

The background of the entire page is a dark, moody photograph of a stormy night sky. Multiple bright, jagged lightning bolts are visible, striking down from the clouds. In the lower portion of the image, the dark silhouette of a hill or castle is visible against the horizon. A large, semi-transparent dark triangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, pointing towards the bottom right corner.

# **CRISIS COMMS: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE**

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# CREATING A FULL CRISIS COMMS PLAN

Use this simple guide to help kickstart your crisis comms plan.

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From prepping for minor inconveniences to tackling major issues, we'll show you how to expect the unexpected.

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- Amy Simpson, Co-Founder  
of Yours Sincerely



What would you consider a crisis? What would your consumers consider a problem? How about your company stakeholders? Have you considered these issues in detail?

A common misconception among businesses is that they'll never experience a crisis at a level that requires a specific plan - this is a risky approach to take. Crises can take many forms, from data breaches and workplace accidents to employee wrongdoing and natural disasters. Each of these incidents can cause more damage to your reputation than you could possibly imagine - regardless of your business' size.

We live by the mantra that it's always better to be prepared. But where do you start?

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# SEVEN STEPS TO START A CRISIS COMMS PLAN

It might seem like a daunting activity to set up a crisis comms plan. From considering potential crises that might occur to choosing the best people to handle the job, there is a lot to review - and a lot at stake.

At Yours Sincerely, we work through the following structure to ensure that you've covered all bases and eventualities when creating a crisis communications strategy:

- 1 Procedural guidelines:** We'd suggest a time-sensitive, step-by-step guide so that everyone across the business knows how to act when a crisis first breaks. Start by creating an organisation chart (a bit like a family tree) to show everyone who will be the first port of call, who else will be in the internal 'crisis circle' (i.e. on the front line tackling the crisis) and who will be delegated each task. Take a look at our template organisation chart below to get you started.
- 2 Scenario plans:** We recommend creating a plan for as many scenarios as possible and working out an appropriate response for each. Once completed, share these scenarios with your crisis circle to make them aware of what should be done and what their role will be in the situation.
- 3 Template statements:** It's worth considering advance media statements for your possible scenarios - saving valuable time when you may not have much of it. Media statements should come from key spokespeople in the company, whose comment holds gravitas, meaning they're more likely to get picked up by the press.

Remember: tone of voice is just as important as the content itself. The statement should be direct and forward-looking but be sure to apologise and show that you've found, or you're finding, a solution to the problem. Have a '**Media Q&A**' with your crisis circle - what could the media ask? How would you respond?

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**Crisis assessment:** When these first steps are complete, you will have a full set of materials that you could form into a spreadsheet, training session or a list of crises according to the seriousness of impact to support your crisis assessment.

When a crisis hits, it's vital to have a team on hand to determine what level of crisis this is, and what the appropriate response needs to be. Bring together your crisis circle, refer back to your crisis assessment and adapt the template media materials to best fit the circumstances.

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**Key Messages:** Working with a comms agency that understands your messaging inside and out, will help you decide how to convey and emphasise key messages wherever possible.

They will also figure out how best to communicate your key messages to, not just press, but your customers. For example, you might need a banner at the top of your webpage to notify people of a problem or perhaps an email to tell customers you're fixing the issue as quickly as possible.

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**Internal comms:** In an external-facing crisis, it's easy to forget about what your own team is saying. Make sure all staff know what they can and can't say. It's especially important to consider employees that answer the phones.

These teams need to be aware of what they should say, even if it's just a holding response or if they need to pass the journalist/customer through to the correct spokesperson.

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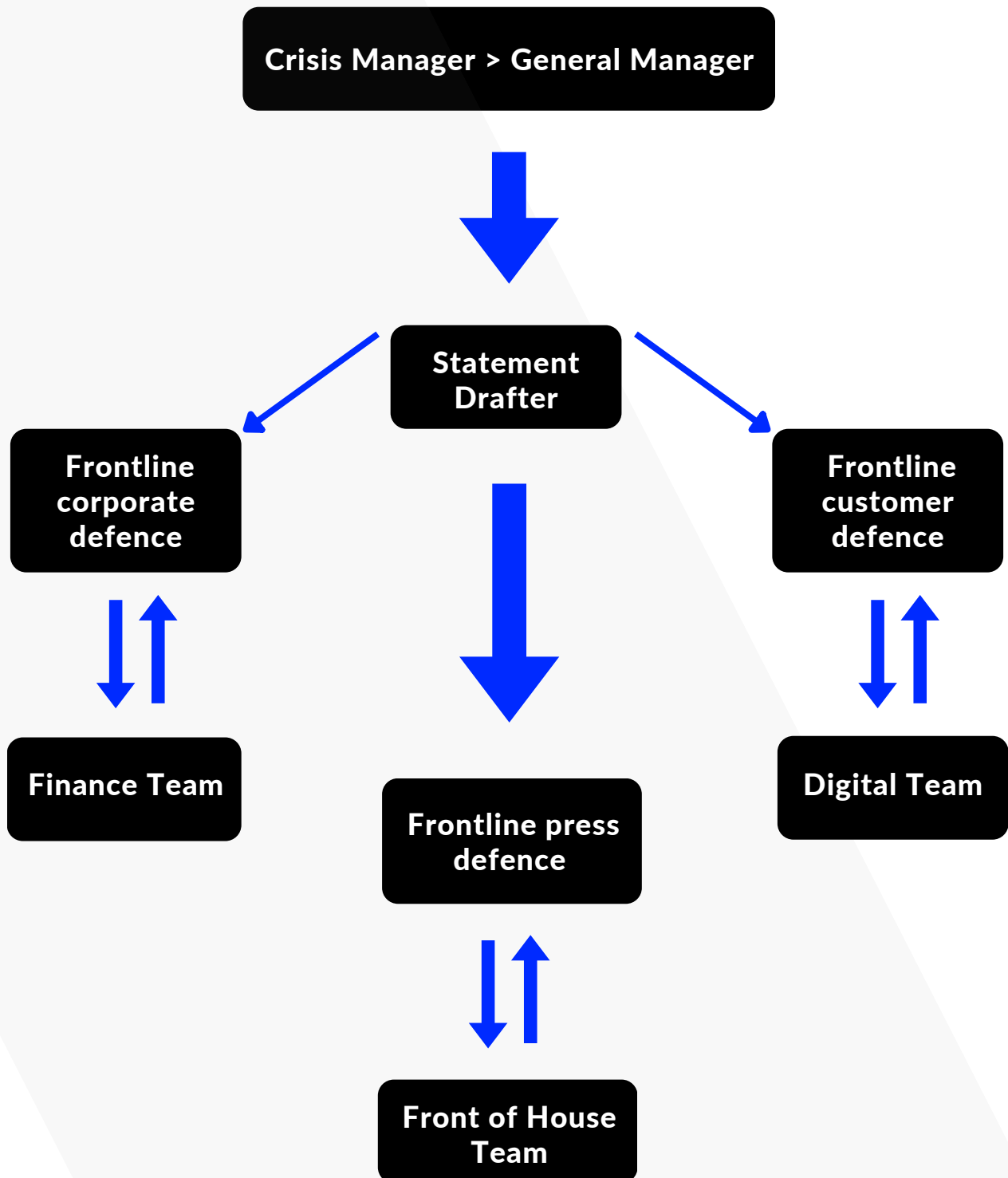
**Proactive media monitoring:** In today's digital age, the vast majority of crises will originate and play out on social media channels, so that will often be where you'll see initial ripples. Make sure your teams or comms agency understands that active social monitoring should be a key part of any organisation's communications strategy - and is the essential ingredient to detecting a crisis before it blows out of proportion. With that said, how you communicate on social media will be different to how you speak to the press. Be sure to bear this in mind when crafting your responses.

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# ORGANISATION CHART TEMPLATE



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# THE THREE GOLDEN RULES

By this point you might be feeling a little overwhelmed with the amount of information that goes into a crisis comms plan. That's completely normal! We are tackling the almost impossible task of planning for events that have not happened or might not ever happen - but it's an important job nonetheless.

However, if you are feeling overwhelmed, we would ask that you simply take away these Three Golden Rules:

- 1 Keep to the facts:** It's natural to question how a crisis occurred, but this is not the time to misconstrue, point fingers or find a loophole. These things happen, that's what a crisis comms plan is for and if you lie or omit the truth now, you will only make the situation worse.
- 2 Keep your crisis circle small:** All hands on deck is really not the scenario you want in these circumstances. Bring in the people who are needed, keep communicating with those outside of the crisis circle, and then work together to solve the problem.
- 3 Keep calm:** It can be so easy to lose your head in times of crisis. But you have a plan - you have a team - you can solve this problem. To dust off an old chestnut - "Keep calm and carry on."



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# WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

This guide has hopefully helped you feel a little more prepared to create and use your crisis comms plan. You've got the keys to set-up potential scenarios, get the right team on board and align your messaging for whatever might come your way. But if you still need a helping hand, we are always here to chat.

At Yours Sincerely, we're experienced in running crisis comms for businesses of all shapes and sizes. We know how it can feel to have the rug pulled from underneath you, so we'll work with you to get your business back on its feet.

For additional guidance on crafting your plan or to have a team you can count on in a crisis, get in touch with us today.

**NEED HELP PLANNING  
YOUR CRISIS  
COMMUNICATIONS?**

**GET IN TOUCH**



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HELP YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS HERE**

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