



**About the Author:**

**Judith Ingleton-Beer, CEO IBA International** was previously the editor of leading UK weekly and monthly business and technology magazines and wrote for the Financial Times and Investors Chronicle before becoming one of the two founders of IBA. At IBA she has overseen long term PR campaigns for many of the world's leading corporations including Acer, Ericsson, Fujitsu Siemens NCR, Nokia, VeriFone and Xerox. In this role she has had more than ample experience in helping clients deal with crises.

## **The Disaster Limitation Rule Book**

**How do you know you have a crisis? Nowadays with 24/7 Internet, it's often when the disaster story hits Twitter and blog fans. The lesson to be learned from the recent raft of crises mis-management is how to avoid them. Judith Ingleton-Beer, CEO of Ingleton-Beer Associates, suggests ways of avoiding mis-management by pre-planning and reacting quickly to contain the damage.**

### **The Disaster Limitation Rule Book**

The cardinal rule in crisis management: assume the worst. Companies often don't realise they have a problem until it hits the media fan – and nowadays, Twitter, bloggers and YouTube beat most lumbering corporations to it. From a disgruntled employee to toxic waste – assume the worst.

Speed is of the essence – it always was but now 24/7 Internet catapults the timings. Remember the three A's: Assume the worst, Act fast – remember the bloggers and the Tweeters act faster than you – and Act from the top.

Here is your action plan – and you have less than 24 hours to do this:

**1: Get the facts. Assume the worst** – who, what, where, when, how...

**2: Decide: Instant Rebuttal or Damage Limitation?**

**The Instant Rebuttal** is an absolute denial that the story is true. Make sure you are right, and remember, journalists often know in general but no-one ever tells them in detail.

If necessary, in the case of an untrue report that is actually damaging to your company, you might need to consult with your lawyers and your PR professionals to obtain a retraction. There are quite specific techniques to obtain the retraction and to retain an ongoing professional relationship with the press concerned. Remember the objective is never to obtain financial damages from an influential publication in your marketplace. A retraction of an untrue story is what you require.

**Damage Limitation – Take it on the chin** – take full responsibility, be empathic to

the victims, if there are any, and their families and be in control by outlining the problem and how they intend to solve it.

**3: Lead from the top** – the ultimate fall guy makes the statements. We need to know you care. It took Toyota months before the founder spoke.

**4: Communicate** – with your staff, with your contact centre (remember, in a crisis, the person that answers the phone is as influential as top management), with your customers and with the media. Craft your message to suit your audience.

**5: Remember, signals speak louder than words** – Tiger Woods, a 'Big Brand' in his own right, hid from the media for days, refused to let police officials talk to him and his wife, not once but THREE times, blamed the media and let the bloggers and Tweeters go wild! The signal? I have something to hide.

So what should he have done? Assume the worst – that all the women involved were going to tell their stories. Admit responsibility – just imagine the sympathy vote he would have had if he had appeared after coming out of hospital in front of the cameras, bruised, battered and scarred from his wife's golf clubbing, and said he was sorry.

**6: Manage that valuable brand that's such an important part of your market capital and business** – remember the Perrier benzene contamination (1990), where, although the product was recalled within a week, an initial communications vacuum was accompanied by attempts to say that there is nothing wrong with benzene. This was followed by confusion and inconsistent messaging among worldwide subsidiaries which prolonged the crisis, and lost Perrier its brand dominance. If only Perrier had launched an entirely new product, benzene free, it might have rescued its tarnished brand.

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**About IBA:**

IBA is a leading specialist one-stop international press relations organisation working directly for clients in the UK, US and Europe with target journalist audiences in the Americas, Europe, Middle East and AsiaPacific. It was set up in 1977 as a division of Special Interest Publications Limited - a leading publisher of business and specialist weekly and monthly publications. For over 30 years IBA has worked at the highest level for leading worldwide organisations such as Siemens, Sage and Xerox as well as with companies in new markets such as Cybit, Clash-Media and 41st Parameter.