

Journal of Professional Communication **jpc**

Preface to the special JPC issue on crisis communications

Alex Sévigny★

McMaster University, Hamilton (Canada)

ARTICLE INFO

Article Type:

Editorial

Article History:

Received: 2012-12-29

Revised: 2012-12-29

Accepted: 2013-02-16

Keywords:

Crisis communication

Public relations

Strategic communication

ABSTRACT

This preface presents the special issue (vol 2, issue 1) on crisis communications of the Journal of Professional Communication, including an editorial, several research articles and book reviews from scholars and practitioners from Canada and the United States. The issue includes one preface, three commentaries, four book reviews and three research articles. The articles touch on crises from the health, oil, labour and other sectors. Included is a review of a work of fiction concerning the adventures of a public relations practitioner who specializes in crisis communications.

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As we issued the call for papers for this special issue of the Journal of Professional Communication in late 2011, little did we know that 2012 would be a memorable year in risk and crisis management. Take a moment to reflect on some of the issues, risks and crises that have impacted organizations in the last 12 months: The earthquake and tsunami in Japan, Superstorm Sandy along the U.S. eastern seaboard, XL Foods e-coli contamination in Canada, the BBC sex abuse scandal in the United Kingdom, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the ongoing tensions and conflicts in the Middle East. All of these were very public crises that received heavy coverage in both traditional and social media.

In our call we asked researchers and practitioners to reflect on and recommend strategies that organizations should embrace in order to communicate and manage issues, risks and crises in today's social media world. We challenged scholars to study those organizations that are able to anticipate and ready themselves for crises. We sought to understand what factors are necessary for organizations to successfully manage through difficult issues, risks and crises in order to survive potentially catastrophic events. We suggested that while some of the

★Corresponding author (Alex Sévigny)

Email: sevigny@mcmaster.ca, Tel. (+1 905) 525-9140 Ext. 27661, Twitter: @AlexSevigny

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challenges that organizations face are, indeed, self-inflicted (viz. poor leadership, lack of vision, improperly designed processes and products) others come as a result of drastic and sometimes unforeseen changes in the organization's operating environment.

I invite you to enjoy perusing this focus issue of the JPC. In total, the writings of ten professionals and academics are presented covering a broad range of topics and issues. From recent crises such as the BP Oil Spill (Erin Schauster: The Structuration of Crisis Management: Guiding a Process of Repair) and Toyota (Lindsey Anderson: Recalling Toyota's Crisis: Utilizing the Discourse of Renewal) to risk management events in public health (Josh Greenberg: Risk Communication, Public Health & The Ottawa Endoscopy Infection 'Scare'). Three of our authors provide interesting commentaries on topics ranging from the emergence of crisis communications as a crucial area of professional communication practice (Terry Flynn: Into the crisis vortex: Managing and communicating issues, risks, and crises), to crisis communications in the labour movement (Don Courchesne: Trade Unions Should R.A.C.E. to Survive in the Current Communications Climate) to the 30th anniversary of the offshore drilling crisis off the coast of Newfoundland (Sean Kelly: PR Lessons from the Ocean Ranger Tragedy). And finally four of our contributors provide reviews of recent books published on crisis and risk topics. These articles were all fully peer-reviewed.

Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Shelagh Hartford, the JPC's assistant editor. Without her attention to detail, this issue would not be the elegant product that you are reading. As well, a note of thanks to all peer reviewers: without their help – often at the cost of family and professional time – it would be impossible to produce an academic journal.