

ACCIDENT AT STUDÉNKA

/Change & Crisis communication/

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Construction company ODS - Dopravní stavby Ostrava, a.s. was a main supplier undertaking the general repair of a road bridge. During the handling of the bridge, performed by a sub supplier, the bridge construction collapsed on to the rails, directly in front of an oncoming international express train. Eight people died in the subsequent accident with dozens badly injured. It was thus classified as one of the worst railroad disasters in the history of the Czech Republic.

Immediately after the accident, the agency was addressed by the construction company to represent it in all communication with the media and public. The goal was to create an official information source, calm down the media and excited public opinion, create an ad hoc service for Czech and foreign media and minimize the damage to the client's reputation.

The agency succeeded in rectifying the primarily negative publicity and kept the client's media image on a more or less neutral level. The media publicity surrounding the case has decreased in a relatively short time span to a small amount of articles and the client has been presented only as a construction supplier.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM / OPPORTUNITY

The railroad tragedy could have seriously damaged the long-term reputation of the client. Without media representation, journalists would have only worked with unauthorised information and the company would have had zero influence on the interpretation of the information.

Without a professional partner, the media would a priori have looked at the company with suspicion. The journalists would not have had

a contact person to manage reactions without hesitation to new facts.

The goal of the agency was to calm down the media and excited public opinion, take on the role of spokesperson for the construction company, create an information service for Czech and foreign media and mainly **minimize damage to the client's reputation.**

RESEARCH

Every day, detailed media monitoring was performed. This was subjected to content analysis to determine recommendations regarding further communication or proposals for corrections.

PLANNING

The crisis communication rested on four basic pillars:

- **Quick reaction**
Immediately after the accident, it was necessary to proactively inform about the eventuated situation, calm down emotions, express regret and show that the client had not given up on openness, responsibility and interest in discovering the facts that preceded the accident. Strategic steps:
 - quick situation analysis and publication of first press release
 - endorsement of the moral responsibility
 - endorsement of a share of financial aid for survivors and injured people
 - announcement of the company's intention to perform its own investigation
 - proactive, open communication with journalists
 - preparation of an information telephone line

- **Protection against speculation**

This phase rested in the communication of a non-confrontational description of the event. The handling of the bridge construction prior to the accident was performed by a different entity. Therefore, there was a high probability the culprit was not our client. That is why we separated the accident issue from the construction company. The communication related to the accident was purely address to the involved technical problem. In contrast, communication related to the company was associated with the social aspect: helpfulness, openness, realization of financial aid outside the framework of legally required compensation and the conducting of the company's own investigation.

- **Presentation of help – social aspect**

In the next phase, it was necessary to address the survivors and relatives of the injured people and realize the paying out of financial aid:

- establishment of an information line to which people could turn to with an enquiry for help
- sending direct mail to survivors and relatives of the injured people with the intention of gathering legally required data for the financial aid payout

- **Clarification of causes**

Presentation to local journalists of findings from the company's own investigation conducted by independent experts, including the most probable causes of the bridge construction's collapse.

releases was published. Communication was conducted in four languages for Czech, Slovak, Polish and English speaking media. Additionally, the client's web presentation was simultaneously complemented.

In relation to the search for the culprit behind the accident, the client commissioned a processing of a detailed technical presentation for the media. It included the internal investigation's finding and the most probable hypothesis of the accident causes.



CAMPAIGN OUTCOMES / MONITORING AND EVALUATION

With appropriately chosen arguments and the separation of the accident issue away from the construction company, **we managed to fence off negative publicity** and keep the media image of the client under the required control. Open, proactive and non-confrontational communication contributed to the **maintenance of the company's good reputation on the regional and national levels**. No accusation has so far been lodged against the client.

The client gained the trust of the bridge work commissioner and has built a new bridge at the place of the accident. We managed to prevent the feared decline in the number of construction commissions for the client.

The successful development of the case in media coverage was evidenced by a very quick decline in the number of media references to it.

Day 1 – 123

Day 2 – 912

Day 3 – 66 (Sunday)

Day 4 – 637

Day 5 – 345

Day 6 – 274

Day 7 – 181

EXECUTION

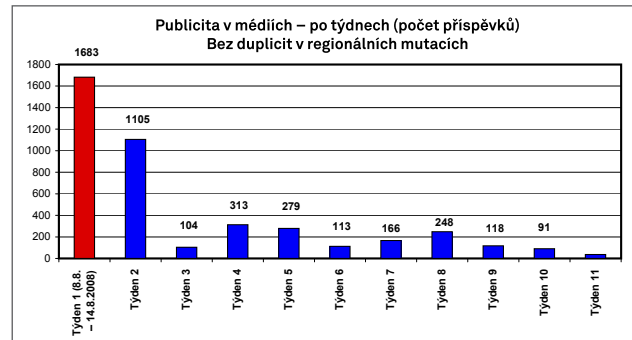
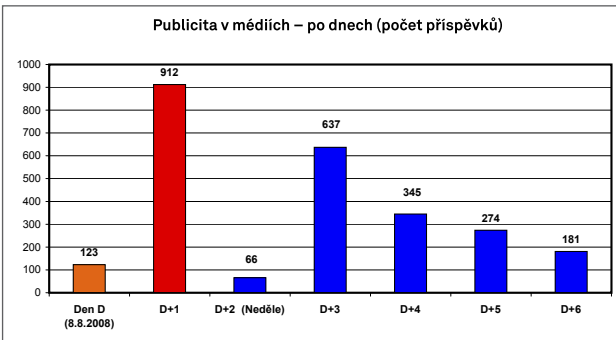
The choice of the corresponding steps and the usage of tools occurred in reaction to the actual situation. Therefore, it was necessary to follow press monitoring in detail and evaluate the questions of journalists and the information they were working with.

Immediately after the tragedy, an improvised press center was established at the place of the accident. On the very first day, a series of press

(1) Titulní strany vybraných médií v prvních vydáních po nehodě



(2) Grafy mediální publicity



(3) Letecký pohled na most před a po nehodě

