

Crisis information: the role of the media*

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Editor



* with only a few tiny deviations... honest

A spiral-bound notebook with a light beige, textured cover. The spiral binding is visible on the left side. The text "To begin with..." is centered on the page in a green, serif font.

To begin with...

Some Philosophy

 “**Nam et ipsa scientica potestas est.**”

- Francis Bacon *De Haeresibus* (1597)

 “**Ciencia es locura si buen senso no la cura.**”

- George Herbert’s *Outlandish Proverbs* (1639)

Some Philosophy

 “Nam et ipsa scientica potestas est.”

- Francis Bacon *De Haeresibus* (1597)

“For knowledge itself is power”

 “Cienca es locura si buen senso no la cura.”

- George Herbert’s *Outlandish Proverbs* (1639)

“Knowledge is madness

if good sense does not direct it.”

So Where does the Power lie in a crisis?

Government

- official line
- lobby line / special advisers
- spin & leak

Media

Electorate v. consumer

Random ascendancy of individuals?

So Where does the Power lie in a crisis?



Whom to trust

- politicians?
- scientists?
- experts?
- professions?
- eyewitness reporters?



Onus of responsibility

- “We published it on our website.”

FMD Epidemic



Political dimension

- manipulative / tainted science
- bandwagons



Professional dimension

- BVA, NFU & RCVS +/- modellers



Logistics dimension

- Army, water board



Boffin dimension

- naïve science / the truth

FMD Epidemic

“Information’s pretty thin stuff unless mixed with experience.”

- Clarence Day *The Three Tigers* (1921)

Coverage

Nature of medium / publication

- Internet
- wireless & television
- print journals

Resources

Ethos

Angle

Time and hindsight

How does this affect me?

 **Personal security & health**

 **Panic buying**

- Easter
- Fuel blockade

 **Moral judgements**

 **Civil unrest**

 **Civil disobedience**

- hunting
- TB in badgers

Journalists

“The press is the enemy.”

- Richard Nixon.

“[Journalism] is full of lying, cheating, drunken, cocaine-sniffing, unethical people. It’s a wonderful profession.”

- Piers Morgan, *Daily Mirror*.

“Some editors are failed writers ... but so are most writers.”

- T. S. Eliot.

Journalists

“The task of any paper is to be a gadfly and, like Socrates long ago, to stir things up.”

- Roger L. Roberts, editor of the *Church Times*, speaking at its centenary dinner in 1963.

Journalists



Obsessive about facts



Seeking an “angle”








Crises tend to increase opportunities for stories; but decrease the number of fresh angles available



Television journalism is the exception rather than the rule

Print

-  Measured
-  Controlled
-  Allows reflection
-  Comfort factor
-  Highly portable

RELATIVELY SAFE

DEFINITIVE

Internet



Global



Instant



Blanket coverage & dissemination



Interactive & demanding







Not good for subtlety or explanation

FOR DEFENSIVE MANAGEMENT

SUBSEQUENT FREE-FOR-ALL







Wireless

-  Traditional crisis medium
-  Not cluttered by appearances
-  Some dependence on personalities
-  Can be manipulated by interview techniques and editing

REASONABLY SAFE

USEFUL ON LOCAL BASIS

Television






-  Essentially visual
-  Words secondary consideration
-  Image is everything
-  Very manipulative
-  Heavily personality dependent
-  Editing a real danger

HAIRIEST MEDIUM IN A CRISIS

Into the lion's den...






Be Clear

What The Journalist Wants?

-  To whom are you talking and where do they work?
-  What sort of piece are they working on?
-  Who else are they talking to?
-  Do they just want a quote from you or something more?
-  What is his or her deadline?






Journalists

Have Worries Too





-  What rôle are you playing?
-  Don't assume that journalists know much about your subject
-  Don't treat all journalists the same
-  Finding stories / missing stories
-  Meeting tight deadlines

Journalists







Have Worries Too

-  People who don't return phone calls
-  Long rambling 'phone conversations
-  Not filling the newspaper, web page or programme
-  Getting something wrong (legally or factually)
-  Upsetting somebody else







What Is Your Prime Objective?

-  Decide on ONE main message
-  What do you most want to say about the crisis?
-  Which positives, achievements, or plans do you most want to highlight?
-  If you get just one sentence, what exactly are you going to say?

The Six Golden Rules

-  **Be quotable – give value**
-  **Anticipate questions**
-  **Identify your “no go” zones**
-  **Buy yourself time to think**
-  **Avoid imprecision & stupid misunderstanding**
-  **Always tell the truth – but never drop your guard**

Quotes & Soundbites

-  Use interesting language
-  Be succinct
-  Avoid jargon, technical language, acronyms
-  Above all, avoid marketing speak and advertising slogans
-  Signpost & highlight
-  Have a pay-off for live broadcast interviews

Numbers



What is the KEY statistic?



What does that mean in real terms?



Have you any research findings to talk about?

Anticipate Questions



Who?



What?



Why?



When?




Where?



How (much)?




“No Go” Zones

 Identify your own “No Go” zones

 Costs? profits? plans? staff matters? pay?
mistakes? **BLAME?**






 **Expect questions from journalists!**

Time








-  Buy time to organise your thoughts when a journalist rings you
-  Don't call a journalist just before a deadline
-  Don't waste a journalist's time by making it hard to follow up a press release

No turning back now...

Aim To Appear:

-  positive;
-  authoritative – but not pompous;
-  enthusiastic – but not gushing;
-  confident – but not smug;
-  firm – but not overbearing.


Questions To Watch

-  Hypothetical questions
-  Invitations to forecast or predict
-  Politics
-  Rivals
-  "I don't know."
-  "That's not something I deal with."
-  Sometimes it's better to make / release
a statement

Tricks & Traps


 **Encouraging you to overstate**

“Just how worried are you by this development ... how dangerous is it?”


 **Encouraging you to criticise
customers, government
departments, competitors**

“How disappointed are people with the way they handled this ... with their reaction?”

Tricks & Traps

 **Rephrasing or misinterpreting what you say**

“So you’re saying ... ”

 **Introducing negative words or phrases into the conversation**

“Problem, rip off, weak distribution, bungled issue, disaster”

Tricks & Traps










Mixing a statement with an unrelated question







“Its well known that your organisation ... tell me, how fast do you think the problem will grow?”

Silk purse... or sow's ear







Press Releases

-  Write to be identified
-  Look like a press release
-  Give it a title
-  Use double or 1.5 spacing
-  Please **DON'T INDENT INDENTS!**
-  Remember the five “Ws” + one “H”
-  Releases should follow a logical sequence

Press Releases

-  Concise paragraphs of
40 – 50 words
-  If you have finished, say so
-  Avoid embargoes
-  Quotes add colour and save time
-  Pics
-  **MORE PICS!**

Tips On Style

-  Grab attention & capture story in first paragraph
-  Remember the magic of “you”
-  Assume nothing
-  Check grammar and punctuation
-  Check it again
-  Familiarise yourself with the styles of others

Angles



Surveys



Award schemes



Media events



Charity



PR opportunities



Children & animals



Sex & age

Angles



Health & safety



Environment



Special days & milestones



Eccentrics



Personalities



Piggy-backs



PICS

The End



Verbal Combat

The Slimy Seven

-  **The Kite Flyer**
-  **The Accuser**
-  **The Interrupter**
-  **The Speculator**
-  **The Machine Gunner**
-  **The Good Buddy**
-  **The Silent Witness**

Getting Your Message Across

1. HEADLINE YOURSELF

(to emphasise your key message)

“The central issue in all this is...”

“But you mustn’t forget the main point here is...”

“The key thing to remember is...”

Getting Your Message Across

2. ANSWER their question briefly THEN
ADD your key point

“The answer to that is yes – but more importantly...”

“It’s too early to be sure about that - but don’t forget there’s another issue to consider...”

Getting Your Message Across

3. SEIZE THE INITIATIVE

(grab hold of the interview and make your key point)

“But what that ignores is...”

“Underlying/behind all this is...”

“I prefer to approach it from a different angle...”

Getting Your Message Across

4. CLEAR THE DECKS




(appear to address the question – but then make your key point)

“That’s one way of looking at it...” “I’ve heard that criticism...”

“I can see where you’re coming from with that question...”

Getting Your Message Across


5. GUARANTEES

-  Be very careful to avoid being trapped when asked to give a guarantee.
-  Not possible to guarantee that something will never happen again.
-  But you can guarantee effort, professionalism, commitment &tc.

Getting Your Message Across

6. CAN YOU RULE IT OUT?


 Another favourite trap.

 Keep a twinkle in your eye and avoid ruling anything in or out.

“You wouldn't expect me to at this stage...”

Getting Your Message Across

7. PLAN ANY ADMISSIONS

 They enhance credibility. But they must be managed and planned – not made on the run.