The power of communication during a product recall
Jonathan Hemus, Porter Novelli
October 2006

Your reputation on the line

Sony battles to restore credibility after recall warning
Financial Times, 5 Oct, 2007

Recoverers and non-recoverers
It’s not the recall that kills you, it’s the way you are perceived to have managed it

Rule number one: prepare beforehand

Why is preparation so important?

- Speed of interest
- Scale of interest
- Surfeit of ‘experts’ and ‘commentators’
- Spread of bad news
- Word of mouth – blogs etc
- Perceptions form and harden quickly
Preparing the communications arsenal

- Stakeholder map
- Corporate/product facts and figures
- Positioning papers
- Holding statements
- Spokespeople
- Communications procedures and processes
- Communications capability – call centres, website, Intranet, design agency etc.
- Monitoring capability

Rule number two: understand your audiences

Stakeholder mapping

- Develop stakeholder map – who is impacted, who has influence?
- Prioritise accordingly - focus on high impact and/or high influence
- Messages – what do they need to know and/or do?
- Develop communications tactics that meet the need of each stakeholder group
- Identify and mobilise allies
The media likes a good crisis, especially:

- Conflict
- Someone to blame
- Controversy
- Mixed messages
- “No comment” – it means you’re guilty!
- But they can help

So...

- Communicate proactively as early as is practicably possible
- If you don’t communicate, they will get the story from other sources
- Delays in responding position you as irresponsible, unconcerned, incompetent and confused

Understand the agenda

- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What are you doing about it?

Who is to blame?
Rule number three: partnership between communications and legal is critical

Working together

- Build relationships beforehand
- Work in partnership – we’re on the same team!
- Put yourself in the other person’s shoes
- Agree the overall strategy/approach
- Agree ground rules and communicate them clearly
- Consider, decide, act

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