Social Media Crisis Management- BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Objective: Examine Steve Marino’s presentation on “Social Media, PR and Issues/Reputation Management” in the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and it’s application to other businesses. Inspect the role of advertising, public relations, social media, and technology in crisis management. Formulate best practices within business crisis management and integrated communications management.

Four corporate business structure best practices related to crisis management:

- **Policies and procedures in place to prevent crisis:** BP was unprepared for the event and ended up sitting on their hands for a month before considering social media as a plan-of-action. The public expects rapid response when a disaster occurs that has the potential to harm them physically or economically. Technology is progressing faster than our solutions, rules, and regulations; many companies are treading in unknown territory. Formulating a plan that involves rapid response, media outlets, and control can reduce problems before and after a crisis.

- **Social media foothold:** A company’s most valuable asset in a crisis is its employees. Instructing, informing, and connecting those employees within minutes can be done through social media. BP has over 80,000 employees which were unable to connect. Social media also has the ability to bring departments like, Advertising, Public Relations, Human Resources, and Marketing together under one roof. BP’s social media presence started out a fire storm as two weeks of negative publicity featured on their Facebook feed. If BP would have had a Facebook or twitter account with at least half of their employees, BP would have had a built in support system. Social media also allows for transparency and 24-hour turn around where the company gets to make the rules. BP would allow commenting but no profanity and they were able to answer followers and posters within a short time period.

- **War room and rapid response team:** Whether virtual or physical, having a place to battle out the crisis is important. It separates the company’s crisis management from current management focusing on profit. This space should be technologically equipped to handle the demands of the rapid response team. A rapid response team is made up from a representative from each department (Adv, PR, Mkting, etc.) in order to dedicate time and resources to a crisis. Utilizing a war room and rapid response team increases the ability to handle situations and consumer concerns quickly.

- **Pick your battles:** People have a short attention span. One of the largest environmental disasters in the world died down within 2-3 weeks. The uproars online following the initial disaster were related to miscommunications. When BP digitally corrected a photo used for marketing purposes people found out but it was quickly corrected. BP did not want to allow commenting on their Facebook and wanted to shut down #BPGlobalPR, a parody twitter handle with over 50,000 followers. During these two occasions Marino advised them to pick their battles and let the general rules govern the public rather than BP.
Four public relations best practices:

- **Use your resources:** The content created on the social media outlets were taken from resources already in place. The ROVs 32 cameras monitoring the leak were digitalized to be viewed 24/7 by the media and the public. This dissolved conspiracy theories, offered transparency, and allowed for an even playing field within the media. Board meetings were recorded, and the content was placed online for those who wanted to see the interworking of BP and the full story. Twitter was able to change a headline on CNN within seconds and even though there was a misspelling within the headline it changed the story. They used Kent Wells’, chief engineer of the entire operation, press briefs on YouTube and 80% of people viewing would watch the entire 42 minutes press briefing. Most of these resources were already being employed for other measures and were simply shifted to other channels as content.

- **Increase social media presence:** If all the social media outlets are working cohesively then organic search can improve drastically. Twitter was used to create headlines and drive traffic to other websites while multimedia assets like Flickr and YouTube, were properly tagged, shared, embedded onto other websites. A wide variety of these properties all working together can increase a company’s SEO. While most websites are not two-sided communication sites, social media allows for a conversation to take place. Facebook, as Marino stated, is the essential central hub used to connect with a wide audience.

- **Manage and maintain social media:** Businesses are nervous hearing from their consumers, but it is necessary to open channels for communication. The use of multimedia and a 24/7 monitoring of feeds and tweets allowed BP to dispel conspiracy theories and coax public worry. BP used Facebook as a living focus group where people ended up policing the group.

- **Be transparent, not tricky:** In an effort to minimize the crisis, BP communicated false information with the media, government and public. Technology has changed the way one receives and interprets information making it more important than ever to be transparent and honest with audiences. When BP started operation ‘Top Kill,’ the Obama Administration was told it was “going great,” but the operation had been stopped for 19 hours and BP lost the ability to break news due to falsification of information. Additionally, a popular UK blogger discovered an altered image used by BP and further undermined BP’s creditability.

Four advertising best practices:

- **Move forward from crisis to promotion:** As mentioned above, the American people have a short attention span. After the initial crisis was solved, BP turned to promoting the cities and states most affected by the spill.

- **Connect social media:** Social media was not only used as an engagement channel but as a marketing tool. It was used to measure the audience’s reaction to the advertisements and foster a living focus group. Advertising usually only allows for one voice or one message at a time, while social media can have several different messages. Thee 22 person content team put out 20-24 pieces a day to be used in traditional media and online through their various outlets.
Traditional media is still a one sided conversation, but social media enables it to become more conversational.

- **Partner with big business**: BP partnered with Google and YouTube to air a live 22 minute interview with an executive which was then promoted and followed by a 3 hour Q&A by other executives via Facebook. After the well was plugged coastline businesses also looked to BP as a partner in restoring their economy. BP has been promoting and sponsoring events on the coast line for the last year and a half.

- **Have multiple platforms of content**: As Marino explained not every piece of content marketing and management will resonate with every audience. Similar to a television network, there are multiple forms of content that interest a variety of people. Content needs to be engaging and support the companies’ objectives as well as the customer’s needs. While much of the US was observing the incident (viewing TV commercials, following the news), many of the effected individuals were creating content (Twitter and Facebook) and engaging with BP.

Four technology tactics/dimensions worth further investigation:

- **Real-time social media metrics**: Social media is often a metric itself. Eventually, there will be an effective form of measuring social media as it happens in the “now”. The graph presented by Marino depicted the followers on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter gave a retrospective outlook on social media’s impact throughout the event. Reaching between 38,000 fans on Facebook, 57,000 twitter followers, and 70,000 YouTube subscribers, BP only had a very small reaction to the incident via social media in comparison to the population affected.

- **Combine and interconnect all platforms in advertising and PR**: BP was able to measure the reaction to BP TV spots by monitoring the conversations on their social media platforms. This case was an excellent example of the fluid connections between different communications as they were all brought together by social media.

- **Segmenting in social media**: Similarly between marketing and advertising, there is a need to segment, target, and position content on social media platforms. Facebook is constantly collecting information from its users, but it is not made available for corporate use. In the future when it becomes available, businesses will have to use theories and structures from advertising and marketing to use social media data.

- **Maximizing SEO**: Marino stated that BP was raising its SEO by integrating social media in every step. Social media tags, likes, fans, followers, and sharing abilities allowed BP to gain unpaid, but earned story awareness. Many companies can utilize this rather than using PPC or SEM; this puts a central focus on social media and its abilities to engage and monitor consumers.