



# 5 guidelines to save companies in a crisis situation



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## The scenario

The crisis machine in the contemporary age is in constant turmoil. **The 21st century continues to be hit by world crises of every kind and origin, which with globalisation, even if starting from a small nation, affect all states.** A whirlwind of attacks, economic crises, environmental disasters, epidemics that affect markets, health systems, the environment and crush the souls of society.

In 2001, live television broadcasts burst into our homes, flooding our daily lives with unexpected terror at the beginning of a century that seemed safer than any other. Instead, there has been a succession of moments of tension with the attacks in Madrid in 2004, London in 2005 and the most recent Islamic terrorist acts in France, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain and Spain.

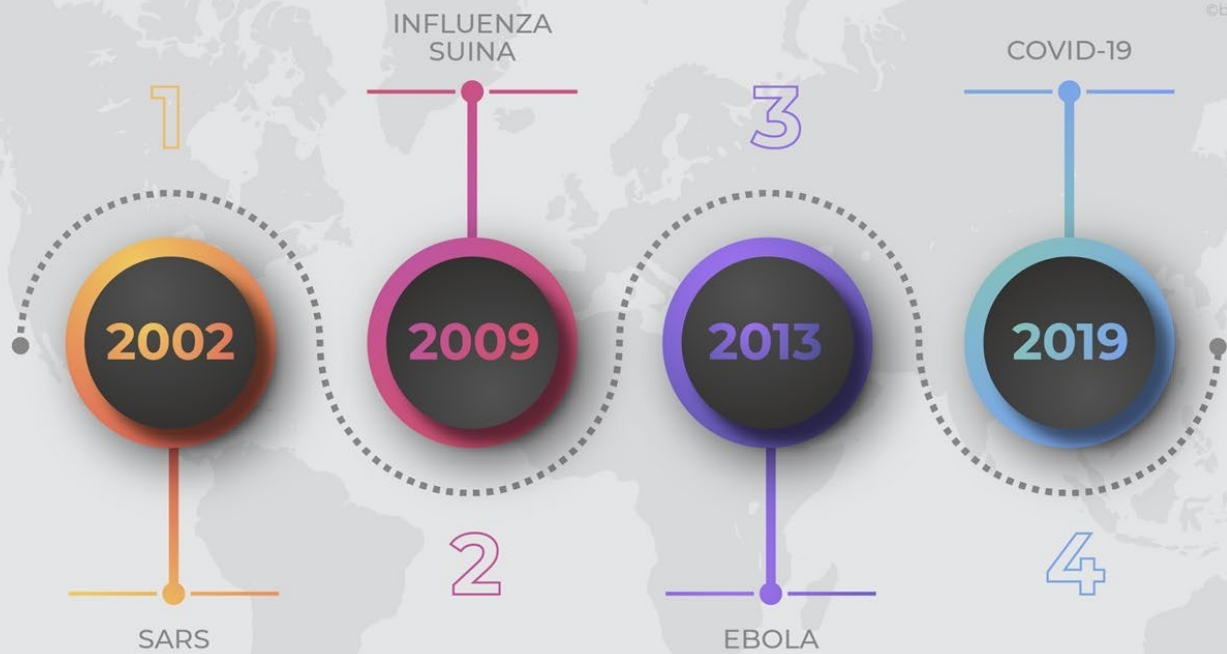
**The first real watershed was the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, a moment when the whole world witnessed one of the worst financial crises in global history.**

In the United States and in all the major economic powers, the stock market collapsed, unemployment rose dramatically and the whole economy fell into the deep recession it is still in today.

### WHAT'S IMPORTANT



In the last decade large companies, multinationals, investment banks and other organisations have not been able to structure effective antibodies to cope with crisis situations. The bond of mutual trust between the various economic actors has become a prerequisite for the economy today: to operate in modern society, a company must enjoy the undisputed consensus of the entire community.



## The scenario

In the midst of the turmoil of these years, there was no shortage of health emergencies. One of the first to appear during 2002-2003, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), was an extremely contagious coronavirus that was contained, causing a total of around 8,000 infections and 774 deaths in 37 countries.

During 2009, starting in Mexico, it was the turn of swine flu, a variant of the influenza virus that emerged from the recombination of human, avian and pig viruses. The epidemic ended the following year after infecting almost seven million people and leading to the death of more than 200,000 people worldwide.

Another emergency in recent years is undoubtedly the Ebola virus, a pathogen of animal origin that causes severe haemorrhagic fever in humans. Although the disease was identified as early as 1976,

following the outbreak of several epidemics, one of the most serious was the one that affected West Africa between 2013 and 2016, infecting a total of 28,000 people and causing more than 11,000 deaths.

Today a new virus, which seemed confined to China, has burst into our lives, into the lives of the entire globe, overwhelming everything: the health system in the first place, then the economy. As the number of cases of COVID-19 increases, towns become ghost towns, schools, businesses and production activities close: it is quarantine time.

It is a profound crisis, sudden in some respects, which pervades and leads to the collapse of health structures and casts a shadow over the economic future of countries and their economic and commercial enterprises because the economy cannot develop where health is lacking.



# Crisis communication

As its etymology, derived from the **Greek** (κρίσις) "**to separate**", indicates, it represents **a transitory moment of choice, of decision marked by a strong perturbation caused by profound changes**. The verb was used in reference to threshing, i.e. the final activity in harvesting wheat, consisting in separating the wheat grain from the straw and chaff, which is the name of the envelope that covers the grain of wheat. **The etymology of the word 'crisis' in the Chinese language is also very interesting, as it is composed of two ideograms: the first "危" meaning problem, and the second "機" meaning opportunity.**

Reflecting, therefore, on the etymology of the word 'crisis', it is also possible to grasp a positive nuance. In fact, a crisis situation is often a moment of reflection and evaluation that can become the necessary condition for improvement, rebirth and the discovery of new personal resources that were previously unknown.

Driven by these semantic analyses, we at **bbrand** have deemed it appropriate to draw up some guidelines that all marketing managers should follow in order not to send their brand into crisis. Because the crisis is dangerous, but it also brings with it opportunities that, if seized, will give you the chance not only to stay afloat, but to emerge from it stronger and better.

Many company managers are wondering how to deal with this phenomenon, which is as unexpected as it is ill-defined in terms of the consequences it will generate.

This is a difficult time for communicators who, faced with a shift in priorities and consumer dynamics, have the task of not losing touch with their people. We are talking about people and not just customers, because the scale of this crisis affects employees as much as the brand's audience.

## KEYWORDS






- #Authenticity
- #Transparency
- #Sharing with stakeholders
- #Reputation building
- #Preparation



*It takes twenty years to  
build a reputation and five  
minutes to destroy it.*

*Warren Buffet*

## The 5 guidelines for business-saving communication

- #1** Disseminate truthful information. 
- #2** Ensuring continuous support. 
- #3** Staying close to customers by investing in digital. 
- #4** Focus on promoting corporate values. 
- #5** Focus on the value of staff. 



## Disseminate truthful information.



Accuracy and clarity of information are fundamental in conveying corporate communications and messages to the outside and inside of the company.

A sincere, authoritative and prudent tone of voice with which to express oneself is necessary in order not to frighten and create anxiety because in times of crisis and catastrophic events people are more sensitive and unclear and direct messages can have devastating effects. Even in the case of global crises, such as the health crises of the last century, among which Covid-19 deserves particular attention, one must not risk spreading panic, but create confidence through constant updates with responsible information. Adopt the right communication methods to reassure, acknowledge the situation and offer concrete solutions.

## Ensuring continuous support.



Clear and transparent communication free of charge and within minutes. To make business continuity felt and to demonstrate responsiveness and transparency to customers at this difficult time you need to be proactive and responsive in responding to incoming questions and requests and to provide as much detail and reassurance as possible. For some service companies it may be useful to have a dedicated FAQ. Sharing important information with customers via email, website, social pages to connect with them by providing timely and transparent updates on the status of projects or your internal emergency management will help reduce complaints and prevent customers from going elsewhere.



## Staying close to customers by investing in digital.



The question that needs to be asked at the start of a communication strategy is: where is our audience, what channels are they on and how? In a situation of upheaval such as the COVID-19 health emergency, for example, this question has become even more fundamental.

The containment measures applied have had an impact on new lifestyles, putting the spotlight on the key role of digital. Companies are grasping the importance of redefining their communication strategy during crises and emergencies, identifying new channels or optimising existing ones. At the time of the COVID-19, there has been a real change in habits and paradigms that has led to the use of an internet connection for all kinds of activities, from shopping to work, training and leisure.

Online is therefore becoming an opportunity to be seized. A channel to be exploited not only in the short term, but as part of a broader project looking to the future. By adapting to this situation, users have sanctioned the definitive affirmation of digitalisation, discovering the network's many potentialities.

## Focus on promoting corporate values.



When crisis and emergency coincide, pausing commercial communication in favour of sharing value messages becomes a must. What are the values that define your company? What is its purpose in the world? This is the time to make emotional communications that establish the company's closeness to the consumer, through concrete initiatives that are the solution to moments of crisis. Tell your story in an essential, credible, responsible and authoritative way to keep the ties with your people and your collaborators and employees strong. A responsible brand recognises that it is time to stop and meditate in order to prepare to start again with energy and awareness.

## Focus on the value of staff.



The time has come to show your staff how important they are to the organisation. Internal communication to staff becomes fundamental and is expressed in alignment, coordination and collaboration, especially in terms of motivation. Hence the importance of introducing platforms that allow the company to communicate with staff on a continuous, daily basis. Another point that should not be underestimated, especially in cases where the crisis has implications for people's health, is the protection of the employees themselves: companies must commit to developing and launching support plans to make employees safe.





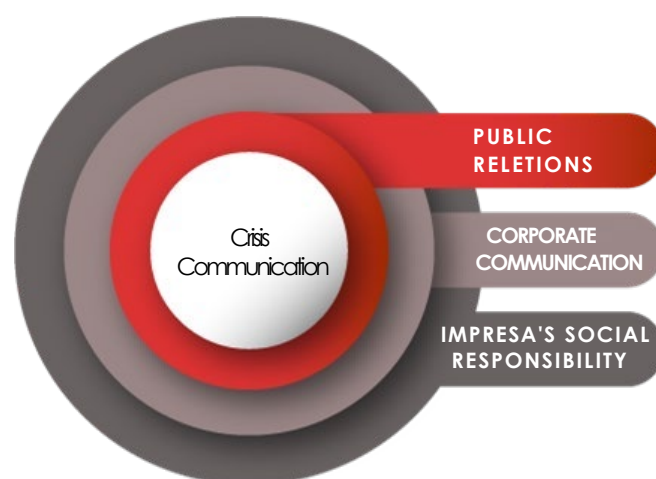
## The bbrand commitment

Good communication can make a real difference now. Certainly the crisis is not an easy condition, but it is also an extraordinary opportunity that gives the possibility to reinvent and evolve. It is in this context of digital rebirth that bbrand is working to reposition its Marketing and Communication services, favouring the authoritativeness of the expertise gained through years of work in the field. THE NEW TEXT STARTS HERE

In particular, bbrand supports its clients in **managing the crisis communication process** (Crisis Management), analysing the evolution of "risk scenarios", identifying the various corporate stakeholders impacted and developing all communication materials. **Crisis management is a medium to long-term process that includes all the activities to be put in place before, during and after a critical event, to protect an organisation from threats or to reduce their negative impact.**

In Italy there are still few companies that are structured on these aspects and sensitive to the issue of crisis management. There is often a tendency to try to repair the damage when it has already been committed, and this entails very high costs for the company, as well as damaging the reputation index of companies, which today is the most valuable intangible asset. As the Cluetrain Manifesto pointed out long ago, "**markets have become conversations, and companies must understand that the time for monologues is over**".

This means that it is important to prepare in peacetime, continuing to simulate critical scenarios until you are ready to deal with any kind of potential reputational problem.



For this reason, we help companies **to continuously forecast possible critical scenarios, even before the crisis erupts, with real simulations to identify possible vulnerable areas. Crisis communication must always be forward-looking: change management measures and the rethinking of organisational processes are therefore seen as substantial, giving the organisation the opportunity to create a new story to communicate.**



## Services

Crisis management is "fluid" by definition, so it cannot be broken down into completely rigid patterns. It requires a detailed knowledge of the technical mechanisms of management, a deep awareness of the variables in the field, both environmental and human, but also a good deal of creativity and the ability to improvise. Like military strategy, it is a technique, not a science. As with military strategy, it is a technique, not a science. Inspired by both these and these guidelines, bbrand has developed a set of services to help companies facing a crisis situation.



### **Crisis management plan:**

Creation of an integrated corporate crisis management plan that manages to modulate the different communication tools (internal and external) according to the stakeholders involved, defining the crisis storyline, timing and communication approach in a targeted manner.



### **Drafting of communication materials:**

stakeholder mapping (stakeholder-matrix) and creation of all necessary communication materials, according to the defined strategy.



### **PR & Media Relations:**

setting up a single control room for the management of public relations and relations with stakeholder "media" (national and local) in line with the strategy defined in the communication plan.



### **Social Media crisis management:**

use of social media as a tool to reach specific target audiences defined in the communication plan, working in full integration with Media Relations.



### **Media, Social Media and Web Monitoring:**

continuous monitoring and reporting to measure the extent of the reputational crisis and the reactions of the different stakeholders on the various platforms. This provides a clear picture when developing and updating the communication strategy.

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“ You may be hiding in a corner, waiting for the return of a normality that no longer exists, but in the new normality opposing change will not help you.

Seth Godin

#### ABOUT BBRAND

bbrand is an innovation company that develops integrated Marketing and Communication services for international companies, mainly B2B, that arrive in Italy without a marketing structure and need a single point of reference for positioning. From the strategic study of the market to business development, identifying the right interlocutors to interact with in the various start-up phases, including communication and PR initiatives, bbrand helps companies generate business opportunities, offering on and off-line communication, content marketing, storytelling, marketing and lead generation services.

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