Crisis Communication in the Facebook Age: The Basics Still Matter

Wilderness Risk Management Conference
Salt Lake City, Utah
October 13, 2016
Little did I suspect when my phone rang at 6 in the morning on July 24th that the next 48 hours, the next three months and for the that matter the next 3 years of my life would take a decidedly grizzly turn. Don Ford, NOLS Alaska director was on the line and reported...
The Plan

- What makes a story?
- Messaging and Tactics
- Social media
- Lessons Learned

Please ask questions as they arise!

Use recent bear incident as the thread that holds the info together
How the media works/ Messaging in a crisis/ Explore the role social media plays/ Communication Lessons learned/ NOLS latest thinking. Please ask questions as we go along!

How many OE/travel/lawyers/rescue?
How many employees? 1–10/11–20/20–50/ 50–100/ more?
Lions and Tigers and Bears...Oh, my!

Interactive--What are some of the themes of the stories--local, weird, scary, young, animals

What can we do to control the story or more accurately direct the story? Message points!
Messaging
Message Points—Outline, Organize, Help keep us from going over the precipice
Development-- the facts--Who, what, where, when, why, what’s next/ What is the story you want to tell?/ Anticipate what will be asked
Bear Attack Messages

7/24/11 10:00 AM MD v 2

A group of seven students were hiking without instruction in the western Tsalteshi mountains, approximately 15 miles northeast of the town of Talkeetna. The students were approaching a creek when they came in contact with at least one bear that attacked the group.

Alaska State Troopers were contacted via personal locating beacons, activated by the student group, and responded to the scene. These students have been evacuated by helicopter to Providence Hospital. Two of the three for treatment of injuries.

- Josh Berg - Section
- Sam Glaubman - Section

Sam Glaubman is reported to not be injured.

Four students were air evacuated to Talkeetna and then transported to Palmer to the Mat-Su Regional Hospital.

- Noah Alston will be released later today
- Victor Martin was treated and released with cuts and a bite wound above his ankle, never hospitalized.

Two students are reported to be injured:

- Sam Minahan
- Shane Gudlaugsson

The rest of the course and instructors have been located via aerial survey and are in the process of being rescued via helicopter.

This was the 24th day of a 90 day backpacking course. Students have been learning outdoor travel and survival techniques.

The students had crossed or were in the process of crossing a small creek when they encountered a bear at close range that attacked the group.

Students indicated that they did not use the bear spray.

Message points will be continuously updated as new information becomes available.
NOLS ELEVATOR PITCH

NOLS is the world’s most comprehensive wilderness school. Students of any age learn communication, good judgement, and grit through developing outdoor skills, risk management, and wilderness medicine expertise in a hands-on environment. Students graduate prepared to step forward and lead their communities in a changing world.

I would suggest the place that you need to start would be with the ability to articulate what your program is and does.
Interactive—Give your elevator pitch to your neighbor.
Any examples to share?
What does your organization teach that is worth the loss of a life?

The ultimate question.
Develop a press release before the media calls. Have available to email. Post on website.
The Team

- Director/ primary spokesperson
- Spokespeople
- Writers (press release, blog, Facebook, etc.)
- Booker (field calls, schedule interviews, etc.)
- Online media monitor

Crisis communication team should meet regularly. Training provides opportunities to identify new talent.
Preparing for the Interview

- Purpose of the interview
- Location
- Medium/Publication
- Interviewer
- Audience

- How might recent events effect the interview?
- What are they likely to ask?

Location—where would you stage a tv interview?
Medium/interviewer/audience—knowledge in these areas allow you to tailor the conversation. Outside mag audience is very different than the NY Daily News audience.
Tactics and Techniques
Bridging. Moving to your message points. I’ve noticed this year pivoting is the term the media is using when talking about politicians.

Don’t know to do know: “I don’t know the answer to that question. What I do know is…”

Time- “Historically that was the case. Today what’s happening is…”

“No, let me explain…”

“Yes, and furthermore…”
• Flagging

• “The most exciting thing about this program is…”

• “The key point to remember is…”
• Hooking

• “You’d be surprised at what our research indicates…”

• “There are three things we’ve found that are particularly important…”
Press release from NOLS bear incident. What are the message points?
Let’s get into social media
Who here uses...
Who here has a blog on their website?
Whose organizations have a FB page? Twitter. **How does social media change the game?**
We have our own publishing Platform!
We have an opportunity for dialogue and promotion.

And the Haters also have a tool!
@tommydurango NOLS thinking they should get special response just illustrates to me that they have zero clue about Alaska.
@tymorrisonheath

@tommydurango Pisses me off that NOLS claims to be so awesome that pro rescue should just ASSUME they’re in big trouble if they call 4 help.
Teens recovering after Alaska bear attack

July 25, 2011 | By the CNN Wire Staff

The four teenage boys who were mauled by a brown bear and her cub over the weekend deep in the Alaskan wilderness were recovering Monday. Two of the teens, participating in a survival skills course, suffered life-threatening injuries, according to Alaska State Troopers, and two had injuries that were labeled "serious, but non-life-threatening."

Three others were reported to have minor injuries or exposure-related issues.

Officials at Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage and Mat-Su Regional Hospital in Palmer said Monday that two of the boys have been discharged.

Ads by Google
NOLS Bear incident was blogging sensation—Everyone got in on the act.—Mommy blogs
Lawyers, using it for sales bait.
Unusual, very specialized sites with a point of view.
What We Did

In the wake of the bear attack NOLS...
- Switched off automated attendant
- Press release on website
- Blog on the incident
- Prepared and Used Message Points
- Contacted parents of students affected
- Did interviews (lots of 'em)
- Monitored media, blog and social networks
- Conducted Press Conference

- Message from the Board Chair
- Utilized a PR firm specializing in crisis communications for press conference and edits to Chair message
- Announced press release on Facebook and Twitter
- eNews Story, Leader Story
- Released report to selected media
- Continuing Press Engagement
What We Learned

We learned a few things that we could improve upon...
• 24/7 phone coverage
• Announce coverage and encourage calls in the press release
• Get more people in, more quickly
• Separate the “booking” function from the spokesperson function.
• Maintain and update spokesperson list.
• Maintain and update writer list.
• “NOLS executive director is on the scene…”
• Password list for all of the NOLS accounts—Twitter, Facebook, blog, Pitchengine
• Contact PR firm to notify in case we need a consult
• Video of press conference
• No comments on the blog
Five years have passed and some things have changed and our thinking has evolved…
• Email or call all parents on all Alaska courses. Possibly all courses everywhere.

• Statement in press room, not on the blog.

• Definitely post to Twitter, probably to Facebook. Not other social media channels.

• Link from homepage to press release.

• Assume centralized control over all social accounts.

• Don't allow FB to turn into a place to discuss the incident, hide or delete comments.

• Sweep social accounts of students on the affected course.

• In addition to media contact, include the email of a person to contact with concerns.

• Remind staff to not post opinions or condolences on personal social accounts.

• Non-NOLS events: do not insert NOLS into non-pertinent conversations. Pause accounts, monitor the situation, research resources to make available to staff.
Vaguepost. Warn staff away from, “Sure was a wild week at NOLS!” type posts
You have to be in it for the long haul.
Five years have passed and we are still dealing with the occasional, random media request.
Seven high school students were near the end of their month-long wilderness survival course in the Alaskan wilderness. But the real schooling began when they came face to face with the wildest thing of all.

-Tommy Garrett, Adventures in Alaska
Monitoring the Situation—Google alerts, media monitoring company, Hootsuite, Sprout Social
Action Items

- Identify three questions that would likely be asked of your organization in a crisis.

- Craft organizational and crisis message points unique to your organization.

- Practice two new methods of monitoring social media.

Your homework...
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Closing thought..
Not rocket science just a few simple things to remember. — Perspective; can’t believe your press clippings—humility—How many think that their program is essential to society? ; mindful of words; Just do it!