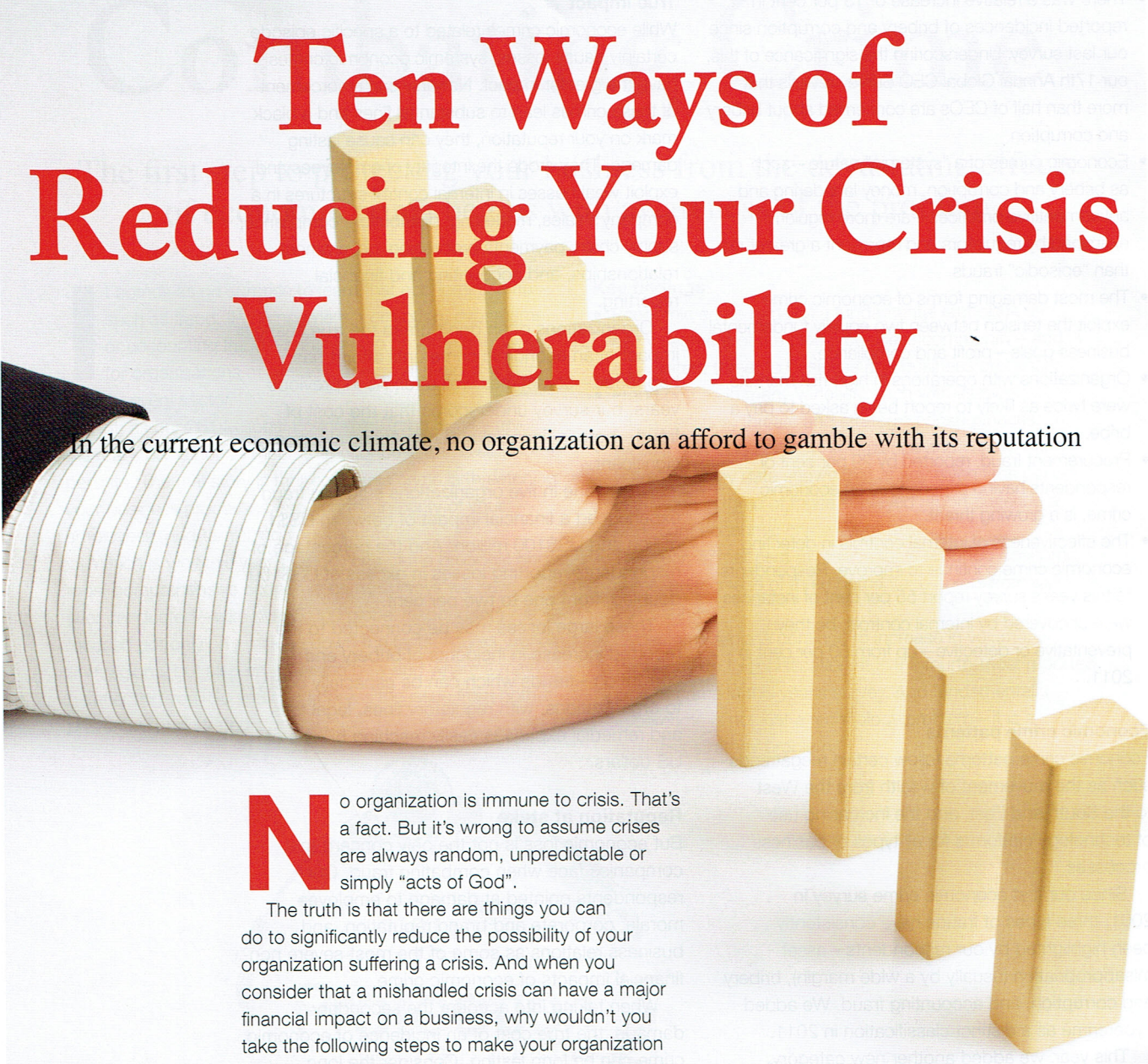


Ten Ways of Reducing Your Crisis Vulnerability



In the current economic climate, no organization can afford to gamble with its reputation

No organization is immune to crisis. That's a fact. But it's wrong to assume crises are always random, unpredictable or simply "acts of God".

The truth is that there are things you can do to significantly reduce the possibility of your organization suffering a crisis. And when you consider that a mishandled crisis can have a major financial impact on a business, why wouldn't you take the following steps to make your organization less vulnerable to crisis?

Here are the ten ways of reducing your crisis vulnerability.

1 Conduct a reputational risk assessment
Conducting a regular—at least annual—reputational risk assessment not only reduces your chances of being blind-sided by a damaging incident, it also provides the stimulus for actions to reduce their likelihood and/or impact.

2 Conduct a reputational risk assessment—with a difference
A conventional risk assessment is an essential first step in risk reduction. Inviting your people to think

the unthinkable by role playing tabloid journalists, disgruntled ex-employees, competitors or pressure groups, results in a changed perspective and a much more comprehensive set of risks to be managed.

3 Create the right culture
Prevention is always better than cure—and nowhere is this more true than in crisis management. So ensure you create a culture where your people are encouraged to identify and communicate potential problems. The reverse—a culture of fear and blame—is the perfect incubator for crises.

4 Focus on the front-line

A comprehensive crisis management plan and a well-trained senior team are essential in effective crisis management—but it is not enough. Unless the front-line—your receptionists, security guards, sales executives, engineers—know what to do and who to call in the event of an incident, the top team won't get the chance to exercise the crisis plan until it's too late.

5 Monitor the landscape

Be constantly vigilant for emerging issues and potential crises. Go beyond conventional media monitoring to understand what is being said about your organization online. Social networking sites and blogs can serve as an early warning of gestating issues: effective action at this stage can prevent them from becoming full-blown crises.

6 Manage issues pro-actively

Identifying a potential issue is one thing; managing it effectively is quite another. Whilst heads down and fingers crossed is one strategy, it's rarely as effective as a purposeful plan to take control. Actively managing issues gives you more control over your reputational destiny and often heads off a potential crisis.

7 Hold a crisis simulation

Crisis simulations are essential to test a crisis management plan, and building the skills and confidence of the crisis team. But that's not all. The process also raises awareness of the potential for crisis, and highlights flaws in the current infrastructure. As a consequence, a post-simulation organization is not only better equipped to deal with a crisis, but is also less likely to suffer one in the first place.

8 Review and learn


Let's be honest: there's no guarantee of a crisis-free existence for any organization. But the experience of handling a live crisis is an opportunity to learn, review and enhance procedures to reduce the likelihood and impact of a future incident. Never simply breathe a corporate sigh of relief and get back to business as usual. The danger is that "business as usual" may have caused the crisis and without a proper review, another one may be lurking in the system.

9 Plan well to avoid self-inflicted crises

Self-inflicted crises—the botched site closure, the ill-conceived product launch, the child

labour scandal—are often the worst crises of all. Why? Because they arise not out of an act of God, an accident, or the evil intent of a third party, but as a result of actions and decisions made by the organization itself. And given this fact, it's essential for the organization to have a robust communication strategy to avoid an unnecessary crisis.

10 Resolve the incident before it becomes a crisis

Research from Oxford Metrica demonstrates that a well-managed incident has a positive impact not just on how an organization is regarded, but also how it is valued. So swift and effective action to manage an emerging situation not only reduces the number of crises that you will have to face, it can also do wonders for your share price! 

Jonathan Hemus is the founder of Insignia Communications—a consultancy specialising in corporate reputation management and crisis communication.

