VOL 65, OCTOBER 2025

TESTING TIMES

Crisis communication strategies and responses in the spotlight

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- SPEAK FREQUENTLY
- FOCUS ON PEOPLE
- REMEMBER SUPPLY CHAINS
- PREPARE
- TEST FOR THE LONG TERM

WHAT HAPPENED?

In September, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) suffered a cyber-attack that disrupted its networks and brought production to a halt. A group have claimed responsibility for the attack and the National Crime Agency is investigating the incident.

The impact of the events has been significant with production unlikely to restart until October and the knock on effect has brought other suppliers to a standstill as well. A professor from Birmingham Business School said there was up to a quarter of a million people in the Jaguar Land Rover supply chain.

Union leaders highlighted concerns about the supply chain staff who were not likely to be afforded the same level of support as the JLR staff. The mayor of the West Midlands and unions called for some form of furlough style scheme that would provide support until things are back to normal. It is estimated the cost to JLR from the prolonged shut down will be into the billions. But the wider implications are being felt by small and medium sized businesses that rely heavily on supplying parts and services to JLR.

The cyber-attack is the latest in a series of high profile incidents that has affected retailers, airlines and businesses. Government at the eleventh hour have suggested that they will be looking to a way of supporting with a loan guarantee and some production should be restarted this week.

What can communication and business learn from the situation?

From the moment the cyber-attack was announced on 2 September, statements from JLR have been brief and have failed to recognise the human impact on many businesses, suppliers and individuals. The early statements that can be found on the JLR website focus on 'immediate action' and that they were 'working at pace' to restart systems. Four days later, they mentioned working with cybersecurity experts and law enforcement and did apologise for the disruption.

Another four days and an update came to say they believed 'some data has been affected' and regulators were being informed. This was eight days after the first message.

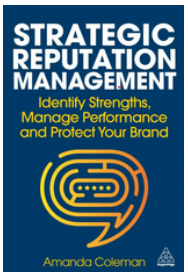
Six days later was the announcement of the cessation of production, which was followed with the 23 September announcement it would continue until October. It talked about working 'around the clock' with experts at the National Cyber Security Centre and law enforcement. At no point have the business provided reassurance with someone in a senior position providing interviews.

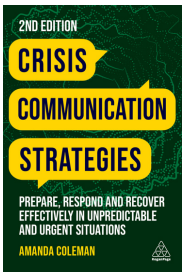
The lack of a visible presence has left the media talking to businesses that have been impacted, suppliers and the union staff. It is notable that in the statements the focus is predominantly on the future of the JLR business with a passing mention of staff. The statements need to have a greater focus on customers, staff and the suppliers who have been or are being affected.

What do we need to remember in this situation?

- Provide a regular flow of information – the information has been slow, limited and with days and weeks between them. A regular flow of updates even when it cannot go into the detail of what is happening behind the scenes will increase confidence in the response.
- Recognise and focus on the impact on people – throughout the incident, the JLR messages have been without empathy and fail to acknowledge the devastating impact that ceasing production has had.
- Understand the wider impact across suppliers and contractors – this has been the most critical element of the situation. JLR staff are being paid but those working for smaller businesses that rely on JLR have no support available.
- Preparation is vital – every business and organisation needs a cyber incident plan, and this includes understanding the communication requirements and how to manage when there is so much that cannot be said.
- Exercise and test the whole organisation response to a cyber-attack – It is clear from recent incidents, that the impact can last for many months and that is what should be put to the test.
- Be visible – having someone speaking about the approach to managing the situation, while avoiding the sensitive data, will elevate the communication responses. This is not just with the media but with stakeholders and suppliers. I hope that this is taking place behind closed doors from JLR to suppliers, retailers and other stakeholders.

New book Strategic Reputation Management published available now.





For more case studies and crisis communication tips get a copy of Crisis Communication Strategies by Amanda Coleman available at book stores and on Amazon.