



CORPORATE COUNSEL

New Tool Takes Crisis Communications Online

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There are very few areas of an in-house lawyer's life today that haven't been affected by new technologies. From e-discovery to case management, the law department is now powering up and logging on to get some of its most important work done quicker, easier and, perhaps, better. So why should crisis and litigation communications, a brief well within the general counsel's purview, be any different?

This is the idea that led attorney and communications consultant Jim Haggerty to create CrisisResponsePro, [an online subscription portal](#) allowing in-house attorneys, as well as their colleagues in public relations, outside firms and business units, to take a more efficient and collaborative approach to dealing with a crisis.

Part of the challenge for many companies facing a crisis, Haggerty told CorpCounsel.com, is a surprisingly low level of preparation. "It's amazing how few companies have crisis plans in place, and if they do, it's often hidden in a book or buried in a server somewhere," he said. Another important component of reacting to a crisis, Haggerty added, is speed. If a company can't rally its response team immediately after an incident, it's easy to lose control of the narrative that media coverage creates.

"You've got to be one step ahead for every step of the process," he noted.

CrisisResponsePro attempts to get companies in gear by creating a Virtual WorkRoom, where all of a company's internal stakeholders, plus outside counsel, can share information about events as they unfold. Importantly, once counsel become part of the workroom conversation, communications fall under attorney-client privilege, keeping the privacy of these exchanges protected. Each workroom also has a document vault, where the response team can securely organize and store documentation connected to the litigation or crisis.

Besides trying to figure out how to communicate with each other in an efficient and organized way in the event of a corporate crisis, another problem in-house counsel and their response teams may struggle with is how to address the press—and how to do it fast.

"I'm big on the fact that the in-house counsel is often the chief crisis officer," said Haggerty. However, in his experience, lawyers' instincts and training generally prompt them to want to keep as much information from the media for as long as possible, a philosophy not necessarily fit for a corporate PR emergency. When investors, regulators and employees have a vested interest in how a crisis is unfolding, saying as little as possible is often not the right approach.

To help in-house lawyers and their crisis management teams, CrisisResponsePro has a database full of thousands of public statements collected from companies having faced a wide variety of major problems, from massive data breaches to physical accidents to ongoing litigation and investigations. These templates can be tweaked and reformatted quickly to make the process of dealing with the public and the press easier.

The platform also includes news and analyses of some of today's biggest crises (type in "Deflategate" for instance and plenty of hits will show up). It also has checklists for companies needing a road map to follow in the hours, days and weeks after a disaster.

So far, Haggerty said, feedback has been positive.

"Our experience has been that CrisisResponsePro is an excellent tool, one that greatly speeds response and collaboration," Alan Ratner, president of WeRecycle!, an electronics recycling firm, told CorpCounsel.com. "When negative incidents occur, coordination is key, and technology can give companies in any industry a tremendous edge."