have a good handle on what's being searched in relation to your brand, you can stay on top of any changes or fluctuations in activity. For example, if search terms (found through Google analytics, website, etc.) are changing from purchasing to returning your product, it's time you find out why.

**3. Know when to activate your crisis management plan.**

Remember, no amount of planning or preparedness can guarantee you will avoid crisis altogether, but understanding the nature of the risks to your business and having the appropriate monitoring systems in place will help you recognize when to act when crisis is afoot. ❄️

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# DEALING WITH KEYBOARD WARRIORS

How to contain a local issue before it becomes a nationwide social media crisis

BY HWEE YEE TAN



It may start off as a one-time, local issue that doesn't affect anyone aside from the person involved, so you don't think anyone will notice it.

The next thing you know, it has spiralled into a full-blown crisis the next morning, and you're not even sure how it started.

**S**ometimes it begins with a lonely keyboard warrior who is bored and wants to pick a bone with one of your campaigns, or with an incredibly popular social media influencer who has had a bad experience using your product or services. Whatever it is, it is damaging your franchise's reputation at the speed of light. Public outrage goes viral faster than that cute cat video, and it is something that no organization or brand can afford. Many studies have been done to track what moves the viral needle faster on social media, and the unanimous conclusion is rage. According to a *New York Times* article, anger is the emotion that spreads faster than anything else on social media. Just scroll down your Facebook timeline and you'll understand.

But all is not lost. The good news is that communication can help manage a serious issue before it becomes a crisis.

There are solutions to help prevent or contain such situations. With the right preparation and strategy, you can identify potential issues and manage them effectively in order to minimize the damage.

Here are some tips for you to think about before your franchise experiences a crisis.

## Always have a crisis management plan in place

The first thing you need to do is to put together a plan which will help you act quickly and effectively when a crisis hits. This plan will include guidelines to measure the severity of the crisis and the roles of every department and executive during the crisis, and

will help you establish a point of contact for each of these departments. Having a plan in place will allow you to take immediate action to prevent the crisis from spiralling out of control.

From key company executives to the most junior employees, everyone needs to know what to do or say, or what not to do or say, on social media during a crisis. This must also include how they are expected to communicate on social media if someone, including family members, reaches out to them with a question.

## Identify and understand the issue

Once you have a plan in place, you can start identifying the issue and the best way to respond. It's important to understand its cause and severity, especially if it is something that you have anticipated could happen. There are many issues for which you can prepare in advance, especially if the issue relates to a product recall, service interruption due to a predicted situation, or an existing issue surrounding the industry that is ongoing for many companies or brands. Then there are those unexpected issues that may have happened outside of a franchise's control.

Upon identifying the issue, you will need to be able to categorize the severity of the problem: Who is complaining? Is it a journalist or a social media influencer? How influential is this person? Are they just a typical keyboard warrior? The answers to these questions will impact the response level needed. The last thing we want is to step on the toes of a social media influencer, because this group of people can quickly turn a local issue into an international crisis, depending on their level of influence and authority.

## Acknowledge the issue as soon as possible

People use social media as a platform to vent their anger and dislikes, hoping to reach the right person quickly – usually with great success. However, when these displeasures are not recognized immediately, they could escalate into mass outrage, and by then, it's too late. Many companies are not prepared for situations like this, and will quickly feel overwhelmed by the speed and complexity of the event as it unfolds.

Always remember that speed is everything when it comes to social media; if you're not prepared to keep up with the keyboard warriors, you shouldn't be on social media.

The KitchenAid incident that occurred in 2016 is a good example of how a speedy, sincere, and earnest response helped save the brand's reputation.

In 2016, a KitchenAid employee accidentally posted an insensitive post about former U.S. President Obama's deceased grandmother, thinking he or she was using a personal account. KitchenAid quickly took the post down, apologized to the Obama family, and acknowledged the mistake. They also took action against the employee and announced that to the public.

All it takes is a simple acknowledgement from your company to contain the negative sentiment around the issue.

## Listen to the mood of your audience

The real-time nature of social media allows you to listen to your audience as time goes by. As soon as you have addressed the issue immediately on social media, get started on a solution to solve it – be it fine-tuning a public statement, answering media interview requests, or briefing your spokesperson.

When developing your first public announcement on the issue, be as considerate as possible, as the first statement will set the tone and pave the way for a successful outcome. Always be sensitive, humble, and assuring to the anxious, riled up, or angry people waiting on the other side of the screen, who are ready to fire away at your franchise from their keyboards.

However, not all crises warrant a sombre response. Depending on the mood of your audience, you can always try to lighten things up a little. For example, a Sainsbury's employee in Great Britain decided that the issue of a "battered fish not having barcodes" posted by a customer deserved some fun puns, and the conversation went on hilariously for hours – nobody even remembered the real issue after that!

## Give them the platform to rant – and make sure you listen

The only thing worse than acknowledging positive comments on social media is deleting legitimate negative ones. When your franchise is facing a crisis – big or small – don't try to hide anything. In this day and age, everyone can find out anything about you, and it will come back to haunt you if you aren't transparent. Believe in the power of the Internet.

Don't carry out a back-and-forth exchange in public, as it could fuel mass outrage if someone else has experienced the same problem. If you have decided that this is an issue that warrants a quick response, give them an avenue through which they can rant. Share a phone number or a direct email address where they can reach you, making sure that they know they will be heard.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT SPEED IS EVERYTHING WHEN IT COMES TO SOCIAL MEDIA; IF YOU'RE NOT PREPARED TO KEEP UP WITH THE KEYBOARD WARRIORS, YOU SHOULDN'T BE ON SOCIAL MEDIA.**

## After the storm – debrief and continue to listen

After you've put out the fire, don't just stop there. Get everyone who was involved together for a debriefing session, and go through the situation, step-by-step. Discuss what worked, and what can be done better to help ensure you are more prepared the next time.

Continue monitoring your social media channels for any possible aftermath – there will always be that one keyboard warrior hoping to stir things up again, but if you have handled your crisis well, rest assured that you will have the help and support of your fans and followers to fend off difficult people moving forward.

If you have been sending out statements (be it through email or social media) to your stakeholders during the crisis, make sure to continue to stay in touch with them. Keep them updated on what you have done to resolve the issue, along with the outcome, to regain their trust. Make your stakeholders feel that they too play an important role when it comes to decision-making by asking them how they feel about the way you handled the situation, and whether there is anything you can do to improve it the next time.

## Practice, practice, practice

There is no point in having a crisis plan if you don't know if it is going to work when the real issue hits. It is worth investing some time, preferably on a "sunny day," to put your social media crisis management plan to the test. It will help you identify any weak spots that require more attention and fine-tuning. Ensure all key executives and employees are a part of your training. You should consider holding a quick refresher session once every six months.

## Conclusion

In the fast-moving world of social media, it is important to remember that while it is easy to reach millions of people with friendly messages on these platforms, social media can also damage your brand's reputation just as easily. Always listen to your audience, and invest in a social media expert to keep your social media engaging, yet mindful. If you're not willing to invest in a dedicated team to manage your social media accounts, hold back your social media engagement plan until you're truly ready. 🌟

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# HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOUR FRANCHISE BRAND AFTER A CRISIS

Social media can be an effective tool to restore your reputation

BY JEFF LAKE, APR

**“IN THE MIDST OF EVERY CRISIS, LIES GREAT OPPORTUNITY.” – ALBERT EINSTEIN**

**W**hen it comes to franchises embroiled in a crisis, why is it we can always remember those that handled them badly, rather than those that did an excellent job managing their reputation at a time when their brand was under siege?

You may feel inclined to point the finger first at the media for exposing and reporting a franchise that wasn't prepared when a crisis erupted over food poisoning, data breach, or a serious employee issue. But more than likely, consumers will be driving the negativity.

When airport security thugs dragged a doctor off an overbooked United Airlines flight in April, it was passenger cellphone videos that captured the insensible act and allowed it to be shared to the world. The airline's initial communications ignored the plight of the injured doctor, and supported the rough treatment of the paying passenger. This backfired when everyone was able to see the truth firsthand, resulting in the CEO apologizing two days later. Fast forward three months, and there has been a quick settlement of the doctor's lawsuit, and the CEO is giving speeches on his commitment and mission to make United the best airline in the world.

The harsh reality today is we live in a world of consumer journalism.

Companies can no longer hide and hope a crisis or serious incident goes away.

Franchises, especially restaurant franchises, are under the consumer microscope every single day. Patrons can easily post their opinions and share photos of their restaurant experience on third-party websites dedicated to reviews, without any vetting. This is where it can get especially challenging for franchise outlets faced with dealing with unfair or fabricated reviews. Unlike professional news organizations, there are few rules when it comes to social journalism.

While the current U.S. president laments the prevalence of “fake news” and “alternative facts” impacting his presidency, franchises must deal with real and erroneous claims every day.

Albert Einstein realized that even in a company's darkest hour, there are positive opportunities that can arise from a crisis, when managed properly. Franchises can learn from other franchises, especially those that have managed public employee food-tampering incidents, or where customers died from eating their products.

In a fascinating compilation of the 22 Biggest Crisis Communications Challenges in Restaurant History, global restaurant consultants Aaron Allen & Associates report on crises that have put franchises out of business, and crises that have helped franchises improve their business practices and even grow their business.

One of their examples was how Domino's Pizza became one of the first companies to use social media to defend its brand reputation in 2009, when two employees filmed a video of themselves performing disgusting acts with Domino's food products and posted it to YouTube. These videos quickly made news headlines, greatly enhanced by the millions of views on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and blogs. It simply goes to show how quickly social media can tarnish even a 50-year-old brand, virtually overnight.

Two days after the incident, Domino's President Patrick Doyle posted a video to fight back and help protect the company's reputation. He apologized for the now fired employees' behaviour, and assured consumers they wouldn't tolerate actions that falsely portrayed their food safety. In 2017, taking two days to post a video would be much too long. If possible, this should have been done within hours of the company being made aware of the employees' actions.

A company spokesperson told *ABC News* at the time: “If there is a lesson here, it is to move faster than we did.” Although Domino's made an effort not to hide anything, and despite a rapid response that addressed the public's concern, the spokesperson said the company could have responded even faster.

Domino's turned the crisis into an opportunity to earn consumers' trust by creating a Pizza Tracker, where guests can follow their food in real time from store to home delivery.

Franchises need to be aware and sensitive of the fact that customers now have the ability to use social media as an outlet to air grievances and stage a protest in a matter of minutes.

The CEO video helped Domino's show its sincerity, and its brand and client commitment. The public response helped it recover from the brand-damaging behaviour by two rogue employees. In PR circles, the Domino's incident is recognized as a responsible way to respond to a crisis.

While Domino's was praised for using social media, Chipotle Mexican Grill was slammed by crisis management experts in the U.S. when the company initially ignored social media to respond to norovirus, E. coli, and salmonella outbreaks that sickened consumers in nine states.

"I would give them a C," said Laurel Kennedy, principal of crisis management firm Blink. In a December 10, 2015 article in the *Nation's Restaurants News*, she said: "They're basically absent on social media, which is a huge mistake. On Twitter, there's page after page of negative coverage."

Chipotle CEO and Founder Steve Ells at the time showed compassion by apologizing on major TV networks and making a serious commitment to making their restaurants the safest place in the world to eat. This February, he told *Fortune* magazine: "In the upcoming year, we intend to continue to simplify and improve our restaurant operations, utilize creative marketing to rebuild our brand, and further the roll-out of our digital sales efforts."

Since the crisis, Chipotle has embraced social media in a serious bid to be openly transparent when communicating with consumers about its new and improved food safety measures. It is earning consumers' trust and investors' support through its open communications.

Another fast food chain that turned it around after a devastating crisis is Jack in the Box.

An E. coli bacteria outbreak killed four children, and 600 others were reported sick, after eating undercooked patties contaminated with fecal material containing the bacteria at a location in Tacoma, Washington, and other parts of the Pacific Northwest in the early 1990s.

The chain's communications were abysmal, throwing skepticism as to whether it knew what it was doing in its kitchens. Jack in the Box was faced with several lawsuits; all were quickly settled. The crisis was so severe, it pushed the company close to bankruptcy, with consumer support at an all-time low.

Jack in the Box initially did not handle the public relations crisis well. It took two days after the health department had traced the bad meat to a supplier before the company addressed the public and removed all meat from its restaurants.

In a November/December 1999 *Business Digest* story: "How 'Jack' Turned Crisis Into Opportunity," Steve Albrecht, a San Diego expert on corporate crisis management, said: "Consumers don't want to see any delay or apprehension. Jack in the Box officials did not take immediate decisive action to shut down all the stores for a few days and teach employees how to properly grill hamburgers."

The hundreds of food poisoning cases reported were linked to undercooked beef at the hamburger chain's shops. Its cooking practices followed lower cooking temperatures dictated by the FDA, and not Washington state law that required hamburgers be cooked at least 68°C, the temperature needed to kill E. coli bacteria. Instead of disappearing as result of the serious hit to its reputation and bottom line, Jack in the Box turned things around by adopting best practices and setting new standards for the preparation of its food.

The chain has rebounded strongly from the crisis. U.S. media has reported how the brand turned a serious crisis into an opportunity to restore reputation and instill a new corporate culture.

Jack in the Box was fortunate it didn't have to deal with social media when this crisis hit. One wonders if the chain could have survived the negative communications that would have been generated in 2017.

Franchises beware. If consumers have a beef today, you can be sure they will be aired for all to see. 🍷

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