Crisis Communications for Economic Recovery

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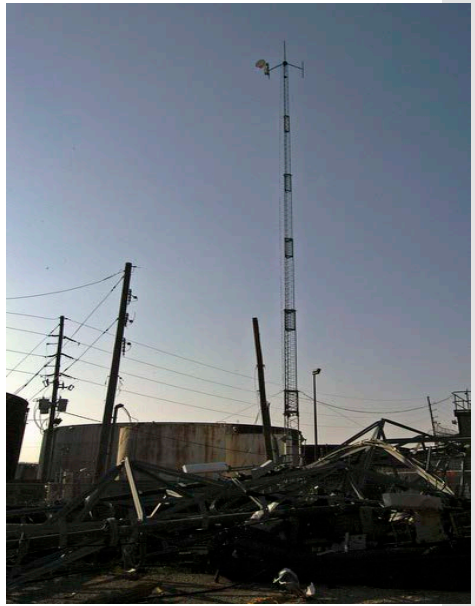
Outline

- Key issues in crisis communication
- Essential steps
- Communication challenges and strategies
- Communicating for economic recovery



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Incorporate business communications into core activities

- Local government leaders will make emergency decisions that have a direct impact on local business:
  - Business re-entry
  - Access to property
  - Approach to power restoration
  - Infrastructure rebuilding
  - Long-term marketing campaign outside the community
- These become part of emergency management and communication plans
- It is important to incorporate business and industry considerations early

Audiences for emergency communications -- different needs

- Residents & workers
- Media
- State & Federal Government
- Visitors
- Volunteer responders

*** Business Community**

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Why communicating with businesses is essential to recovery

- Rumors spread quickly and can lead to slower economic recovery
- Businesses may delay opening or move
- They will attempt to contact you for information
- How you communicate – or don't communicate can have a big impact on how quickly they recover

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Impact: Colorado Forest Fires

- After successive fires, local officials lamented the international publicity -- appearance that the entire state of Colorado was destroyed
- Impression was that Colorado is not a safe place to visit or invest
- A pro-active and positive message was needed

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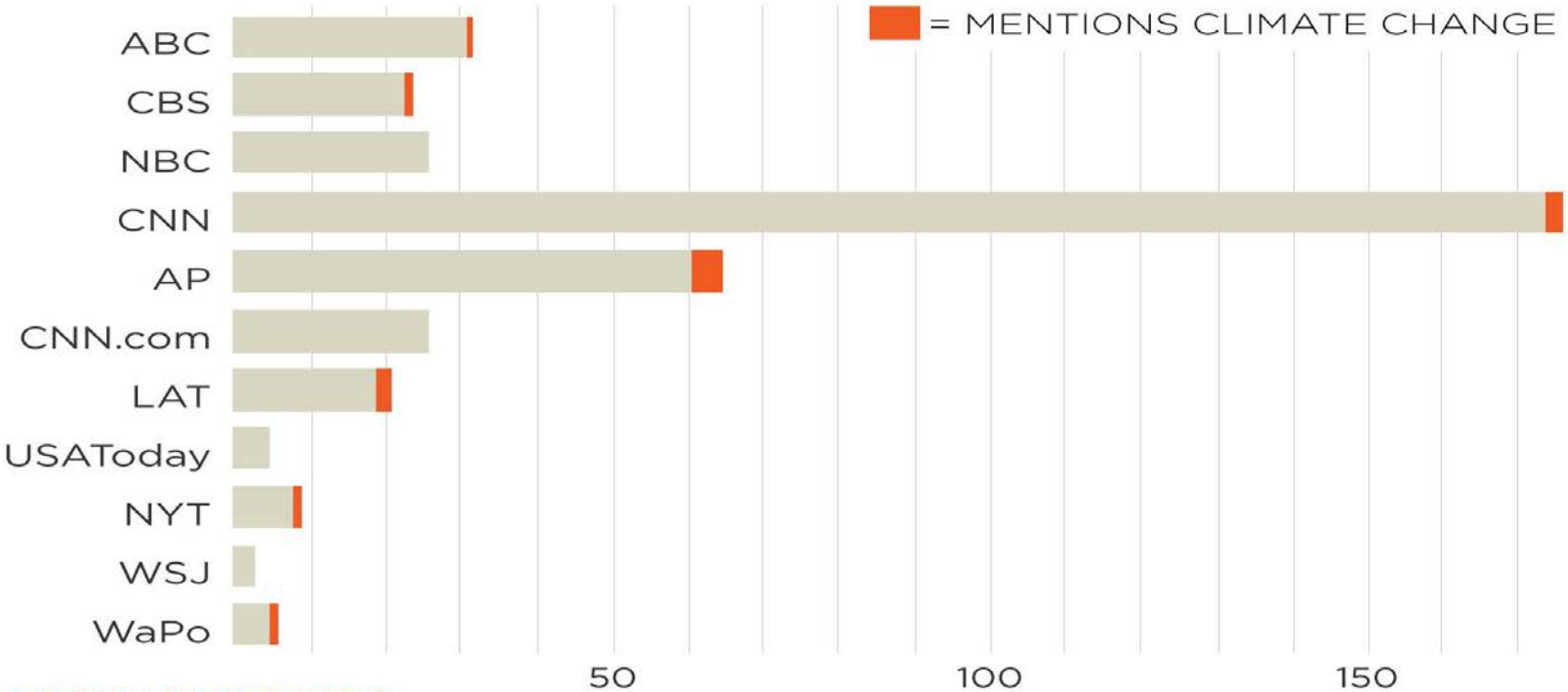
MEDIA COVERAGE OF WILDFIRES

Articles/Segments On Western Wildfires, April 1 - June 30, 2012



MEDIA**MATTERS**
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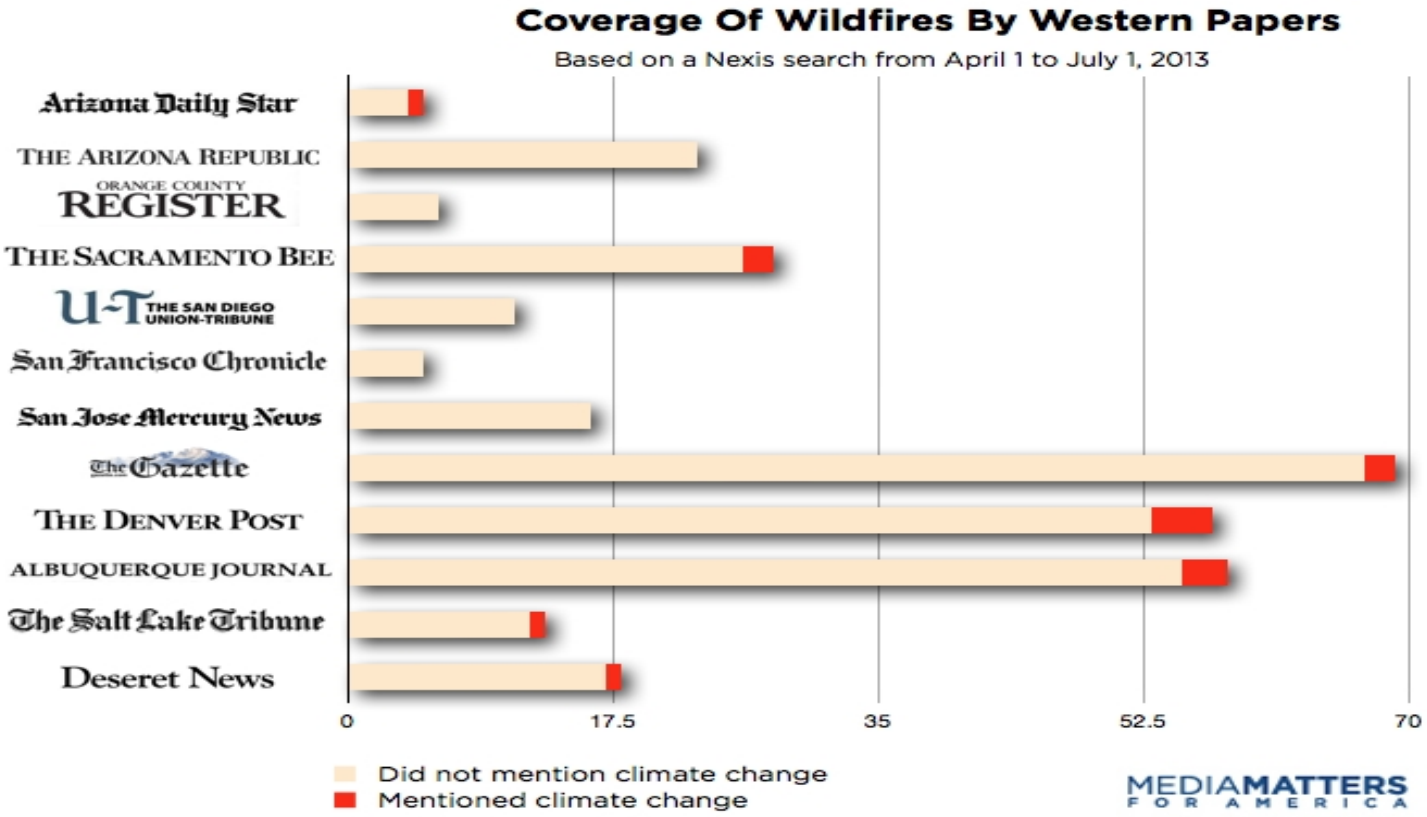

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Hurricane Sandy, New Jersey

- Media stories left the impression that the entire New Jersey Shore was out of business

- Cape May and the Wildwood Boardwalk were unaffected and open for business

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- The state waged a campaign to communicate "open for business" and inspire businesses and the community

The Essential Communication Plan

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Key Steps

- Designate a spokesperson
- Update contacts
- Establish a base
- Gather all facts
- Draft statements in advance of being asked
- Anticipate the tough questions
- Disseminate information widely
- Maintain in contact with businesses

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Emergency business contacts

Determine who you must contact and how to reach them

- Build relationships in advance
- Get home and office contacts for business leaders and media

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Emergency Operations Center

Establish a location to coordinate communications

- Various government depts., state and federal agencies should operate out of one place
- Invite your economic development and business organizations like the Chamber to work in the center

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Providing Timely Information & Dispelling Rumors

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Lead through the crisis

Take time to communicate

- If dangerous weather or other circumstances are imminent, disseminate information widely
- Leaders will often be judged on speed and accuracy of information
- Best Practice: Today elected officials and community leaders are using a wider variety of channels, including social media, email, website, phone recordings, TV and radio

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Dispel Rumors

- Misinformation is harmful to businesses, the economy, and the community following a major disaster
- Providing timely, accurate information to businesses and the media will help to get the economy moving
- Key is timeliness and control
- Make this a team effort

Uniform, credible response

- Consistent and accurate messaging from authorities builds confidence among community residents and business owners
- Enforce organizational roles and procedures for communicating
- Establish your spokesperson

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Prepare statements and spokesman

Brainstorm "What-ifs?"

Be creative but prepare for the worst

- Think through all topics that may come up
- Practice answering toughest questions
- Develop "must air" points

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Best practice

- Establish lead organization in facilitating communication with businesses
  - Coordinate outreach to re-connect with businesses and identify at-risk firms
  - Coordinate post-disaster media strategies
  - Build relationships with and maintain current contacts with partner organizations
  - Identify problems and firms that are at risk

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Roles of EDOs

Economic development organizations, industry associations and Chambers are vital resources to inform local government about business needs

- They will advocate for recovery resources and should help identify gaps

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New Communication Strategies

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Dealing with Media

- High demand for information on deadline
- Reporters compete to deliver news first
- They won't be concerned about economic consequences
- Get ahead of the media for best results
- Spokesperson must be ready or reporters will find other sources

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Do's & Don'ts of Media Interviews

- Don't give exclusives
- "No comment" conveys a message of guilt or fault
- Instead:
  - "Specific details are still unfolding"
  - "The situation is under investigation, so it would be premature to give you a statement. I'll be glad to do so as soon as we know the facts."
- Follow up when you have information
- You can use:
  - "Off the record"
  - "For your background only"

Control & Manage Publicity

- Provide written fact sheet or press release with 24/7 contacts
- Dispel myths, promote your message
- Publicize every success with a press release
- Tailor messages and methods of communicating to target audiences

Media Statements

- Contact information
- Proof read! Credibility will be harmed by poorly written release
- Share everywhere, including organization website, social media, and sent to community partners, PR wire services

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Central Themes in Messages

- Communities must understand how their economy is being affected
- Publicize milestones: recovery successes, businesses returning and re-opening
- Be ready for media cycle; news outlets will revisit disasters at anniversaries
- Consider hiring a PR firm in extreme cases

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Disseminating information

Texting

- Often available even when cellular network is down
- In immediate aftermath, can provide information on where to find safe spaces and resources
  - Know your audience (internal vs. external)
  - Keep it simple and clear
  - Arrange for a mass text messaging service before the crisis

Social Media

- Internet can be accessed when networks are down
- Businesses should use social media to advertise when they are open again
- Some communities engage citizens on social media to track recovery efforts (such as NYC in Superstorm Sandy)

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Social Media

Tips

- Facebook: Make sure to indicate date and time of post, and when next post will be
- Twitter: Tweet latest news, and monitor for trends related to your community (Not always accurate.)
- LinkedIn: Useful during recovery phase to connect with larger organizations for

Social Media

Tips (cont.)

- Blogs: Update during disaster and recovery
- Online message boards: Can offer or seek assistance

Websites

- Central source of information
  - Promote as go-to source
- Develop pre-disaster to be deployed and updated quickly
- Create a business contact database
  - Displaced businesses can enter updated contact information easily via Google Forms

Business Recovery Hotline

Recovery Center & Hotline

- Business Recovery Center: a one-stop location to find services for businesses after a catastrophic event
- Hotline rings to center
- Include SBDCs, SBA loan officers, business counselors, and other stakeholders

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Best Practice: Joplin, Missouri

Example: Joplin's Strategy after a Disaster

- On May 22, 2011, an EF-5 tornado struck
- Joplin utilized social media extensively, posting on Facebook within 1 hour of the tornado to relay initial information and resources

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Best Practice: Joplin, Missouri

- The Joplin Chamber set up and staffed an information hotline to combat misinformation
- Chamber staff answered calls from businesses:
    - Utility restoration
    - Cleanup, business services
    - Rebuilding efforts
    - Financing options
    - Other practical matters important for businesses

Best Practice: Joplin, Missouri

- Joplin chamber rebuilt their website to focus on resources and provide an update on the status of businesses.
  - Created an employer tracking system from emergency grant funds
  - 3 weeks after the tornado, 1100 chamber members and 200+ non-members had been reached

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Case Study: Polk County, FL

Example: Post-Disaster Communication in Polk County, Florida

- Polk County was struck by a series of three hurricanes in 2004/05.
- The Polk County EM office released a daily news flier in English and Spanish on general community recovery

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Case Study: Polk County, Florida

Economic Development Organization's Role in Post-Disaster Communication

- The Central Florida Development Council, in partnership with the county's 13 chambers of commerce, provided information for businesses
- CFDC updated its website on a daily basis to provide updates on recovery information for local businesses

Central Florida Development Council, Inc. of POLK COUNTY, FLORIDA

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Case Study: Polk County, Florida

Updates included:

- list of vacant space for temporary needs
- list of licensed contractors
- business recovery resources such as capital and technical assistance programs

- List of licensed contractors was valuable in avoiding scams
- Utilized hard copy flyers and local media to communicate locations of economic recovery meetings and services available to businesses.

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Essential customers

Communications needs of visitors

- Evacuation plans, safety procedures
- Airport is open and flights are departing
- Alternative accommodations and services
- Which businesses are open
- How you care for visitors will affect reputation and economy for the future

2006 Hawaii earthquake

2015 Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

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Case Study:

Major Factory Closure

Workforce communications

Factory closure – 1,400 in a community of 60,000

- Closure announced Dec. 12 after 23 years of operation
- Set up a "war room" in Mayor's office to facilitate daily communication as crisis progressed. This greatly helped minimize disruptions that occurred:
  - Protest march
  - Potential run on bank
  - Hostage-taking
  - International bad publicity
- Lesson learned: work very closely with your business community during a crisis to keep control.

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In summary:

What businesses need to hear from you

- Information regarding business re-entry
- Essential service providers who can help:
  - Cleanup
  - Financing
  - business counsel
  - rebuilding efforts
- Empathy: how local gov't is advocating for biz needs
- Your plans for mitigation & future economic resilience

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Questions?

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