

# TOP 10 TIPS FOR ISSUES MANAGEMENT

By Andrew Griffin

Issues management, like crisis management, has the ultimate goal of protecting reputation through potentially difficult or controversial times. An issue plays out over a longer period, with more sporadic scrutiny, but can be as damaging as a crisis if poorly managed. Some of the most famous case studies of corporate reputation damage - such as Nestlé and infant formula, Shell and Brent Spa, McDonald's and the McLibel case - were issues rather than crises.

Below are ten recommendations for developing corporate best practice in the discipline of issues management.

1. **Don't treat issues management as secondary to crisis management** – The language of issues may be less emotive than that of crises, but the outcome of a badly-managed issue can be as bad as - or worse than - a badly-managed crisis.
2. **Get the categorisation system right** – A list of 100 issues will just confuse people. Break them down into categories that make sense for your organisation.
3. **Prioritise resource, but don't forget the rest** – Any issue, given the right combination of external triggers, can be catapulted quickly from bottom of the list to top.
4. **Don't kill issues management with convoluted systems** – The more time people spend managing the system, the less time they spend managing the issues.
5. **Focus on competence As with crisis management, competence is the key** – If staffed are skilled, confident and empowered, the systems are far more likely to operate well.
6. **Beware the institutionalised issue** – Are there issues in your organisation which have drained resources for years and on which people's jobs depend? There shouldn't be. Good issues management should lead to resolution, not stagnation.
7. **Keep issues management teams tight and empowered** – Yes, get the right people, representing the right functions, round the table... but 30-strong issues management teams will barely manage themselves, let alone the issue.
8. **Control the agenda Don't allow others to set the terms of the debate** – Always manage issues from the front.
9. **Beware of promises you can't keep** – The moment you make a corporate commitment, you will have people monitoring its implementation. This can add fuel to the fire.
10. **Think long term Encourage your organisation to take a stand on long-term issues and prove that it can make a difference** – Courageous companies and leaders can shape the future.

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Andrew has provided strategic advice and training to international clients on a wide range of issues spanning land contamination, corporate restructuring, health scares, boycotts and regulatory non-compliance. He is a regular commentator and lecturer on reputation management and author of the recent book 'New Strategies for Reputation Management'.

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