

Module 8

This module will cover:

- How to recognize and identify potential media issues
- Preparing media strategies for dealing with issues
- Action plans for managing a crisis in the media
- Minimizing the negative impact of issues and crises

Issues management and crisis media – what to do when things go wrong

Crises are the sudden events that occasionally disrupt a club, association or organisation at the same time as focusing considerable attention on it – from both the media and important publics. A fire, for example, can be seen, heard, felt and smelled. A stock exchange crisis can be seen, with lists of numbers going up and down and panicked stockbrokers staring earnestly into their computer screens.

Tiger Woods and the public revelation of his indiscretions became an overnight crisis impacting the entire sporting community. [Serena Williams recent outburst](#) created a media crisis for the player (as a brand), the tennis world and all women and men in sport who were forced into taking a stance on the importance of sportsmanship. The Caster Semenya case is another [example](#) of an unanticipated media crisis.

Crises, by their very nature, can not always be averted. But a well handled crisis is soon forgotten. A badly handled crisis can see a name linked to the disaster for decades, as with Exxon Valdez and its disastrous oil spill in Alaska.

Issues are far harder to identify and categorise. Issues management has to do with the subtle world of ideas and attitudes, policy debates and public opinion. Ideas and attitudes sometimes develop so slowly they are hard to notice until their effects bite, in the form of new laws or regulations.

Take the issue of equality – it has been expressed through feminism, multiculturalism and equal opportunity. Australian building codes now require all new buildings be wheelchair accessible and all employers must advertise for the best person for the job, irrespective of sex, age, ethnicity, etc. The object of issues management is to identify the issue early enough to allow a club or association to position itself to deal with the issue in the way it chooses. So anyone that implemented equality of employment opportunities before they were forced to by legislation probably found they had a better profile than if they had been forced to employ less qualified people to meet an externally determined profile.



Identification

Efficient scanning and identification of important issues is partly a methodical extension of good management practice. Management at all levels needs to talk and listen to its board, members and staff and take their views and concerns seriously. All stakeholders - your members, volunteers, coaches, officials, employees, sponsors, local council, lawyers – anyone your club or association has contact with can help scan for and identify issues if dealt with systematically. Media scanning is an important way of identifying issues – in this case media includes websites, facebook, blogs, journals, newsletters, periodicals, radio and television. New media networks enable clubs and organisations to ascertain what people are or aren't saying about them very quickly and easily. By participating in a range of online forums anyone can now scan and identify potential issues prior to them bubbling from the surface to boiling point. It can be done in house or through media monitoring services retained for the purpose. All clubs and organisations can do simple internal media scanning by setting up search engine alerts such as "Google Alerts". Opinion polling - including the analysis of regular polls, the commissioning of one's own poll and the retention of consultants and analysts to monitor all efforts – is often conducted.

Evaluation

Not all concerns raised are fundamentally important. At this stage it is necessary to weigh up the impact on the club or association and the probability of occurrence.

Priorities

Setting these is the most difficult step. It isn't easy to decide that 'Issue A' is more important than 'Issue B'. This is most often the case with social, rather than corporate issues. Priority is usually given to issues that affect today's membership and profitability.

Corporate Response

Some issues call for a action, others for the expression of a position; others simply require continued attention. The action phase is more complex today because there are so many response mechanisms that can be used. Organisations or clubs speaking out is a big change – taking positions on social issues that may be unpopular with the general public.

A [media policy](#) stipulating who is authorised to speak to the media and under what circumstances is a valuable tool for all clubs and associations.

Design and Implement a Strategy

The crucial element to success in issues management is identifying the issues early enough to actually influence the outcome. Most clubs and associations suffer not from lack of information but from mismanagement of the information they have. Convincing them to take corrective action is the key.

Senior management and the board need to support Issues Management activities if they are to succeed.

There are a range of strategies used to manage issues:

- A government relations programme might be needed in the issue of media coverage of women in sport or the Crawford report ([view here](#)).
- A media relations campaign may be required in the case of sponsorship value for athletes such as Torah Bright (Vancouver Winter Olympic gold medallist) increasing female participation in sport.
- Media training of athletes and sports people to help them understand how the media works and how they will interact with them in the event of a media crisis
- A blog may be set up to start conversations on the issue of inappropriate behaviour or drinking and sport; the conversations could lead to an online driven establishment of behavioural codes.
- Engaging in philanthropy may be the answer – think about positive profile building for athletes such as Cathy Freeman or Stephanie Rice after negatively perceived behaviour.
- Activities may need to go further – management may need to be counselled about modifying or ceasing certain practices and processes such as allowing athletes to drink alcohol during the season.

EXERCISE EIGHT: List any potential crises or issues that could affect your PR campaign and the steps you would take to counter these.

Example: [Draft Media Spokespeople Protocols](#)