Assignment 1, Lesson 2

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Analysis of Pampers and Dry Max Chemical Burn Crisis

As with most crises, the Pampers Dry Max Chemical Burn crisis was ultimately a threat to the organization’s reputation and image. (Coombs, 2014, p. 10) In attempts to defend and repair reputation and put rumors that can quickly and easily transform into a full-blown crisis to rest, the Pampers crisis communication team successfully combined common strategies to develop a solution.

This crisis began soon after Pampers released a modified diaper technology, Dry Max. The diaper modification was added to the diapers consumers had already been using, but suddenly parents claimed on social media that Dry Max was causing rashes, skin irritations, and even chemical burns on their babies. A crisis quickly began to unfold and one of the first things the Pampers communications team needed to consider was that consumers were using social media as the medium to voice their opinions and experiences, creating groups and pages, and their testimonials were going viral. (Coombs, 2014, p. 33) Social media essentially sped up time during this crisis and they had to address it even quicker than any other situation.

Ultimately, the most applicable crisis communication theory used by Pampers in this case is corporate apologia. Apologia, or a concept involving self-defense, essentially defines exactly how Pampers reacted. (Coombs, 2014, p. 8) They did everything in their power to come to a solution by defending themselves and their reputation before the crisis could grow. Within corporate apologia are disassociation strategies, and in this case, Pampers used opinion-knowledge disassociation attempts to solve the crisis. Opinion-knowledge disassociation involves removing connection between the organization and the crisis and using the facts, or knowledge, to help others realize that the organization has no connection to the crisis. (Coombs, 2014, p. 9)

Upon monitoring and coming across disgruntled customers on social media, Pampers immediately took to the facts to distinguish the rumors that their diapers are causing rashes and chemical burns on babies. In an immediate news release, Pampers stated that they investigated and “have found no evidence whatsoever that the reported conditions were in any way caused by materials in our product. Independent physicians, highly respected in the field, have analyzed our data and have confirmed our conclusions.” (Coombs, 2014, p. 35) They presented facts and used that to defend themselves.

The Pampers crisis communications team used the image repair strategy to get ahead of the rumors and tackle the crisis before it got out of hand. More specifically, Pampers used denial, in two forms, to address the issue. Simple denial was used as one of their first strategies by denying that the Dry Max diapers were a direct link to the “chemical burns” and severe diaper rashes parents were describing and that Pampers was not responsible for what consumers were experiencing. (Coombs, 2014, p. 10) Typically denial tends to be an unsuccessful tool during a crisis, but in the Pampers case, they used denial, combined with evidence and third-party endorsements, to determine no crisis existed.

In addition to simple denial, Pampers severed the connection between their organization and the crisis and shifted the blame. Rather than accepting blame and allowing the serious rumors to attack their image and reputation, the crisis communications team made sure to discreetly shift the blame to another group responsible for the origin of the crisis. In the release, they were sure to mention that the rumors spread are “by a small number of parents, some of whom are unhappy that we replaced our older Cruisers and Swaddlers products while others support competitive products and the use of cloth diapers. Some have specifically sought to promote the myth that our product causes ‘chemical burns.’” (Coombs, 2014, p. 35) By connecting the responsibility of the crisis to another group, Pampers was able to disassociate themselves from the issue, protect their image, and use facts to alter the perception of the crisis in their favor.

References

Coombs, W. T. (2014). *Applied Crisis Communication and Crisis Management: Cases and*

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