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# SPARTAN CRUISE LINE

Crisis Communications Plan: COVID-19 Outbreak On The Driftaway

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## COVID-19 Outbreak Aboard the Driftaway Cruise Ship

There are three essential steps we take at the beginning of each crisis event. “Who,” “What,” and “How.” First, we identify the stakeholders that will be included and considered throughout our crisis communications plan. Secondly, we define our message. Lastly, we determine the methods and mediums we will use to communicate to, for, and with our stakeholders. There are benefits and risks to choosing to pursue or avoid to whom and how we share our messages. While transparency and accountability are our end goals. Understanding the nuances of too much or too little information too soon or not quickly enough is a balanced walk towards success or failure.

### **Step One: Identify our stakeholders.**

- Driftaway crew
- Driftaway passengers and their emergency contacts
- Cozumel and Miami port authorities
- Spartan Cruise Line executive team
- Spartan Cruise Line employees and contract/contingent workers
- Spartan Cruise Line shareholders
- Spartan Cruise Line insurance and financial partners, vendors, etc.
- CDC/WHO and local/state health departments
- Media
  - National news entities
  - Local entities at each port
  - Online news entities
  - Trade/business media
- Labor unions
- Port staff and guests
- Other interested publics

While not exhaustive, this initial list of stakeholders allows us to maintain accurate contact information, develop communication channels and processes, and outline our overall strategy.

### **Step 2: Develop our message**

Spartan Cruise Line endeavors to be empathetic and authentic in all communication efforts. As such, our messages will be transparent and grounded in our determination to protect the lives of our passengers and the future of our company. We plan to gather information, check facts and resources, and consider the perspectives of those involved to develop the background

information, current plans of action, and propose next steps for the ship and its passengers, the company and its stakeholders, and the publics who are invested in these circumstances. The following outlines some of our messaging plans.

- Verify facts with captain, medical team, C-suite, and legal counsel.
  - Identify basics metrics of the ship, crew and passengers
- Apologize to those affected for the disruption, inconvenience, and unease caused by the crisis. Reiterating that protecting the health and safety of our passengers and crew is our top priority.
- Share a public narrative of events (to protect the privacy of those involved and protect the company as appropriate)
- Provide information on the Driftaway and Spartan Cruise Line’s current COVID-19 status
  - Advanced preparation for COVID-19 and other contagions aboard the ship
  - Contact tracing of affected families reveals low risk to other passengers
  - Increased cleaning and sanitizing of all common areas for passengers and crew that meets/exceeds local/state health department guidelines and/or CDC guidelines.
  - Appropriate PPE including face coverings (i.e. mask, shield and gaiers) will be provided to all crew
- Release next Steps for the families, for the ship, and for the cruise line.

### **Step 3: Identify our communication channels**

To effectively communicate with our stakeholders and any other interested publics, we have elected to focus on the following communication channels:

- Social media
- News media
- Interviews and prepared statements
- Spartan Cruise Line website (public)
- Spartan Cruise Line internal intranet
- Briefings aboard the Driftaway

## **Crisis Communication Team: 48-hour Plans**

### **Media Relations Manager - Fred Woodhams:**

As the media relations manager, I would spend my first 48 hours developing and finding ways to share our message, and coordinating with the Crisis Communications Team.

First, I would verify basic facts of the situation with the ship's staff and the company's legal counsel, human resources and medical team, and draft a holding statement to provide to news media until more detailed talking points and news releases could be drafted, and share the statement with the social media and internal communications managers for use.

I then would draft talking points to be reviewed by the staff mentioned previously and other relevant subject-matter experts. The talking points would more fully detail the situation for my personal use when speaking with news media and could be used as a backgrounder to bring the spokesperson and other C-suite executives up to speed on the situation and allow them to think through what more questions they may have or expect to receive. We would want to show empathy to those who are sick and the other passengers whose travel plans were affected, and apologize to them for the inconvenience as well as express how the health and safety of our passengers and crew are our top priority. We also would mention how we are following the guidance of medical professionals both within our organization, and at national and international experts, such as the CDC and WHO.

The talking points also would be given to the customer-service staff and used to draft a news release that would include a quote from the identified spokesperson, whom I would work with C-suite staff to identify if the person was not called out already in our crisis communications plan. The release would provide contact information to reach me and the spokesperson. The full release would be shared with the social media manager for use as well as be placed on the company's website, which would be updated to have a dedicated crisis microsite with information for various stakeholders.

In pitching the release and spokesperson, who could be the CEO or the company's chief medical officer, I would ensure they had sufficient time on their calendar, had been fully briefed about the situation and the company's actions and future plans, and reiterate media training points for them. The spokesperson already would have been through media training and would

be familiar with speaking to the media. I would coordinate with the social media manager and the spokesperson about recording a short video statement for use on social media and our microsite.

Depending on media interest, I would work with the communications team to set up and pitch a news conference for the second day with the spokesperson and potentially other subject-matter experts. We would determine whether it was appropriate to have an in-person news event at our Lansing facility or use Zoom or another platform for a virtual news conference due to COVID-19 concerns. We would have already prepared a company fact sheet, updated with items about our efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and speaker bios for inclusion in the media kit along with the news release. I would send the news release along with a pitch to interview the company's spokesperson to national media reporters who cover our cruise line or cover travel or business issues as well as local and regional media in Miami and Lansing, which is included to help reach employees. Media calls would be prioritized in favor of travel media and outlets with the most reach to maximize the amount of people hearing our message.

Finally, I would work with the social media manager to track posts from reporters, media outlets and the general public to see how the coverage was being shaped, and work to correct inaccuracies and refine our talking points further if there was new information or if reporters weren't adequately understanding key points.

### **Social Media Manage: Denise Negrea**

As the social media manager, it is my responsibility to ensure that the social media crisis plan is in place and understood by all team members. It is vital that information is communicated via social media as soon as it is ready to pass along.

Our first step will be to **pause all social media activity** that has been scheduled. Not doing so will cause our crisis response message to be lost and it will cause the company to appear to be ignoring the crisis. Any posts that are not related to the crisis are going to receive backlash and major damage control will need to be accomplished. That is why we will start by putting the brakes on all activity.

Next we will **set up a listening program** to pick up on brand mentions and relevant hashtags. A listening program will need to be set up as soon as possible in order to help us

analyze and monitor public response to the crisis. This will allow us to get ahead of harmful comments and any misinformation that may come about. The quicker we put out information and get ahead of what may already be brewing on social media the easier it will be to come out of the crisis.

**A social media crisis team will then be put into action.** This team will consist of a manager, strategists, creatives, coordinators and analysts. This team will be put into place to work together to create and implement a communications strategy across all social media channels. The analysts will interpret the data from the social listening program in order to inform next steps in communication for the strategists, creatives. The coordinators will also perform social listening and will be responsible for implementing the messages and responding to comments and messages. The manager will ensure the team is on track and will be the liaison between the social media crisis team and the company executives and media relations manager. Ensure contact information for crisis team is up to date

Before going to work on the social media crisis response, we must **ensure that we have the most up-to-date contact information** or all individuals on the crisis team. This will ensure that we do not waste time trying to get a hold of a team member when time is of the essence. Publish a statement

**The statement** that is developed in response to the crisis **will be modified for social media before being published** in order for the message to be easily picked up on and shared. The more it is shared the more the information can be spread to audiences beyond our direct reach. Comments to the initial statement will be closely monitored and concerns will be promptly responded to with the input of the social media manager and strategists. Ensure a communication plan for future updates

When new communications come down from the executives and through the crisis communication team, **there is a plan in place for how and when communications will be received.** After the initial statement is published to social media, this plan allows us to inform the public of how soon the next update will be published. It also allows the social media crisis team to manage their time and have an idea of what to expect.

**Keywords and hashtags that pertain to the crisis and the company will be monitored and analyzed through the social listening program.** This will help us respond to misinformation, concerns and will allow us to understand the public's sentiment towards the crisis. It will also allow us to see what other crisis may lie ahead based on social media comments and activities. Keywords such as the name of the company, the executives, the name of the ship, the location of the ship, urls to news articles and the cruise line's webpage as well as industry-related words pertaining to cruising.

Incorporate escalation flowchart for determining issue severity as they arise

When social media activities that are monitored become problematic, there is an **escalation chart** to help move the issue along to someone who is more able to appropriately handle the issue. This turnaround time for responding to an issue should be no more than 24 hours. Depending on the subject matter at hand, the flowchart will help the coordinator decide who to pass the issue along to. It may go to the strategist, to the manager or to the internal communications director if it is a matter pertaining to someone inside the organization.

**Director of Internal Communication - Megan Sager:**

As Director of Internal Communication, I am responsible for communicating with all employees, including salary, wage, (onboard crew), and contract/contingent workers on assignment with Spartan Cruise Line. Internal communication is an essential link between executive leadership for the business, Crisis Communication Team (CCT), the corporate incident support team, medical staff and employees at all levels and locations of the organization. All messages will be aligned and approved by executive leadership and the CCT before being shared with employees.

First 48-hours goals include:

- Coordinating with the corporate incident support team and medical team, both onboard and ashore, to get up-to-date information on what is happening on the ship;
- Determine information that needs to be shared with onboard crew immediately;
- Creating and sending a message to all crew on Driftaway ship with more detailed information about situation;
  - Cannot dock in Cozumel, working to return to Miami;

- What should they do to protect themselves;
  - If you feel ill, stay in your cabin, contact your supervisor and medical and do NOT report for work;
- Increased cleaning and sanitizing of all common areas for passengers and crew that meets/exceeds local/state health department guidelines and/or CDC guidelines.
- Appropriate PPE including face coverings (i.e. mask, shield or gaiters) will be provided to all crew;
- Dynamic situation and will report when there is new information;
- Message to all salary/wage/contract/contingent workers about situation;
- Activate a COVID-19 resource site. It will provide information from the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) and also includes relevant company policies and communications.

**Community and Stakeholder Relations Manager - Amanda Jones:**

As the Community and Stakeholder Relations Manager, it is my duty to ensure that our stakeholders have access to the most up-to-date information about the non-media organizational influencers involved in this crisis. These include the Captain and crew of the Driftaway, the Port Authorities in Cozumel, Miami, and other nearby locations that may be affected by the ship's course, the CDC, WHO, and other health departments, as well as the Spartan Cruise Line's highest executives and shareholders. In order to do my job effectively, I will need to gather and share the reports of these agencies to and from each other as well as inform and confer with the other members of the Crisis Communications Team (CCT) about current and next steps, decisions, and reactions from these entities.

In the first 48 hours of this crisis my goals include:

- Collaborating with other members of the CCT to share information, resources, and provide organizational expertise and perspective to the crisis communication plan and execution.
- Confirming where the Driftaway is headed, her course, and when she will arrive.



- Cozumel authorities have declined to allow the Driftaway to dock, Miami will allow an offshore anchor.
- Sharing all guidance from the CDC, WHO, and other health organizations about how to protect from COVID-19 and care for those infected and in quarantine. Additionally, communicating required information from the Driftaway/Spartan Cruise Line to those organizations.
  - CDC working on virus containment plan in Miami.
  - Driftaway to share contact tracing footage and signed affidavits from passengers.
- Fielding questions and feedback from Spartan Cruise Line leadership and shareholders. Fostering two-way communication with updates and reports between the shareholders and other members of the CCT.
  - Follow up with customer service and legal counsel about the anonymous caller.
  - Draft outline of communication to SL leadership and shareholders about the impacts of this crisis.
- Connecting with local organizations (municipal, private sector, non-profit) in Miami to create structures for the support of the Driftaway.
- Establishing appropriate and required channels of information with Spartan Cruise Line's various partners and vendors regarding matters of insurance, compliance, finance, strategic planning, etc. and connecting them with the appropriate counterparts within our organization.

## **Closing**

Within the first 48 hours of the announcement of a COVID-19 outbreak on the Driftaway, our Crisis Communications Team communicated with a variety of stakeholders through mediums that guaranteed they would have immediate access to accurate information. Showing empathy and embracing authenticity we created content and information that protected both the privacy and the health of all aboard the Driftaway. We were able to navigate our stakeholders through the beginning stages of this crisis while allowing the crew, medical team, and other leaders at Spartan Cruise Lines to do their jobs effectively.