



A Template for Event Crisis Communications

17 Essential Elements of Controlling the Narrative

Blerter

Introduction

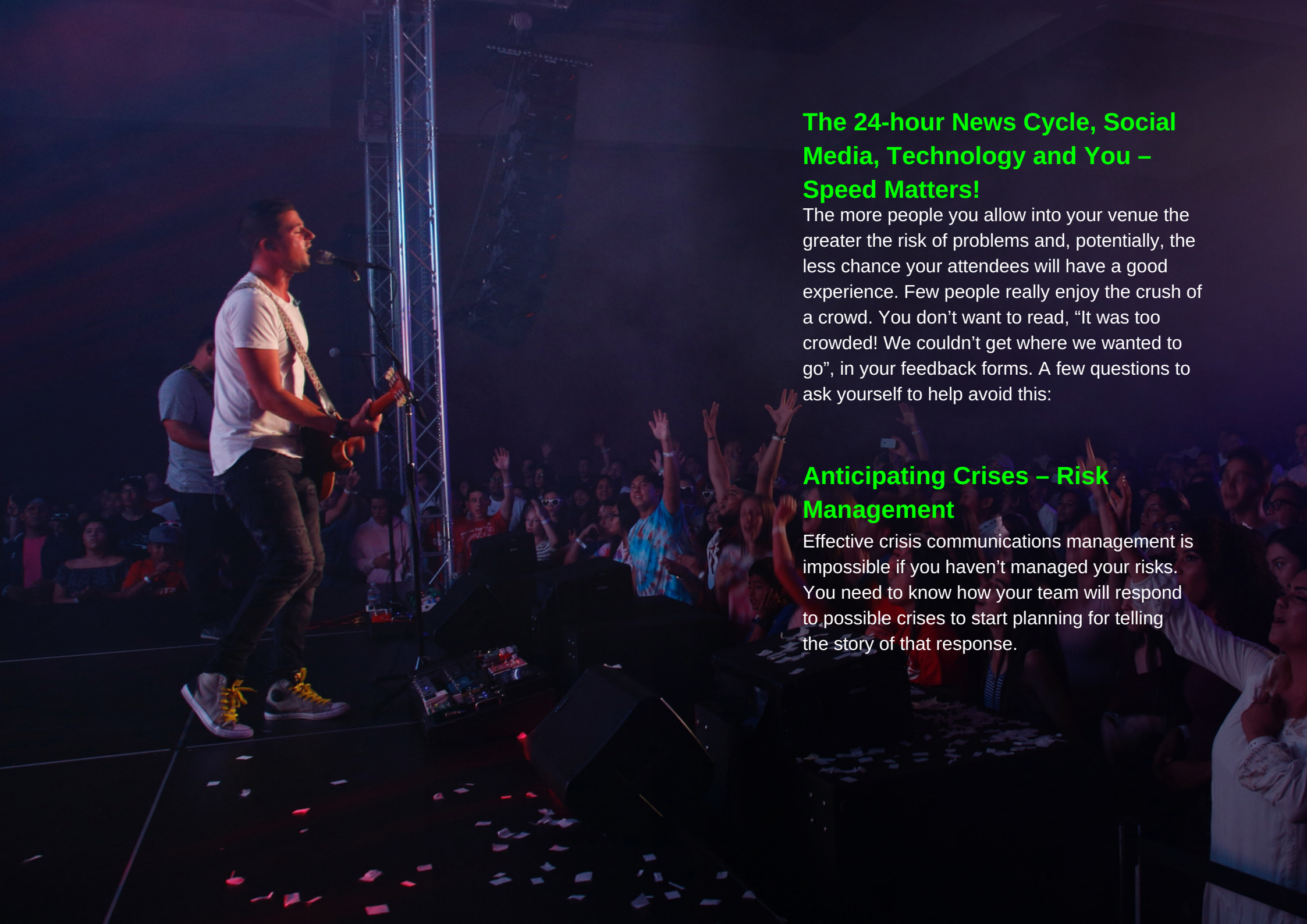
When something goes wrong at your event how well you respond might not matter. You're thinking: "Huh?" The thing is, you see, how people remember the crisis you faced could be more reliant on your crisis communications than your actual response.

You might have a plan for responding to the crisis and execute it well, minimizing the impact of the incident. But that crisis can still ruin your event's reputation, if you let others tell its story.

You've probably heard the phrase "controlling the narrative" -- anyone with any training in PR has. And its just as essential in effective crisis management for event managers as it is for politicians.

So, how do you control the narrative around a crisis that your event might face? The answer is effective crisis communications and, as with many aspects of event planning, being prepared is key. Making sure you tell the story of the crisis at your event and not someone else requires you to prepare and execute a communications plan alongside your incident management measures.





The 24-hour News Cycle, Social Media, Technology and You – Speed Matters!

The more people you allow into your venue the greater the risk of problems and, potentially, the less chance your attendees will have a good experience. Few people really enjoy the crush of a crowd. You don't want to read, "It was too crowded! We couldn't get where we wanted to go", in your feedback forms. A few questions to ask yourself to help avoid this:

Anticipating Crises – Risk Management

Effective crisis communications management is impossible if you haven't managed your risks. You need to know how your team will respond to possible crises to start planning for telling the story of that response.



1 Have you identified the risks associated with your event?


Managing risk is an essential part of planning for any event and crisis -- be the security, health and safety or finance related – are the children of risks. By identifying risks, you anticipate possible crisis.

2 Have you created a risk management plan?

Crisis communications is a key part of responding to a crisis but there needs to be substance to your narrative. That means you need to have a plan for managing incidents underpinning your communications strategy. Telling the world how you are responding to a crisis will be easier, if you know in advance how your event team will respond to an incident.

3 Does your risk mitigation planning include communications planning?

You're never going to be able to anticipate all aspects of a crisis – you might plan for a response to a fire, but you won't be able to be certain where it might start, for instance. So, it's essential that your response includes a mechanism for designated respondents to a crisis informing the comm's team what is going on.



Preparing for Crisis

Establishing Communications Channels

You can't wait until after a crisis to establish your presence on social media, set up mechanisms for following the emerging story across the media and make press contacts.



4

Have you set up your website to convey news about a crisis?

Your website will be one of the first places people turn to for news about an incident at your event. Make sure you plan for and include an easily found information page and establish protocols for homepage changes that give people the latest information. After an incident at your event an outdated and unrelated press release on a media page isn't going to impress the media. And it might enrage people looking for information about attendees.



5

Have you established a social media presence?

Many people, including journalists, are heavily reliant on social media for news and will turn to it for "the latest" on just about anything. This leaves you at the mercy of anyone with a small following on social media when it comes to defining the narrative about the crisis you are facing. Building a presence across social media should be part of your marketing efforts. And it's an essential part of crisis communications preparation. It gives you a way to get the correct story out across social media platforms and respond directly to misinformation as it appears.



6 Have you established mechanisms for monitoring news?

If you can't follow the story of your crisis, you can hardly influence it. So, it's essential that you have mechanisms for monitoring mentions of your event across old and new media. Reputation Management is a service that many PR companies and SEO agencies offer and relatively easy to setup via social media management platforms. The investment you make here will pay dividends when you need to identify and respond to misinformation.

7 Have you established contacts in local media and key social media voices?

Again, there is significant crossover with marketing here. The contacts you've made to help promote your event can really help you ensure that your crisis is accurately reported.



8

Have you set up protocols and processes for internal communications?

It is essential that your team knows what is going on and how to inform the right people when a crisis occurs. Technology can be your friend here. Event management apps and software will include communications functionality that ensure that team members responding to a crisis can tell the crisis communications team what is happening and trigger incident responses specified in your risk management plan.

“

Nothing travels faster than the speed of light with the possible exception of bad news, which obeys its own special rules

”

Douglas Adams



Establishing your Crisis Communications Team

It's very important that you identify who will tell the story of your crisis to the media and how they will tell it before you face a crisis. Discipline is key: the last thing you need is conflicting information coming out of your team.



9

Have you identified your crisis communications team?

You need to be sure who will determine your story in the event of a crisis. If you have planned effectively, you will have many of the elements of the story prepared around anticipated crises. But you need to be able to quickly adjust your messaging around the specific crisis you are facing. So, the people who will determine your messaging need to be ready and able to make that determination. You also need to know who will field media enquiries, who will inform your team and other stakeholders, who will handle social media, who will inform attendees, etc.



10

Have you identified and trained spokespeople?

In many cases your comms team will provide your spokesperson. But it may be that someone else is better placed to speak for your event and your comms team or outside PR consultant can prepare them with media training. Being able to convey required information clearly and with the right tone is essential here.





11 Have you identified likely media questions?

Your crisis communication plan should anticipate questions and offer answers for background questions. Time preparing facts sheets based on likely questions before a crisis will speed up your response time by helping team members understand what they need to tell the crisis comm's team.



The secret of crisis management is not good vs. bad, it's preventing the bad from getting worse.



Andy Gilman

Elements of an Effective Crisis Communications Plan

Healthcare company Cassling offers a very useful list of elements of a crisis communications plan on their website

Crisis communication team makeup

Key messages to communicate

Internal communications procedures

Contacts and media list

First steps checklist

Media policy

Social media policy

Media call log to document calls/communication received from members of the media

Internal and external communication checklists
Fact sheets

Profiles and biographies for each key administrator

Copies of organization logos/photos

News release template

Copies of the organization's business continuity/disaster recovery plans

Contact information for employees, crisis communication team members (including any outside legal or public relations representation) and the media

A large crowd of people is gathered at an outdoor event, possibly a festival or fair. The scene is illuminated by warm, glowing string lights hanging from the ceiling. In the foreground, a man wearing a red baseball cap and a green and white striped shirt is seen from the back. The background is filled with many other people, some looking towards the camera and others engaged in conversation. The overall atmosphere is lively and social.

12 Have you trained your broader team on crisis communications?

Your plan should include clear instructions to your whole team on how to respond to enquiries for information from media and attendees. They need to know who the media contact is and how people can get hold of them. And they need to know not to make comments unless your plan or the crisis comms team allows it.

13 Have all stakeholders been informed of your plan?

People who may not be on your team could be approached for comment – from sponsors' staff and suppliers to emergency services personnel – and your crisis comm's planning needs to include clear instructions on how to respond.

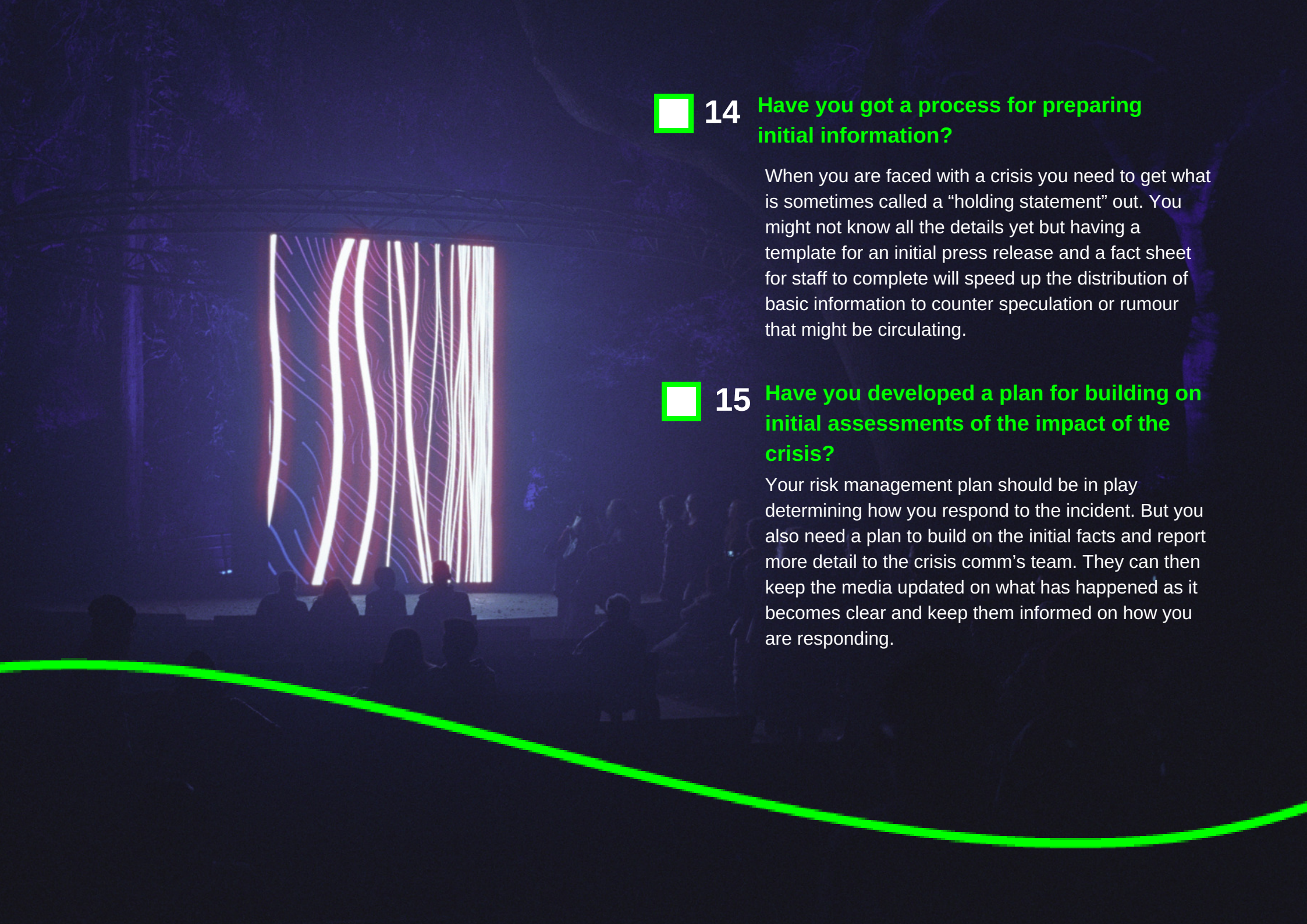
Hint

Don't forget your specialists in crisis communications planning. You may have decided to transfer a risk by employing specialists, like security contractors or medical supports teams, to handle it. That doesn't mean that they should be the ones fielding media enquiries after things go wrong. Include instructions for crisis communications in the terms of your agreement with them and make sure they are familiar with your crisis communications plan.

Responding to a crisis

You need to be able to respond to a crisis quickly but that doesn't mean you should rush to offer answers when you can't be sure of them. The key to this is establishing a process for offering an initial response and following up with more information as you gather it. As crisis communications specialist, Nicole Matejic suggests "when a crisis breaks communicate early and often."





14 Have you got a process for preparing initial information?

When you are faced with a crisis you need to get what is sometimes called a “holding statement” out. You might not know all the details yet but having a template for an initial press release and a fact sheet for staff to complete will speed up the distribution of basic information to counter speculation or rumour that might be circulating.

15 Have you developed a plan for building on initial assessments of the impact of the crisis?

Your risk management plan should be in play determining how you respond to the incident. But you also need a plan to build on the initial facts and report more detail to the crisis comm’s team. They can then keep the media updated on what has happened as it becomes clear and keep them informed on how you are responding.

Essential Fact Sheet Questions

It's very important that the facts related to a crisis are very quickly established. So, your crisis communications plan should include a fact sheet for staff to complete. The sheet should work to establish the basic facts of the crisis answering key initial news questions.

- What happened?
- Who did it affect?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- How did it happen? (If clear)
- Why did it happen? (If clear)
- Action taken?
- Current situation?



16 **Have you developed a process for identifying key messages?**

Your incident response should be designed to collect information as your plans are activated (another place that the technology you use can be very helpful if it tracks your response and related internal communications). This information should be available to the crisis communications team so that they can ensure that key messages are communicated to the media and the broader public.

17 **Have you developed a process for assessing the effectiveness of your response?**

When the proverbial dust settles, you need to ensure that you can learn from what happened and how you responded. How quickly did you respond? Were you able to identify and respond to misinformation? Were journalists supplied with the information they needed in good time? Again the collection and logging of information as you respond to a crisis is key because it allows you to assess your response fully.

**If you've answered yes to all these questions,
you're in pretty good shape to respond
effectively to a crisis and protect the
reputation of your event.**

Blerter is the better way to communicate and collaborate with your entire event crew while creating a safe environment for everyone involved in your events.

Find out how it can enhance your event experience - talk to us today

Book in a Meeting