

## TOP TEN AUDIENCES, MESSAGES AND ONLINE CHANNELS

In today's uncertain economy, health systems across the country are faced with announcing everything from layoffs and hiring freezes to budget cuts and construction delays. If your organization is confronted with announcing negative news, it's important to keep in mind the basics of your crisis communication plan. You have a message you must communicate to your all of your key stakeholders in a way that resonates with each of them.

Each crisis affects each audience differently. Therefore it's important to identify each stakeholder's individual concerns and customize your message to the specific audience you're addressing. You should also keep in mind the many channels you can use to control your message. Standard communication plans typically include press releases and media briefings. But other channels, such as your Web site, intranet and blog, allow you to reach your audience, share your message, and expand on the information you want to present.

Using the unfortunate example of employee layoffs, we've compiled a sample list of audiences, concerns to address and possible online channels that you can use as a framework for your messaging strategy. We hope this example helps with your challenges as you work to communicate what's happening at your organization.

Audiences	Concerns to address (messages)	Online channel ideas
1. Retained Employees and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you decide who to let go?</li> <li>• Is this just the first of a series of layoffs?</li> <li>• Is my job secure?</li> <li>• Who will do the work of those let go?</li> <li>• Will patient care suffer?</li> <li>• How are you taking care of those you let go? After all, they're my friends.</li> </ul>	An intranet is a great place to address ongoing concerns and reassure nervous employees. Consider using a regular CEO blog or an "Ask HR" post. They can be very effective in dealing with the evolving concerns.
2. Laid-off Employees and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you decide who to let go?</li> <li>• Why was I let go?</li> <li>• Is there a severance package?</li> <li>• What resources are available to me to find new employment?</li> <li>• Who will do my work?</li> <li>• Will patient care suffer?</li> <li>• Is there a possibility that I'll be rehired?</li> </ul>	An extranet can be effective to deal with the ongoing concerns of those who were laid off. It's difficult for them to absorb all the information in one sitting, so it's helpful to have a site they can revisit at any time as questions arise.
3. Referring Physicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it still a good idea to refer patients to your hospital?</li> <li>• Who will do the work of those let go?</li> <li>• Will care of my patients suffer?</li> <li>• Are you reducing your focus on certain service lines?</li> </ul>	A combination of email for updates and a physician portal for reference and dialogue can be used to address the questions of your referring physicians. In addition to your usual updates and information, be sure to let them know why they should continue to trust your hospital's services.
4. Physician Recruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it still a good idea to take a job with your hospital?</li> <li>• Are you committed to patient care?</li> <li>• What is the long-term viability of your organization?</li> </ul>	Recruiting new physicians may seem counter-intuitive, but if that's an ongoing concern, use the employment section of your Web site to explain the career opportunities you offer.

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5. Board of Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whose fault is it?</li> <li>• What are you doing to turn this around?</li> <li>• Who will do the work of those let go?</li> <li>• Will patient care suffer?</li> </ul>	<p>Your Board of Directors' extranet is a secure, private place to post all the information your directors will need to manage through this crisis. Use it to post financials, communications plans, timelines, and talking points in case the media approaches them directly.</p>
6. Patients and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it still a good idea to choose your hospital for care?</li> <li>• Who will do the work of those let go?</li> <li>• Will my care suffer?</li> </ul>	<p>Your Web site provides an opportunity to tell your story to patients and their families. Post information to reassure them that your hospital will continue to provide the level of care they've come to expect. In addition, consider a special edition eNewsletter to give them the specific information they want to know.</p>
7. Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it still a good idea to make donations to your hospital?</li> <li>• Are you committed to patient care?</li> <li>• What is the long-term viability of your organization?</li> <li>• What is my money being used for and is it being managed appropriately?</li> </ul>	<p>You need donor support more than ever. Use your Foundation's Web site to explain the situation and reassure nervous donors that your organization, while challenged, is financially sound and worthy of their generosity. Consider adding a message from your CEO if that's not a regular feature on your site. In addition, a special eNewsletter to regular donors is also an effective tactic. Finally, consider the use of social networks to reach out, engage, and get your donor community to encourage one another.</p>
8. Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it still a good idea to choose your hospital for care?</li> <li>• Who will do the work of those let go?</li> <li>• Will patient care suffer?</li> <li>• Are you committed to this community?</li> </ul>	<p>Your public Web site offers the opportunity to talk to the community about the changes and challenges you face. Make sure your CEO (or other appropriate spokesperson) is visible, most effectively through a blog or "Ask the CEO" feature. Be sure to monitor social media to understand and address concerns as they surface.</p>

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9. Vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you slowing your purchases?</li> <li>• Are you slowing your payments?</li> <li>• Will my business suffer as a result?</li> </ul>	<p>Use your vendor extranet to share appropriate information about your financial situation. Especially if you're sourcing through small, locally-owned companies, you want to make sure your messages are timely and consistent. Minimize the risk of causing a local vendor to fail, exacerbating the negative press.</p> <p>In addition, provide talking points to your staff to use when communicating with the vendors that they work with day-to-day to make sure that vendors get a consistent message through all channels.</p>
10. Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the above, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can I personalize this? Are there interviews or photo opportunities with laid off employees or with your executive team?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Make sure you're proactive and timely in addressing the media's concerns. Give them access to the appropriate spokesperson(s). If you're using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or a blog, make sure they've subscribed and are getting the latest and most accurate information directly from you.</p> <p>Most of all, through whatever channel is most appropriate, provide media with a reference site to make sure that they're accurately reflecting your message even when they're unable to reach your spokespeople.</p>