

**Press Release: February 1, 2002**

Crisis Management – The Challenge Of  
Creating A Practical Plan

# Crisis Management – The Challenge Of Creating A Practical Plan

Few executives will mind being told about a crisis early and then learning that it has been dealt with successfully. Most executives will have something to say if they are the last to know when things go wrong...or they see it on TV.

Crisis Management means many things to people it has become a generic phrase that is used by today's corporations with ease, and yet often without a thorough understanding of what the implications may bring for that company should those two words be misunderstood, poorly implemented or badly managed.

Crisis Management translates to having plans, which assist the organisation to deal effectively with an incident that could affect the corporate worth of the company. Today most companies realise that they should have a crisis management plan but few have a practical understanding or have solutions that involve people, practice and relevance. Even companies with a plan in the cupboard may find themselves in an equally uncomfortable position should they be put to the test in today's environment. How often are the volumes of paper that sit on the shelf year on year reviewed?

In any crisis, the keys to proper management rest

in the ability to communicate quickly and efficiently with the right people in a way that focuses them to take ownership of the incident. Frequently, a crisis can spiral out of control because the first time the plan is properly tested is when it is real. But now, systems exist that can provide a discipline to crisis management; a structure, communications links, the ability to test, review and have an audit trail after the event itself an often-underestimated tool to manage the crisis in the aftermath of an incident.

Such a tool is *EmergencyCall*; an automated callout and response product developed by Criticall and used by many companies within their own communications centres including British Airways London Eye. The London Eye is about as high profile a location as one could be couple this with easy access for the TV and Media, and a very high profile corporate sponsor in the form of British Airways, it means that crisis planning is a key business essential.

*EmergencyCall* uses complex technology models but in a simple and highly effective way to contact people quickly and automatically without distracting resource and time away from the incident at hand. The very nature of introducing a structured system means that attention is paid to processes and responsibilities, with different people being made responsible to implement their particular element of the plan when contacted.

*EmergencyCall* helps keep things simple. By focusing on simplicity, there is a better chance of dealing with more complex aspects later on. There are 4 or 5 different parameters in the *EmergencyCall* system where you can list the incident types and various locations. You can also include the severity of the incident and any other vital information. All the contact information and group details are kept in a database. When someone comes to use the system they use the drop down menus to easily pick the relevant details and press the button to initiate the callout.

It is crucial to keep contact details up to date and review them at regular intervals. *EmergencyCall* works via an accessible database, which can be updated by the individuals. In an emergency, *EmergencyCall* determines the most appropriate place and time to contact people depending on the time of day and day of week. For instance, if a call is made during working hours *EmergencyCall* will try an office number as opposed to a home number.

When contacting people in a crisis, you need to deliver concise messages. Often, if you have a manual system, you are likely to get involved in a conversation scenario, discussing when the incident happened and how many people were involved etc. Every time an extra three minutes is spent on the phone, three less people are notified. If you had a total of sixty people to contact that would take three hours. With a simple defined automated system you are able to contact fifty people in a few minutes as opposed to a few hours. Saving time means you are able to deal more effectively with a crisis situation.

The British Airways' London Eye uses *EmergencyCall* to log different events once a situation has started. It is important from a press/media perspective that after the actual event the crisis can continue. Drawing back to corporate value and reputation, if you have a problem people remember. It is just as important to tidy up and get the facts right. Good crisis management also deals with the follow up after the particular incident to ensure the wrap up is done properly. In order to achieve this, information must be accurate. Technology plays a part in the logging of the crisis and is the focal point of the post analysis along with the questions following up the incident from any media interest.

The facility to access the callout system over the Internet is one of the unique aspects to *EmergencyCall*. Operations like the London Eye run notification procedures from an operating centre but what happens if you are not able to use the

centre? How do you do all the same things during an emergency when you can't use the building? The ability to access *EmergencyCall* securely over the web combats any difficulty in these circumstances and gives a wider range of organisations the ability to be connected to a virtual callout centre. Being accessible over the web also means that everyone involved in crisis management can see what the system does and watch progress. It is often very difficult to get people to focus on crisis management. The lethal cliché is "it's something that will never happen to them".

British Airways' London Eye needed to define the various user groups when implementing the *EmergencyCall*. Different user groups have different tasks to undertake within a crisis. The system is set up to put people in teams such as media management, business continuity and customer recovery. Everyone within their certain group has had to develop tactical plans under the larger umbrella of a strategic plan. Everyone at the London Eye understands the "greater" crisis management plan and realises a crisis is not just a PR issue, but an integrated response to crisis through the maintaining of the key aspects of safety and service for the preservation of corporate and brand values.

### Future Trends

The *EmergencyCall* solution is only the beginning in terms of how technology can help with crisis management. There are new systems emerging all of the time that help people actively manage their plans on-line via task driven management systems.

Smaller companies will become more aware of crisis management in the future, and will be able to benefit from using the same systems as those currently used by big corporations.

By introducing crisis management systems to the Internet we are only a small step away from thinking about how we could manage a crisis not only from our laptop but our hand held PC.

### In Conclusion

Looking at the disasters that befall Britain's organisations each year it is easy to see how important it is to consider, and continuously re-consider whether crisis plans are up to the mark and whether you could really let the right people know fast enough. With systems like *EmergencyCall* companies now have simple and easy-to-implement tools on which to build good communications and crisis management frameworks.

Author: Andrew Potter, **Amber Adept Ltd**

For further information about  
*EmergencyCall* ASP, please visit:  
[www.criticall.co.uk](http://www.criticall.co.uk)

or contact  
Ian Hammond, CEO 0870 351 4908  
[ian.hammond@criticall.co.uk](mailto:ian.hammond@criticall.co.uk)



criticall limited

3 chiswick park, 566 chiswick high road,  
london, W4 5YA

tel: 0870 351 4908

fax: 0870 351 4907

web: [www.criticall.co.uk](http://www.criticall.co.uk)

email: [info@criticall.co.uk](mailto:info@criticall.co.uk)

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Criticall Limited  
3 chiswick park,  
566 chiswick high road,  
london, W4 5YA

[www.criticall.co.uk](http://www.criticall.co.uk)