

NEGATIVE PUBLICITY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

for the company: International Toys

by: Grant Patten, Communications Specialist

for the course: *CCMN 413, Corporate Communications*
Ryerson University, Chang School of Continuing Education

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CCMN 413 – Assignment 6, Negative Publicity, Communications Plan Matrix

Document	Preparer	Audience	Release Time	Format (paper, electronic, both)	Key Message(s), Objective(s)
Briefing note	Grant Patten, Communications Specialist	International Toys' senior management	Immediately	Both	Briefly describe the issue with the Bangladesh bears and provide management with options for action.
Social media strategy	“”	Customers and general public on social media	“”	Electronic, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube	Convey that International Toys is intelligently handling the Bangladesh bears issue. Calm down emotional customers. Turn negative comments into more positive reassurances.
Corporate video script	“”	International Toys' customers and general public	After hearing back from management on briefing note	Electronic, i.e. YouTube	Convey that International Toys is very apologetic for the manufacturing error and the safety risk that it has posed. Show strength on message that only Bangladesh bears from 2012 are defective.
Press release	“”	Journalists, media outlets	“”	Electronic	Get as many media outlets on the side of International Toys as possible. Be apologetic and clear about asking for help in the return of the bears.
Parents' Group letter	“”	Parents' Group	“”	Both	Clearly explain why you won't meet the demands of the Parents' Group and appease them somewhat by complimenting their advocacy work and offering to work with them in some capacity in the future.
Letter to retailers	“”	Retailers	In conjunction with returns policy	“”	Explain the Bangladesh bears issue to retailers and provide directions on how they should handle it.
Returns policy	“”	“”	In conjunction with letter to retailers	“”	Explain to retailers what will be considered acceptable vs. unjustified customer returns re: Bangladesh bears.

BRIEFING NOTE

ISSUE *Addressed to: International Toys' senior management*

The Bangladesh bear has been compromised. The bear's nose can easily detach from the body, posing a health risk to children. The nose could be swallowed or puncture a child's skin because of the pins attached to it.

BACKGROUND

This issue was identified during routine quality testing. 6,300 of the Bangladesh bears were manufactured. 3,900 are still in our warehouse. 2,400 were sent to retail outlets. According to the outlets, about 1,800 of the Bangladesh bears were sold.

There have not been any accidents thus far, but the possibility of a child injuring themselves with a Bangladesh bear is certainly real. A citizen's coalition, *The Parents' Group*, has demanded that we recall *all* of our bears (not just Bangladesh) as a precautionary measure.

DISCUSSION

The good news is that the defective bears are immediately and easily identifiable. The bears are dressed in a vest decorated with the Bangladesh flag and the country of origin label is sewn into the left seam of the bear. The solution to this problem is clear: the bears need to be recalled. But do we recall only the Bangladesh bears or all International Toys bears?

Option 1 is to comply with *The Parents' Group* demands and recall every International Toys bear (from all countries) that has been sold in the past year.

Option 2 is to only recall the Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 that have been sold. The Bangladesh bears that are still in stores will be pulled off the shelves also.

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt **option 2**. It would be too much of a business loss to recall all International Toys bears sold in the past year. In order to offset the criticism that we'll inevitably receive from not adopting option 1, we can appease our target audience and *The Parents' Group* through a variety of communications materials that will be outlined in this negative publicity report.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

“If you walk into the center of a crowded room, and then cover your ears with your hands, people don't stop talking; you only stop hearing what they're already saying.” (Neumann, 2012)

International Toys should implement a social media strategy to handle the defective Bangladesh bear crisis, especially since its target market is young mothers who purchase toys for their children. Young mothers are usually very active on social media. International Toys must become and remain aware of what's being said about the crisis on social media. The company must communicate to its customers what the problem is and how they are trying to solve it. They can initially do this by implementing the three As: (Jones, 2012)

- **Acknowledgement:** don't deny any wrongdoing. Admit that International Toys made a mistake that resulted in the Bangladesh bears becoming unsafe. Explain how this happened because of an error in manufacturing. Explain how to avoid any injuries from a Bangladesh bear (don't touch the nose area, return the bear to original package or wrap it in a plastic bag). Explain what customers should do with the Bangladesh bears (return to store for full refund or exchange)
- **Apology:** apologize profusely for the mistake, but don't apologize for anything other than this *specific* mistake with the Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012. *I.e.*, make it clear that all non-Bangladesh International Toys bears are perfectly safe, as well as any Bangladesh bears manufactured pre-2012
- **Action:** make it clear that the company is taking action to resolve the crisis. CEO Robert McCaul is investigating how the error occurred and will make corrections in the manufacturing process. The Bangladesh bears sold in 2012 are being recalled one-by-one and taken off store shelves

It is recommended that International Toys establishes a presence on certain social media platforms, detailed in the table below:

	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	YouTube
Account	Already have	Initiate	Already have	Initiate
Engagement/tone	Post updates on the defective bears recovery process on the fan page. Post CEO apology	More informal and conversational. Respond directly to comments. Make use of hashtags to	More formal, professional. Engage with professional community here.	Post CEO apology video here. Optimize the video properly with relevant keywords

	video on fan page. Respond to any comments made on the fan page. Don't delete any posts unless they're outright offensive.	follow relevant conversations. Monitor relevant keywords using a third-party tool such as HootSuite. Use TweetDeck to manage Facebook and Twitter accounts simultaneously.	Discussion groups in the toys industry will likely be talking about the crisis. Engage there and reassure colleagues that the crisis is being handled.	and add audio transcription with captions for those who are hearing impaired. Do not disable comments. Respond to selected comments. Only delete those comments that are outright offensive.
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Also, set up a Google Alert on relevant keywords such as “Bangladesh bears” so that the organization is immediately informed once sites with these discussions become indexed on Google. Respond to posts on these sites where appropriate and correct any inaccurate information. International Toys should consider dedicating at least one employee in the organization to full-time monitoring of these channels. Consider hiring a Social Media Specialist on a contract basis until the crisis has been thoroughly resolved.

Key things to track through social media monitoring tools: (Neumann, 2012)

- Organization name, *i.e.*, “International Toys”
- CEO and other high-profile people
- Marquee products or services by name, *i.e.*, “Bangladesh bear(s)”
- Competitors

Post ongoing updates on the aforementioned social media channels and the company website about how the defective bears recovery process is going. Consider even making it into a fun challenge for people on social media, e.g., “729 of the 1,800 Bangladesh bears have been recovered... help us get them all back!” Could offer a gift such as a free product to people who are especially helpful in recovering the defective bears. Also put this “scoreboard” on homepage of website to have an element that can be constantly updated and will likely keep driving traffic to site.

Use **aggregation** – become the “de facto information hub” (Jones, 2012) for the crisis by aggregating the social commentary from various networks together onto International Toys homepage. You can't control the conversation, but at least make sure that the official

responses from the company are prominently placed.

Also use **advocacy** (Jones, 2012) – seek out third-party experts on social media who could help the company, e.g. sympathetic journalists, industry commentators, young mothers who are remaining loyal to International Toys despite the crisis. Give these stakeholders information and help them get their message out to their audience.

Be honest on all social networks. Fault lies with International Toys; don't deny that. But also be clear that the company is only apologizing *specifically* for the Bangladesh bears manufacturing error, not something else. Be confident especially on the message that all non-Bangladesh bears are safe and should not be returned. Whenever the opportunity arises, say how and why this won't happen again.

Find ways to turn negative comments around. Turn the negative into a positive by talking about how the company is intelligently handling the problem. Invite those who seem to want an extended conversation to private message/email an employee for more in-depth discussion. Don't delete negative comments unless they're extremely profane and abusive.

Use a sentiment search engine such as <http://www.sentimentsearch.nl> to estimate public sentiment concerning International Toys. It will be negative at first, but keep engaging regularly on all platforms (Twitter especially) until sentiment starts turning more positive. You can scale down efforts gradually once sentiment starts showing consistent tilt toward positivity (might take a few months).

Once all (or at least most) of the bears have been recovered, publicize the resolution across social media. On the same YouTube account as the apology video, create another video showing the recovered Bangladesh bears back in the International Toys warehouse. You can show employees talking about how relieved they are to have recovered the bears.

Citations:

Jones, N. (2012). <http://www.infosecisland.com/blogview/21565-Nine-Tips-for-Social-Media-Crisis-Response.html>

Neumann, A. (2012). http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-neumann/5-steps-for-crisis-manage_b_1791673.html

CORPORATE VIDEO SCRIPT – CEO APOLOGY

An effective means of dealing with a crisis situation in our information-saturated society is to produce a concise, tactful and heartfelt video. People generally won't read letters anymore, but they will watch videos. A key example of this is the way that JetBlue Airways handled their crisis during an ice storm in 2007 where they held passengers on the tarmac for over ten hours. The JetBlue corporate communications team quickly produced a video with CEO David Neeleman apologizing for the incident and offering concrete steps on how they're going to make sure this never happens again: http://youtu.be/-r_Plg7EAUw



*JetBlue CEO Apology Video,
YouTube*

International Toys must take a similar approach as quickly as possible. Below is the first draft of a script that can be used to produce a crisis response video:

INT. INTERNATIONAL TOYS MAIN OFFICE -- DAY

We see the CEO of International Toys, Robert McCaul, sitting behind his office desk. A banner with the International Toys logo is visible behind him. He looks pensive and somewhat tired. He looks directly into the camera as he speaks.

ROBERT MCCAUL

Dear International Toys customers, I'm Robert McCaul, CEO of International Toys. You may have heard about the recent problem that occurred in the manufacturing process for our Made in Bangladesh bears. The Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 have a defect in which the nose of the bear can easily become detached from the body.

An animation is shown, illustrating the Bangladesh bear and how the nose can become easily detached from the bear.

ROBERT MCCAUL (VOICEOVER)

You know you have a Bangladesh bear if the flag of Bangladesh is sewn onto its vest. You can also check the country of origin label on the left seam of the bear. The sharp pin hooks that attach the nose to the bear's body pose a safety risk. It's also possible that children might swallow the detached nose, as it is quite small. If you have a Bangladesh bear, please return the bear to the store where you purchased it immediately. Also, be careful not to touch the

nose area of the bear and keep it away from children. You will receive a full refund when you return your Bangladesh bear. Or if you'd prefer another bear, you'll receive one at no charge.

The animation ends and the shot returns to Robert McCaul speaking (close-up).

ROBERT MCCAUL

As for why this happened, I really have no excuse for you. We accept full responsibility for this error in our manufacturing process and we are deeply regretful that it happened. I am sorry.

(pause) I pledge to ensure that this never happens again. Once we have received all defective Bangladesh bears, the first step I'll take is to conduct a thorough investigation of our manufacturing process and determine where, exactly, we went wrong. Once the error is identified, I'll make sure that it is corrected and never happens again. We will be accountable for our mistakes.

We cut away from close-up to a mid-shot now.

Now, I must also address a demand that our organization has been receiving from certain interest groups. It has been demanded of us that we recall **all** bears from stores as a "precautionary measure". I consider this to be an excessive and unnecessary demand. If I had *any doubt whatsoever* that any of our non-Bangladesh bears also posed a safety risk, then I would be all for recalling those bears too. But they do **not** pose a safety risk, and so we'll only be recalling the Bangladesh bears. I will even stake my career on it: if any of our non-Bangladesh bears are credibly revealed to also pose a safety risk, then I will resign immediately as CEO of International Toys.

Return to close-up.

International Toys *is* an organization dedicated to creating high quality products. We are as concerned about ensuring the safety of children as anyone else. And that is why we did not hesitate in taking this action of having our Bangladesh bears recalled as soon as we found out about the issue. Once again, I apologize for this mistake and would truly appreciate your timely cooperation in handling this issue by returning any and all Bangladesh bears that you have in your possession. We will keep you informed by continuing to communicate openly about this issue as we move forward.

Slow dissolve to International Toys logo and fade out.

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL TOYS REQUESTS ASSISTANCE IN RECOVERING THE 1,800 DEFECTIVE BANGLADESH BEARS THAT WERE MANUFACTURED AND SOLD IN 2012

(Toronto – November 17, 2012) Through a routine quality testing process, International Toys discovered that a specific plush toy bear that it manufactures – the Bangladesh bear – is defective and can pose a safety risk. An error in the manufacturing process has resulted in the bear's nose becoming easily detachable. The button-sized nose could be swallowed by children. Sharp pin hooks also become exposed on the bear, which can cause a puncture wound.

“We are deeply regretful that one of our products is posing a safety risk,” said Robert McCaul, CEO of International Toys, “we always work hard to deliver the highest quality toys and we take our quality control process very seriously. That's why we identified this issue through our own internal processes as quickly as we did. And it's currently our number one priority as a company to recover all the defective bears.”

1,800 of the Bangladesh bears were sold in Toronto area stores, but these customers could have been from anywhere in the world (perhaps on vacation). International Toys is therefore requesting the media's help in publicizing this issue. The company also requests help in publicizing the fact that all non-Bangladesh International Toys bears and pre-2012 Bangladesh bears are completely innocuous and do not pose a safety risk whatsoever. Therefore, attempting to return any non-Bangladesh International Toys bears “just to be on the safe side” will be considered an unjustified customer return and denied.

Owners of Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 are requested to immediately return the bear to the store where it was purchased for a full cash refund **or** an exchange for a non-defective International Toys bear. The manufacturing date can be identified by the year on the bear's inseam. Owners are requested to not touch anywhere near the bear's nose while it is in their possession. Ideally, they should return the bear to its original packaging. If that has already been disposed of, they should wrap the bear in a protective plastic bag and return it to the store immediately.

- more -

International Toys is deeply concerned about public safety and wants to ensure that nobody is harmed because of this flaw in their manufacturing process. They are already in the process of making sure that such an error does not occur again. This is the first time in the company's 40-year history that a product has posed a safety risk. International Toys will learn from this mistake and ensure that all future products are 100% safe. They greatly appreciate your cooperation on this initiative to recover the remaining defective bears.

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For more information, please contact:

Grant Patten, MI – Communications Specialist
International Toys Head Office
140 Yonge Street, Suite 342
Toronto, ON M5C 1F4
Tel: (416) 369-1312 x 2311
Email: gpatten@inttoys.com

LETTER TO THE PARENTS' GROUP

Dear Parents' Group,

Thank you for your concern about the recent situation involving defective products in our Bangladesh line of bears. We at International Toys are as concerned about the safety of children as anyone. We are also very aware of the concerns of parents, as young mothers do comprise our primary target market. So we always make sure to pay careful attention to what The Parents' Group has to say.

We greatly respect the advocacy work that The Parents' Group does on a regular basis. Parents need a strong voice to represent their concerns in all markets, and your organization certainly provides that very well. And although we understand why people might feel compelled to return all International Toys products in a difficult time such as this, we are absolutely confident that *only* the Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 pose a safety risk. All other International Toys products are safe, and for that reason we will not be recalling any of our products other than the Bangladesh bears.

Recalling *all* of our bears would simply cripple International Toys as an organization. It would entail a massive financial undertaking from which we likely would not be able to recover. But, rest assured, we *would* do it if we felt that any public safety risk was being posed. But our quality control processes have confirmed that only the Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 pose such a risk. We invite you to view the video from our CEO, Robert McCaul, that has been posted to YouTube. In the video, Robert makes a pledge to resign if any International Toys products other than the Bangladesh bears are revealed to pose a safety risk. We think this proves how serious we are about our commitment to our products.

Again, we thank you for your hard work in parental advocacy and appreciate your concern. We do hope that we can work with The Parents' Group at some point in the future. Our interests are actually aligned in that we are both very committed to fully addressing the concerns of parents. Please let us know if International Toys could do anything to help The Parents' Group moving forward.

Keep up the good work and thanks again,

- International Toys Communications Department

LETTER TO RETAILERS

EMERGENCY SITUATION

TO ALL RETAILERS WHO HAVE PURCHASED INTERNATIONAL TOYS PRODUCTS:

Remove all Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 from your store shelves and online catalogues. The Bangladesh bear is the International Toys product clearly identifiable by the flag of Bangladesh on the bear's vest. International Toys has discovered that the bear's nose can easily detach, posing a safety risk to children especially. Sharp pin hooks become exposed when the bear's nose is detached.

Retailers must also **make a concerted effort to get back the Bangladesh bears that have been sold in 2012.** The provincial government has been informed of this emergency and is supporting this initiative, so it is in your best interests to cooperate. In order to get back the Bangladesh bears, please take the following steps:

- Use your customer database to directly contact any known customers who have purchased a Bangladesh bear in 2012
- For the next two (2) weeks, place clear signage at the front entrance of your store, alerting customers to the danger of recently sold Bangladesh bears. The signage should also request the return of the bear, with promise of refund or exchange
- On the homepage of your store's website, prominently display the same information as in the physical signage described above. Provide clear contact details
- If you have a social media presence, use all channels to clearly communicate the above information

As the retailer, you have a choice of offering a full cash refund for the Bangladesh bear **or** offering to exchange the bear for another International Toys bear. You can reassure the customer that all non-Bangladesh bears from International Toys are completely safe. Please also refer to the attached document on handling unjustified customer returns.

- International Toys Communications Department

RETURNS POLICY

TO: Retailers who sold International Toys' "Bangladesh bears" in 2012

FROM: International Toys Management

DATE: November 23, 2012

RETAILER RETURNS POLICY

(mandated by International Toys with governmental support)

Retailers,

Because of the ongoing public safety crisis caused by faulty manufacturing in the "Bangladesh bear" International Toys product, retailers are ordered to follow certain rules regarding the return of said product. Not following these rules could potentially get retailers into legal trouble, as this initiative has governmental support.

- Accept the return of all Bangladesh bears **manufactured in 2012**. Bangladesh bears can be identified by the flag on the bear's vest or by the inseam. Manufacturing date can be identified by the year on the inseam.
- Destroy all bears with a missing inseam and **deny** refund. If the bear is missing the inseam, manufacturing date cannot be confirmed. But it might still pose a safety risk, so the product must be destroyed.
- **Deny** refund if the bear was manufactured pre-2012.
- Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 do **not** require a receipt with their return.
- The condition of the Bangladesh bear product manufactured in 2012 is irrelevant. Accept the return even if seriously damaged.

Customers returning Bangladesh bears manufactured in 2012 should receive either:

- A full cash refund; or,
- An exchange for a non-Bangladesh International Toys bear

Retailers have the choice of requiring one of these options **or** leaving it up to the customer to decide which one they prefer.

Retailers cannot charge a restocking fee because the bears will not be restocked. They are to be immediately shipped to International Toys at the address provided below.

If a customer attempts to return a non-Bangladesh International Toys bear, **deny** refund and explain to them that all non-Bangladesh International Toys bears are completely safe.

This policy holds **in perpetuity**.

Shipping Address:

ATTN: INTAKE – BANGLADESH BEARS

International Toys Central Warehouse
1314 Sheppard Avenue East
Toronto, ON A5D 1G6