



Title: Crisis Communication Strategy for Coastal Escapes Ltd. in the Aftermath of a Fatal Water Sports Accident

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Abstract

This plan is a strategic crisis communication strategy that covers the short and long term communication issues that are facing an international tourism operator, Coastal Escapes Ltd., whose subsidiary resort facility at the Mediterranean resort was brought to the spotlight due to a tragic accident in jet skis. The case, which has led one of the guests to death and media coverage in many different countries, is an incident that needs to be treated using advanced crisis communication plans taking into consideration prudence, cultural consciousness, and image support in different markets. The crisis theory used in this paper is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and the intercultural communication theories that focus on constructing communication materials specifically targeting relating to internal staff memoranda, press releases to the populace, and correspondence with relevant stakeholders. The analysis shows how Business English style, tone, and register should be tactically adjusted to the various audiences and at the same time be consistent in the fundamental messaging. The state of some of the critical findings settles on the essential nature of immediate response procedure plans, cultural acclimation of norms of communication in grief, or being proactive in involving stakeholders in maintenance of organizational reputation and continuity. The prescribed communication plan incorporates the use of accommodative crisis response methods coupled with intersection of defensive positioning components to ward off against inordinate legal and reputation liability. This all-embracing strategy covers not only short-term direct needs of crisis management but long-term strategic positioning needs in terms of international markets.

Keywords: crisis communication, tourism business, SCCT, intercultural communication, business English, reputation management

1. Introduction

International tourism industry now has to operate in an ever-more complex risk environment in which a crisis event can easily develop into a threat to reputation at a global level. Such a situation occurs in Coastal Escapes Ltd. another leading multinational tourism company which deals with marine recreation where three people lost their lives in a jet ski motor boat accident in one of their marquee resorts, the Almira Mediterranean Holiday resort. The case, which concerned a 34 year old British visitor who experienced fatal injuries during a guided tour, has already triggered an instant media coverage in the European markets and risks the approximate business continuity and market positioning of the company.

The questions of international crisis communication are multifold, and this crisis communication plan would help to deal with them in the tourism sector. This situation is complicated, not only related to the direct operating issues but also with legal matters, cultural reception of death and ceremonies of grief, media handling on the international level, and maintaining relationships with

stakeholders in the conditions of differing cultures. The response plan should show cultural sensitivity but with the core messages remaining steady so as not to hurt or endanger the human tragedy involved but securing organizational interests.

Tourism sector is prone to the crisis event due to the dependency on the consumer confidence, safety impressions, and positive determinations of destination images associations. One miss can quickly discredit literally years of brand image and market development in a given market, especially when the event becomes popularized with the modern methods of using digital media. These challenges are only enhanced by the fact that tourism activities have an international scope and thus deep involvement in the process necessitates the adoption of communication strategies that are capable of meeting various cultural expectations, legal provisions as well as the media practices in different jurisdictions.

The paper outlines an elaborate crisis communication strategy based on existing theoretical frameworks to fitting real-life communication issues affecting the Coastal Escapes Ltd. The methodology combines Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and intercultural communication rules to design the specific messaging strategies that meet the needs of immediate crisis management and at the same time prepare the organization to achieve its reputation stability and market sustainability in the long term.

2. Literature Review

2.1 situational crisis communication theory (SCCT)

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory as formulated by Coombs (2007) gives the background framework of comprehension of how crisis type, ascription of organizational responsibility, and relationship of stakeholders determine the best approach to be used as regards communication strategy. SCCT divides crises into three main groups: victim crises (the organization itself constitutes a victim), accident crises (the organization has a minor role in the development of the crisis), and preventable crises (the company has a direct involvement in that disastrous event).

Critical jet ski incident in Coastal Escapes Ltd. lends itself to some traits of an accident crisis where the role of an organization is not clear until investigations are carried out. According SCCT, the accommodative response strategies are normally appropriate in the case of accidents crisis whereby the organizations involved show the extent of care and responsibility without necessarily offering the full blame. Nonetheless, these general principles have to be adapted to the international situation and peculiarities of the tourist business.

Coombs and Holladay (2008) reiterate the moderating role of the history of crises and organizational reputation in choosing the best strategy. Organizations who have better prior

reputation and lack crisis may use more defensive measures, whereas organizations which have reputation problem or repetitive crisis have to use more accommodative. The reputation that that Coastal Escapes Ltd. has built in the sphere of marine recreation can also be considered protective factors, but since this event led to loss of life, the appropriate measures of response will need to be raised.

The aspect of communication focused on specific stakeholder-based messages in the theory corresponds with the multinational environment, in which Coastal Escapes Ltd. operates. The various stakeholder groups (employees, customers, media, regulators, investors) have to be communicated to using specific messaging strategies that relate to their area of concerns and keeping the messaging consistent in fundamental and factual messaging content. This stakeholder differentiation is especially complicated in the case of international settings where the factor of cultural differences influences the formation of stakeholder expectations.

2.2 Tourism Situations of Crisis Communication

The crisis communication in tourism research is notable of the fact that the sector is highly vulnerable to a crisis event because of its sensitivity to consumer confidence, perception of safety, and positive destination images. Ritchie (2004) points out that in analysis of the crisis (in tourism), the media tends to focus disproportionately large scale on tourism owing to the large visibility of this industry as well as the human interest points involved when it comes to tourism.

Crisis contagion is especially pertinent to tourism operators and in this case, destructive events are capable of quickly moving outside of the immediate company to involve whole destinations or markets. Laws and Prideaux (2005) illustrate how organizational crises at the level of individuals can lead to the degradation of the general destination image which produces negligible effects that are far-reaching in the industry than the original source of the incident.

Crisis communication in tourism has to respond to the special features such as attention at international media, different cultural demands about safety and accountability, and the strong emotional appeal of vacation experience break. Guests contribute much of their emotional and financial resources in tourism experiences, and events of crisis come out to be especially traumatizing and newsworthy.

The global aspect of tourism activities demands a crisis communication action plan that well considers the different cultural orientations to risk awareness, shift of blame, and expectations to crisis management. Henderson (2007) underlines that the differences between cultures in uncertainty avoidance, collectivism-individualism and power distance have impact on how stakeholders interpret crises and how they wish to respond to them.

2.3 Crisis Communication Interculture

The intercultural communication theory offers fundamental principles of handling international crisis communications in different cultures. The theory of cultural dimensions by Hofstede comes

into extreme prominence when thinking of how to explain the interpretations of crisis situations by various cultural groups regarding accountability and rating the reaction taken by the organization involved. The lethal incident at the Coastal Escapes Ltd. needs the communication plan that will successfully meet cultural differences in the expression of different feelings of grief, the accountability of responsibility, and accusing someone.

The difference between uncertainty avoidance has a major impact on the response of people of various cultural backgrounds towards the ambiguity of crisis and organizational clarifications. Culture with high uncertainty avoidance (such as most European markets) is normally informed by the need to be provided with explanations, elaborate action plans, and apportionment of responsibility. Cultures that have low uncertainty avoidance might tolerate ambiguity at a higher level, but such cultures still need transparent communication styles.

Differences in power distance influence the expectations on the organizational hierarchy, the authority of spokesperson and on the formality in communication. The cultural communication preferences should be addressed with proper respect in the crisis response but the core message should be similar in all the cultural circumstances. This necessitates advanced knowledge of the effects of differences in culture in communication interpretation and effectiveness.

Orientation of collectivism-individualism affects the perception of the various cultural groups on the organization responsibility and personal accountability. There might be more of an organizational responsibility and preventive measures which might have to be put in place relative to the collectivistic cultures whereas the individualist culture might have the personal responsibility and individual satisfaction with the compensations being the subject of importance. These patterns of expectations will present a challenge to the communication strategy, because it should not result in contradictory messages.

2.4 Crisis Communication Business English

The concept of Business English can be specifically vital in the case of crisis communication when the accuracy, clarity, and cultural sensitivity of the message can decide the success or failure of the product message and consequent reputable identity of the organization. Crystal (2003) highlights the fact that business English comes in handy as the language of international business and therefore, international communication necessitates establishment of standard conventions that do not only support cross-cultural comprehension but also uphold the professional validity.

Specific requirements Crisis communication requires additional consideration of tone and register and cultural adaption due to the high level of emotion and scrutiny of the media that can increase and emphasize the effect of communication decisions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework and research design

The methodology associated with this crisis communication plan is the use of a case study which involves the application of the existing crisis communication theories to the actual situation being experienced by the Coastal Escapes Ltd. The study design combines Intercultural communication modeling with the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to build culturally sound communicative material strategically suitable.

The approach is best fitted into practical application of theoretical principles and their preservation in analysis and development of recommendations. The methodology acknowledges that, in the case of crisis communication, the action should be taken as quickly as possible using the available data, and it is required to make the right strategic decision in conditions of uncertainty and time limit.

3.2 Crisis Evaluation and the Analysis of Stakeholders

The stages of crisis assessment utilize the SCCT criteria of categorization to make the best choice of communication strategy. The deadly jet ski accident is such an incident that it possesses the features of a case of accident crisis; the responsibility of the organization is still being investigated. This classification shapes the tone, the way the messages are delivered and the strategies followed in the communication plan.

Stakeholder analysis suggests that there are five major stakeholder groups that are to be given special attention with regard to communication: internal employees, representatives of media, guests and prospective customers, industrial partners and suppliers, and regulatory bodies. Different groups of stakeholders have varying communication needs, cultural issues and factors on reputation and continuity of operation of the organization.

The global nature of stakeholder relations demands the cultural dimensions of stakeholder analyses which focuses on how various cultural groups perceive crisis events, how they interpret organisation response and their expectation about the kind of responses that ought to be made to crisis situations. Such analysis supports the tone, and the register/content adaptation of every piece of communication.

3.3 Message Development and Selection of Communication Channel

Selection of communication channels focuses on the immediate coverage, credibility building and cultural relevance to each category of stakeholders. However, internal communications will be in use of formal communications within an organization, whereas external communications will use various channel approaches, which are most effective in terms of reach, and have consistency in messages.

The practice of message development incorporates the principles of Business English, and it modifies tone and register to suit particular stakeholder needs.

4. Findings

4.1 Crisis categorization and positioning Strategy

Using of SCCT framework analysis, the fatal occurrence of accident involving jet ski at Coastal Escapes Ltd. fits into accident crisis and on moderate organization level responsibility. The initial inquiry shows that there was a malfunction of the equipment and not an error of any scale of operational negligence, which places the organization in the same boat of being victimized in terms of operational responsibility of ensuring safety standards.

This class helps in accommodating response strategy which shows concern and responsibility but does not take full responsibility. The strategy helps balance between openness coupled with legal care, recognizing the tragedy with legal prudence to not take responsibility, and thus, risk exposure, before there is actual liability or damages.

The global situation demands increased level of responses beyond the generalised accidents emergency manuals. The nationality of the victim as a British citizen and the geographical setting in the Mediterranean region imply cross-cultural communication issues that require advanced strategies of cultural adaptation. The tendency of media coverage in European markets is different when it comes to the interpretation of crisis and fault-assigning.

Strategic positioning highlights dedication of Coastal Escapes Ltd. to the protection of its guests, full investigation cooperation, and family support with credibility of its operations and being the leader in the industry. This is a long-term reputation position in order to ensure long-term reputation change whereas dealing with the short-term need of the crisis maintenance.

4.2 Communication Requirement Specific Stakeholders

The Needs of Internal Staff Communication: The staff members shall need up-to-date, precise information that they can use to be responsive to queries made by guests, as well as by the media. The message should be carried out that combines openness with confidentiality limitations and grants psychological support to employees who are traumatized about the situation. International employees have varied working cultures and preference to issues discussing death and crisis, and that is a consideration that should be applied.

Media Communication Needs: Representatives of the media insist on receiving information in real-time, details on how organizations can respond and who can lead them in terms of media spokespersons. The cross-national media environment necessitates cultural modification which considers the differences in journalistic sensibilities, law as well as various audience expectations.

The European media market demonstrates a number of various attitudes to intensity of crisis coverage and review of responsibility.

4.3 Requirements of Cultural Adaptation

British Cultural Context: The fact that the victim is a British national would necessitate such a communication strategy that could accommodate the UK cultural norms with respect to organizational responsibility, family confidentiality, and interaction with the media. The cultural trends of British people imply low-key expression of emotion, straightforward way of communicating and following a process of investigation. In the UK markets, the coverage of the media is to be more intensive with investigative research and corporate responsibility interest.

Mediterranean Cultural Setting: A cultural understanding is needed in the Mediterranean resort setting where the incident had to take place; in particular, the Mediterranean cultural orientations towards hospitality, family support, and responsibility of the community. The cultures over Mediterranean are usually more family centered, aiming at support in the community and they also express emotions in situations of crisis. Local coverage can be more community-oriented in terms of an impact and supportive actions.

Regulatory Environment in the European Union: European Union regulatory systems demand certain reporting procedures, cooperation with the investigation, and safety rates proving. The communication plan needs to deal with the EU specifics in terms of legislatively, and in the same manner be compatible with the international overall messaging practices.

International Tourist Market Context: The mixed international tourist market is where the successful communication strategies have to consider different cultural demands connected with security, accountability, and corporate credence. Markets in norther European countries might be searching in more of systematic prevention than the Southern European markets which could pay more attention to the aspects of emotional support and responsiveness in the community.

4.4 Material Development of Communication

Internal Staff Memo: The tone used in the internal communication is instructive but at the same time empathetic and shares information that is necessary but takes into consideration the emotional toll it will have to the staff members. The memo is focused on correctness of facts, methods of operation and accessibility of psychological support. Cultural sensitivity responds to the various nationalities of the staff in such a way that one does not register confusion in the lines of communication.

Public Press Release: The tone of the press release is transparent and preserving the reputation tone, which agrees with the tragedy reported, and at the same time signifies the responsibility and competence of the organization. The level of language includes empathy and authority, openness and legal caution, cultural sensibility and positioning. There are several language variants and accordingly, they are in the key European markets with proper cultural adjustments.

5. Discussion

5.1 Integration of Strategic Communication Approach

The holistic communication plan indicates how the principles of SCCT can be well utilized in the context of an international tourism crisis. The accommodative direction is situated between transparency and legal precaution when it addresses the varying cultural demands of the community towards the role of an organization and how to mitigate the risks of crisis. To achieve this balance, complex knowledge on how cultural differences affect the interpretation of crisis and the formation of expectations on the stakeholders is needed.

The underrating of remote response procedures indicates the specific sensitivity of the tourism industry to problems of a crisis contagion impact. A late or inappropriate crisis communication may quickly lead to international reputation-crisis and international networks of organizations. The active communication strategy does not only reveal the organizational competence but also helps avoid crisis escalation (including the speculation of media and uncertainty of stakeholders).

The international scope of crisis communication management and response demands cultural adjustment needs that exemplify the difficulty of managing its process. The necessity to approach British culture expectations of the victim nationality, Mediterranean cultural practices of hospitality and community support, and EU variety of regulatory systems need advanced level of intercultural competence in communication. The competence develops into an essential organizational strength of the international tourism players.

The combination of principles of Business English with the interests of cultural adaptation proves the fact that the requirements of professional communication have to be successfully and easily adapted to the environment of some other culture. Preservation of the message consistency based on core notes with adjustments regarding the tone, the register, as well as cultural references, need a high-end communication capacity to integrate linguistic mastery with a cultural sensitivity.

5.2 Applications and limitations of Theoretical Framework

The application of SCCT to international tourism shows the usefulness of the theory as well as the limitations in cross-cultural crises management. The type of crisis categorizing the theory and its stakeholder-tormented messages are valuable strategic tips and need to be extensively scaled to cultural differences and adopted to more complex international regulations.

Accident crisis type falls to the favor of adoption of accommodative response strategy but the global set up requires high response actions than the ordinary recommendations of the SCCT.

5.3 Strategic Consideration and Requirements of Implementation

There exist multiple threats to the successful implementation of crisis communication strategy that have to be considered constantly and managed flexibly. The first constraint of crisis response is immediate time pressure, there is little time to consult widely on the cultural aspects of the situation, to test messages against cultural insights, strategic decisions must be made based on what is known about culture and applying tried and proven communication principles.

Crisis management in an international setting is a complex legal activity that poses a dilemma between the need of commitment to transparency and the protection of legal liability. The communications approach needs to strike an equilibrium between the desirability of extensive information to stakeholders in the society and minimal disclosure vetting by legal counsels. A legal consultation and strategic adroitness would be a constant in such a balance as investigation results comes into light.

Regulatory control and legal policy control of media in numerous cultural settings requires logistical and strategic accountability that requires co-ordinated international response measures. Consistency of the intended message as adapted to the culture of presentation necessitates high level media relation skills and a lot of cultural competence.

Cultural sensitivity and the maintenance of relationships between the company and other stakeholders is of high consideration of stakeholder relationship management in a crisis situation. The emotional part of relationships between stakeholders during the crisis situation is sharpened, and they tend to expect something significant; on the other hand, there is also such unrealized opportunity as the resolving of relationships during the effective response to the crisis. The communication pattern should meet short term necessities of managing the crisis and positioning to build long term relationship.

5.4 Strategic Positioning

Transparent managing of crisis, extending safety improvement and active involvement of stakeholders serve as the pillar strategies of long-term reputation recovery under the crisis strategy. The strategy proves to be competent on the organizational level as well as on the cultural level and covers the valid stakeholder concerns regarding the issues of safety and accountability.

The issue of reputation recovery in the tourism industry is a long-term communication process, which takes confidence during the rebuilding phase by showing the enhancement of security conditions, the industry leadership, and cultural competence. The early crisis response forms a platform that these long-term activities form, and also it builds credibility to the continuing stakeholder involvement.

6. Conclusion

The overall crisis communication plan of the Coastal Escapes Ltd. shows that the theory that has been developed can be successfully used in complicated cases and international tourism crises. The combination of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory and the principles of intercultural communication solve a strong base to deal with the complexities of the international crisis management, which are plentiful in their nature.

The strategic plan brings together the demands of containing the crisis in the present with the long-term goals to repair the company reputation taking into account diverse cultural expectations and regulatory environments. The focus on the accommodative response strategies indicates the special vulnerability of the tourism industry to crisis contagion and the ability to display organizational competence and cultural sensitivity.

Development of stakeholder-oriented communication materials reveals that principles of Business English can be creatively implemented addressing various cultural situations, with a consistent message being conveyed. The cultural adaptation needs emphasize the essential need of intercultural competence in communication that international tourism operators experience in the case of crises.

As shown in the analysis, competent international crisis communication entails advanced knowledge on how cultural differences affect the interpretation of the crisis, the development of stakeholder expectations, and effectiveness in communication. Such knowledge turns into a decisive organizational skill which dictates the success of the crisis management and the possibility to recover a fine reputation long-term.

The crisis communication strategy proposed will offer practical outlines to instant actions in crisis response as well as show the way toward continuous stakeholder-management and reputation rebuild. The method illustrates the feasibility of applying theoretical values into actual crisis events that are complicated and at the same time be academically sound and professionally valid.

The future research needs consist of longitudinal measurement of the effectiveness of crisis communications, comparative measurement of approaches to cultural adaptation based on various tourism crisis events, and internationalization of standardized frameworks in terms of tourism and crisis management. Such research orientations may play a role in further theoretical development, as well as improvement of tourism practice in terms of crisis communication.

The situation encountered in Coastal Escapes Ltd. implies both great difficulties and prospects to show high level of crisis management.

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