

Don't wait 'til it's too late

Everyone knows the expression 'there's no such thing as bad publicity'. Well, I've got news for you: there is. As a media consultant I often get called in when the proverbial s**t has hit the fan and usually one finds that with a little forward thinking most of these 'crisis situations' could have been either diffused or certainly handled more competently.

 By [Marion Scher](#) 22 Feb 2006

So how can you plan for such eventualities? After all who knows when crises will occur or when someone in your organisation will put their foot in it or your product fail!

The trouble with 'no comment' is that the journalist or talk show producer/presenter are then either going to seek out other people to comment or even worse - draw their own conclusions.

One of the best stories to illustrate this happened last year - the now infamous St. John's 'punch-up' story. Without commenting directly on this story, this situation definitely could have been handled better, but the heads of both schools involved jointly agreed that 'no comment' was the way to go.

Unfortunately other parties involved didn't feel that way and took every opportunity they could to have 'their say'. Recently at a social function I came across someone, who when they heard my son had been at the school commented: 'That's a terrible school, their pupils stab each other...'

Another recent incident involved a well-known cold drinks company. The complaint centered around an incident where a Muslim family was having a Sunday braai and drinking their favourite beverage.

The family all noticed a strange taste, which at the time they believed was alcohol. The father immediately got in touch with the particular company. Not being happy with their initial response which was along the line of 'We'll look into it, but this doesn't happen with our product,' the father telephoned a well known outspoken morning talk show host who took up the cudgels on his behalf - a situation you definitely don't want to happen.

The talk show host then contacted the media spokesperson for the company who again kept arguing that it couldn't possibly have happened. Forced to respond by the talk show host on air he somewhat reluctantly said he'd go into the matter further.

It turned out that some air had got through a minute crack in the bottle causing fermentation - hence the taste of alcohol. What should have happened here was that the media spokesperson should have apologised profusely to his valued client and assured him on air that he would go to the ends of the earth in investigating the complaint and make things right.

So where do these things start going wrong? Right from the first phone call creating any kind of awareness, hopefully to your company, rather than the media first.

But often the first sign that something is wrong will come through yours or your client's company. There should be a policy in place that sees this call being direct to ONE person who has a plan to deal with such emergencies.

If the first sign of trouble comes via a talk station newsroom who want you to go live on air, and you haven't got a clue what the situation is actually about - all you need say is give me 30 minutes and I'll come back to you with a full reply.

Very few producers would see any problem with this. This at least gives you time to investigate and formulate a response.

ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher (www.media Mentors.co.za) is a journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 19 years' experience in the industry.
[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>