

CHANGING THE FACE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MBE[®]

MINORITY BUSINESS ENTREPRENEUR

30th ANNIVERSARY

30th Anniversary
**SUPPLIER
SPOTLIGHT:**
Blade, Inc.

**STATE OF
THE STATE:**
*Greater
New
England*

**ASIAN HERITAGE ISSUE
ENERGY, OIL & GAS FOCUS**

March/April 2015
www.mbemag.com
Volume 32 Number 2 | \$5.00

Corporate
STRATEGIES
Global
CONNECTIONS
Diversity &
INCLUSION

REAL TALK



PIONEERING SPIRIT
Gary Stiffler
CEO, The Matlet Group

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Minority Business Entrepreneur
P.O. Box 15685
North Hollywood, CA 91615-9114

PPSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Richmond, VA
Permit No. 930

It's a Real-Time World

By Michele Ruiz

One person can publish a tweet. Hundreds of people can share it. And out of nowhere, tens of thousands can join a conversation. If there is a crisis it can become a firestorm in minutes.

In today's technologically connected world, the speed of information flow is dramatically accelerated, altering the rules of crisis communications. As a former TV journalist, I can tell you that social media has radically changed the so-called news cycle to the point that *there is no news cycle*. It is a real-time world.

This is a paradigm shift of critical importance to all industries, but especially the oil and gas, energy, and utility sectors, which experience high rates of crises.

While technology has changed how people communicate and receive information, this hasn't yet affected the communication practices of the C-suite at major corporations. Many are still relying on old processes based on traditional media.

In working with Fortune 500 companies including Tier 1 businesses in the oil and gas industries, we've found that using an outdated approach in response to a major crisis poses a significant risk not only to a company's reputation, but also its bottom line. In the first couple of hours of a crisis, it's not uncommon for companies to:

- Wait for all the facts to come in;
- Get the PR team to brainstorm ideas on the best 'spin' for the story;
- Run key messages by lawyers and the senior management team; and
- Make the decision to respond or not respond to media inquiries.

By the time senior leaders go through these exercises, the company has lost the opportunity to get out in front of the media and effectively control the message during that first golden hour. Now in reactive mode, it must answer to a slew of outsiders who have already been telling and sharing the story in 140 characters (or less), and influencing public opinion. Many companies have learned the hard way that a picture or a meme and a

hashtag can cost them far more than their reputations.

Social media can be a company's most impactful communication tool during a major emergency, but it requires a real-time mindset up and down the corporate ladder. An effective crisis communications strategy needs to incorporate social media, as well as the following:

1. A shortened chain of command that provides quick approvals on initial communications; and
2. Pre-approved statements that can be modified for the situation at hand.

Early on, these messages should:

- ✓ Acknowledge what happened;
- ✓ Confirm that people are your priority;
- ✓ Convey that the right people and teams are activated (if you have teams onsite, provide images/video of them doing what they can to solve problems);
- ✓ Show empathy and concern, acknowledging that you know people are upset and angry;
- ✓ Speak truthfully and sincerely, even if all the details aren't yet known;
- ✓ Provide reassurance that the company is handling the situation and will provide timely updates;
- ✓ Be pushed out on social media channels for direct communication to your audiences.

Managing a crisis is never easy, but by being prepared to use social media to your advantage, you can help mitigate serious reputational damage. If handled well, you might even engender some goodwill in the midst of a firestorm. ◆

Michele Ruiz is CEO and chief strategist of **Ruiz Strategies**, and was previously an award-winning television news anchor. **Ruiz Strategies** is a strategic communications firm and Tier 1 M/WBE supplier to the oil and gas industries and Fortune 500 companies.

