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TO: Executive Addressed

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RE: Insights Into the Disaster Recovery/Business Resumption Process for Corporate Communicators

Disaster recovery and business resumption (DR/BR) are relatively new corporate disciplines still searching for their rightful niche in the spectrum of corporate management. While the primary focus of DR/BR is getting the business up and running following a catastrophic problem, in their present state of development most DR/BR programs tend to be driven by fear of media exposure caused by some operationally-related disaster scenario. Since most disaster recovery technologists come from other corporate disciplines, primarily security, safety, or engineering, their familiarity with corporate visibility is limited by experience and pro-corporate, anti-media biases. But they often have the backing and "juice" to get their way (because they're closer to operations).

Asset protection and preservation are the prime directives for DR/BR, not communications. The business recovery approach tends to:

- Focus on control to the exclusion of other considerations.
- Establish a structured process which tries to control speech:
 - "Let's wait until we have all the facts."
 - "It's not news . . . yet." "Why are they interested in this anyway?"
 - "Change the story . . . go fix it."
 - "We won't talk until the press can get it right."
 - "We don't want 55 stories out there . . . you've got to stop employees from talking."
- Train by simulations driven by media exposure, often ignoring other audiences and stakeholders.

Corporate communications has a key position in the disaster recovery planning process:

- Get on the DR/BR team early and help . . . React/suggest/respond/coach.
- Insist on a scenario-driven response process (disaster recovery is only involved in the most extreme cases of business disruption) that prioritizes all stakeholder needs.
- Develop specific non-operating response scenarios that don't involve business recovery (they'll outnumber by far those that do).
- Insist on co-equal status in the command and control communications scenarios with the incident control manager position in the disaster recovery management structure.

Corporate communications has the responsibility to integrate internal and external communications with DR/BR. Independently operating response activities during disasters or emergencies can mean confusion, conflict, and mistakes. Addressing this issue now will help avoid the difficulty many organizations have experienced in achieving this integration. Why wait until something painful, terrible, or sufficiently embarrassing occurs that forces reassessment and revised approaches.

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