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Strategic Crisis Communication Plan

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STRATEGIC CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

BACKGROUND:

Since 1915, White's Boots has been producing the boots of the Pacific Northwest. Founded by Otto White, who learned boot making from his father, who learned it from his father, today White's Boots continues to create custom hand-made boots of the highest quality. Located in downtown Spokane, Washington, White's trademark durability and comfort has solidified their reputation in the Pacific Northwest as the boots to own for any lineman, rancher, or fireman. (Whitesboots.com, n.d) With this history of quality and artisan craftsmanship from the Pacific Northwest to stand on, White's has expanded their reputation and products for the high-end markets in Japan and Europe, offering not just work boots, but lifestyle and fashion boots as well. This has catapulted them onto the international fashion stage as an up-and-coming luxury brand.

SITUATION ANALYSIS:

"Crisis is any threat that, when reported to one or more key constituents disrupts company operations or causes a set of negative outcomes for a company or brand" (Caywood, 2012, p. 401). The recent news article exposing the use of horse-hide leather for some products in the Japan market threatens the White's Boots brand. The report frames White's Boots in a way that suggests this may be counter to the company's brand values and reputation (Specifically targeting "Made in America" and ethical practices). Wilson & Ogden identify that "trust and credibility are hard won and easily lost....no organization can exist without trust from the publics, internal and external, on which survival depends. Trust and credibility are earned, daily, by people and organizations whose words and actions are in harmony" (2019, p. 266). This attack on White's Boots' transparency in ethics and practices could potentially break the trust and credibility that White's Boots has built. In this case, White's Boots has the hard task of responding to negative media accusations without compromising their products.

As White's Boots market has expanded, and their production and demand has increased, White's Boots made the decision to source some of its leather material from France to use specifically in some of the products offered in the Japanese market. This has raised concerns from animal cruelty organizations and other ethics-based organizations, and they have the potential to drive a negative narrative to traditional and social media. Currently, White's Boots does not have control of the narrative, placing the historic and newly emerging reputation of the company at risk. There are many potential ways forward to address the negative media, but the leadership of White's Boots must be particularly careful regarding long term impact as well as both formal and informal media communication.

CORE PROBLEM / OPPORTUNITY

A recent news report exposed White's Boots as using horse-hide, sourced from France, in some of the products they create to meet demands in Japan, resulting in negative response/media from animal cruelty/ ethics based entities putting the long-established values and reputation of the company at risk; However, there is an opportunity for White's Boots to not only emphasize the values of the company but also use this as a campaign to highlight some of the ways White's Boots is exploring and supporting topics of sustainability and environmental responsibility.

WHITE'S BOOTS GOAL

White's Boots goal is to create opportunity and control narratives related to use of French-sourced horsehide by engaging with media, community/concern groups, customers and the public on the topic, while maintaining the White's Boots reputation and values, with no loss of retailers, brand ambassadors or reputation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this plan is to gain control of traditional and social media narratives related to use of French-sourced horsehide while simultaneously maintaining traditional White's Boots reputation and values. Currently, emerging media reports are making it seem as though White's is hiding something negative and acting unethically. These accusations attack the relationships between company and customer, and "Strong, trust-based relationships are crucial to long-term survival" (Wilson & Ogden, 2019). Failure to achieve this goal could place the company in a precarious position resulting in an unrecoverable blow to the lifestyle and fashion lines of products and specifically to the European and Japan markets. The main objective in achieving this goal is to create a narrative demonstrating ethics and transparency in the company's response to and moving forward from these negative reports, ultimately with no loss of retailers, brand ambassadors or reputation and ideally with new opportunities to develop and explore.

Turning this crisis into an opportunity is divided into four distinct areas of focus:

1. Mitigating actions
2. External actions
3. Internal actions
4. Opportunities

Mitigating Actions (M) are defined as actions that are purely responsive to the situation. In general, these actions should be completed as soon as possible to respond to existing situations. Any action related to an emergency or unexpected development needing immediate response would be considered a mitigating action.

External Actions (X) are defined as actions taken with the public, to include customers, media, special interest groups, external stakeholders, and similar. These actions should never be reactive, but instead should be planned and vetted prior to release, although this process should not cause undue delay. All external actions should be **ART**:

- a. Accurate
- b. Reflective of company values
- c. Timely

International Actions (I) are defined as actions to be taken internally to the company. This includes internal company communication, internal policy creation, and similar. In general, these actions are not reactive, and instead are supportive of the external messaging to drive the desired narrative.

Opportunities (O) are the actions and tactics to take in order to turn this crisis into an opportunity. In general, these actions are long term focused, but can be beneficial for media in the short term as "ongoing and future efforts".

Ideally, White's Boots will need to take quick mitigating actions. In order to maximize the available opportunities as the situation evolves, quickly responding to and gaining control of the narrative of public perception is critical to the minimizing of impacts to White's Boots as well as to maximizing opportunities. Using "ART" as a guide to communication practices will be beneficial in keeping the focus on appropriate, rapid response to regain control of messaging.

The proposed solution to responding to this crisis while addressing these four focus areas is detailed below, followed with expanded information on the specific tactics required to meet the stated objectives.

OBJECTIVE AND TACTICS:

Objective: Gain control of the media and public affairs narrative related to the use of French-sourced horsehide in order to display ethics and transparency in options with no loss of retailers, brand ambassadors or reputation.

Focus Areas: Mitigating Actions (M); Internal Actions (I); External Actions (X); Opportunities (O)

Focus/#	Tactic	Measurement	Time-bound	Estimated Cost
M1	Leadership statement to employees regarding situation and initial actions	Meaningful statement made to all employees in person and in writing, success measured in employee response/support	Immediately	No direct cost but could directly influence how employees and media perceive overall response
M2	Leadership holding statement to media / social media	Meaningful press release statement made to news outlets, success measured in tone of article featuring / quoting release.	As soon as possible, using feedback from internal statement and after vetting through legal.	Legal fees if no legal services are on retainer
M3	Re-Establish Trust	Update all product descriptions to indicate the type of leather used along with leather sourcing area (more specific the better, as long as leather is being ethically sourced).	Initial actions for first work week. *This should be done for all products	Standard web maintenance budget should cover this
X4	Re-Establish Values	Review the sources for leather used in production for all products. If sources are ethical, ensure to list them as such (potentially with an icon?). If sources are unethical or do not meet values, consider what additional actions are appropriate.	Within 2 weeks a preliminary review should be complete for the France-focused sourcing. Review and investigate all sources within 4 weeks and present full report to board for new actions.	Full-time commitment of at least one employee to meet accelerated timelines as a soft cost, potentially minimal business costs to access reports and ratings (less than \$1000)
X5	Create continuous, clear, positive external messaging	After initial holding statement, release regular statements and updates on the ongoing topics and actions being	Within first two weeks, establish full message and intended short-term	\$1000 (New web element designs w/ interaction and likely significant updates for initial 6-12 weeks)

Focus/#	Tactic	Measurement	Time-bound	Estimated Cost
		<p>taken. Success will be fewer mentions and engagement on the topic as the issue progresses</p> <p>Create a FAQ/Current events section of the White's Boots webpage featuring historic, ongoing, and planned information/action on this specific topic.</p>	<p>actions for public release.</p> <p>Have new webpage built and reviewed by media department and legal for launch within 4 weeks.</p>	<p>Press releases should incur no direct cost but may impact sales if not carefully crafted.</p>
16	Create transparent internal expectations and messaging	<p>Internal employees must be given guidance on social media use / statements made by them regarding the company / situation. Success measured by having zero incidents of media or professional backlash from employee speech or actions.</p>	<p>Develop a policy with legal that both respects employees first amendment rights, but also provides fair guidance on potential impacts to company/employee for certain social media postings.</p>	Legal Fees
17	Continuous internal messaging and communication	<p>Consider regular emails from the company on the situation (more often is better, but only if the emails have sustenance). Provide updates, planned actions and opportunities. Success measured by having zero incidents of discontent from employees/stakeholders about being surprised by news reports</p>	<p>Begin internal communications immediately, and continue to ensure internal stakeholders are provided regular communication before they find out important information from the media.</p>	<p>Minimal, depending on how reliant on legal-review the leadership is.</p>
08	Developing crisis products into strategic planning products	<p>Success measured by completion of monthly post-mortems that identify 3 positive, 3 areas for improvement and at least 1 quality product to expand on moving forward.</p>	<p>Monthly "crisis opportunity" meetings by crisis team</p>	<p>Potential OT costs for identified members of crisis team.</p>

TACTICS TO SUPPORT THE FOUR FOCUS AREAS

FOCUS 1: MITIGATING ACTIONS (M #1-3)

1. As soon as possible, White's Boots leadership should provide an all-employee announcement of a holding statement acknowledging the current media and protesting situation. Part of this communication should include a timeline for when the company will release their first official statements and offer space for employees to ask questions or bring up concerns in a risk-free environment.
 - a. Two-pronged approach is recommended: Have the President draft an email to the company. President should personally brief board members and department heads, answering any questions, and providing them with the expectation that they will have meetings with their departments to discuss the email in a small group setting.
 - b. During the smaller department meetings, have department heads take notes of questions (regardless of whether they could answer them or not) to use as a source for FAQs both internally and externally. See (Attachment 1) for a general FAQ starting point.
 - c. Using these quick meetings/outreach as a guideline, release all internal messaging at least an hour before official external messaging moving forward.

2. Create and release a "Holding Statement" to the media indicating awareness of the issue and committing to a transparent response. See section: News Media – Holding statement (below) for specifics.
 - a. This holding statement will ideally only be used for 24 to 48 hours in order to be responsive while providing space for a leadership/legal review of official statements.

3. As part of the initial press release, announce that within a week, all online product descriptions will be updated to indicate the type of leather used along with leather sourcing location in the product information section so customers can make informed decisions while White's continues to investigate the concerns identified with their sourcing and suppliers.
 - a. Initial effort can be focused on speed of delivery rather than depth of information: simple flag/animal icons will initially suffice until tactic I4 is complete and it can be expanded.
 - b. In addition to the leather type and sourcing information, also include information on where the product is crafted.
 - c. This effort will be announced as part of the official press release for "immediate actions" and should continually evolve.

FOCUS 2: EXTERNAL ACTIONS (X #4-5)

4. Re-establish company values publicly by reviewing and providing accessible information on the sources used in production for all products.
 - a. Be transparent about materials but also emphasize the positives of specific sources and suppliers, regardless of the type or region.
 - i. Develop a new webpage as part of the brand site to explore all the materials used in White's Boots. Use this as an opportunity to highlight the quality, durability, and sustainability of the products, or why White's Boots works with these specific suppliers.
 - ii. If sources are ethical, ensure to list them as such on the website / product descriptions.

- iii. If sources are unethical or do not meet values, label the sourcing information as “Under Review”.
 - 1. Any source “under review” should be further researched and brought to leadership to determine whether to continue relationships or seek new partnerships.
- 5. Create transparent and continuous communications after the initial holding statement is released.
 - a. Release regular statements to press as needed. Success will look like fewer mentions and negative engagement on the topic as the issue progresses. These should generally be short statements and drive people to the website for more information.
 - i. Ensure releases are available, along with other media mentions, on the White’s Boots “media” webpage (accelerated development from previous plan suggestions if not already created.)
 - b. Create a FAQ/Current events section of the White’s Boots webpage featuring historic, ongoing, and planned information/action on this specific topic.
 - i. Use information gained from M1 in developing the FAQ, as well as feedback from media and social media monitoring tools.
 - ii. See (Attachment 1) of this document for initial FAQ draft
 - c. Aggressive, positive social media engagement is important; maintain an active list of related #hashtags and create general themes of responses for social media teams representing the company.
 - i. Specifically identify any retailers, brand ambassadors or significant public personas that are concerned or actively part of the media conversations of White’s Boots sourcing and leather type.
 - 1. Consider these high-priority outreach requiring special review/tactics from PR/Media department

FOCUS 3: INTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES (I #6-7)

- 6. Consider regular emails from the company on the situation. Initially, a regular update or communication will be best, but frequency should be reflective of quality: updates should only be provided when there is sustenance to communicate in order to prevent interest burnout/flagging. Provide general updates, planned actions and opportunities.
 - a. Ensure that important external announcements are made first internally and to stakeholders before public release, at minimum an hour in advance.
- 7. Engage with legal to create a straightforward, simple guide regarding social media use for both Official (company) social media and employee (personal) social media.
 - a. Company Social Media Representation: Guide drafted through legal for use primarily by marketing department in legal guidelines/considerations for incident specific social media posting and engagement.
 - b. Personal Social Media Representation: Foremost, it must be emphasized that the company must respect and protect freedom of speech at all costs. *As an employer, you cannot legally tell employees what they can and cannot talk about on their own personal social*

networking channels. This message should be made clear, especially for management levels. However, White's Boots **can** create some general guidelines and request that employees follow them for social media. Some suggested points to address in the plan are below:

- i. What they **cannot** speak about
 1. If they couldn't talk about it normally in public, they should also not talk about it on social media.
 2. This would apply to fairly obvious things: trade secrets, company strategies, confidential trade/finance information, etc.
- ii. Employees should be made aware that on their personal pages, they must be clear that they are not authorized to speak on the companies behalf.
 1. Posting a personal opinion is fine
 2. Posting to suggest the companies' opinion is not.
- iii. Point of contact for questions or concerns
 1. Emphasize that managers do not have the right to control personal social media posting outside of the above guidelines, and non-punitive resources for employees to report this to.

FOCUS 4: OPPORTUNITIES (O #8)

8. In order to maximize identification of opportunities, the crisis team will conduct monthly post-mortems that identify 3 positive achievements during the month, 3 areas for improvement and at least 1 quality product to expand on moving forward.
 - a. By identifying successful actions, products and efforts, positive feedback can be provided to teams and effectiveness of results from a big picture view can be evaluated.
 - b. Regularly identifying areas for improvement will allow the company to stay ahead of the crisis and maintain control of the narrative instead of being only responsive.
 - c. As products are created specifically for this incident, they will be tested for efficiency and effectiveness. Tactics, products and actions that prove valuable should be expanded from incident specific products to general business continuity products for future use.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

The proposed solution is based on the intention to quickly and efficiently gain control of the public narrative and implement actions intended to lead to new opportunities. When prioritizing simultaneous actions across the four areas of focus, keep in mind the importance of internal communications in maintaining a loyal and positive work environment. "To maintain organizational health, goodwill and morale, those closest to a company crisis — its employees — need to hear what's happening from the CEO before they see it on Facebook or in the news" (Charles, 2019) This solution was inspired by the success of David Miller's (CEO, Minnetonka Moccasins) statement released regarding the controversy the company faced about appropriation and a non-native owned company selling a Native-American product (Miller, 2020)

PROPOSAL: WHITE'S BOOTS ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

Bottom Line Up Front: Instead of focusing on the ethics of using horse leather sourced from France in certain products for the Japanese market, White's Boots should take control of the narrative and create a new conversation to expand and refocus attention on the "Big Picture" - Conservation.

This crisis is an opportunity for White's Boots to establish themselves and their identity/values when it comes to environmental responsibility. White's Boot's has a long history in the PNW, but despite their relationship with outdoor and nature-based jobs, the company does not have a clear or transparent environmental statement or mission. This is an opportunity for White's Boots to take the narrow narrative currently in the media regarding the use of France-sourced horse hide leather, and re-brand the story to be about White's Boots leaning into an environmentally responsible future by addressing not only this immediate issue but also providing long term gains as socially, environmental concerns are becoming more important. By controlling and expanding the focus, White's can control a more positive narrative regarding changes and communication and dilute the current negative media with more neutral and positive messaging.

This has been successfully done by Minnetonka Moccasins in recent years. For many years, the company had to deal with accusations of cultural appropriation regarding their moccasins. However, instead of responding to just that specific issue, the company released an open letter that clearly identified the issue at question, but also took it a step further. From the letter:

"We recognize that our original products, some of which are still sold today, have been appropriated from Native American culture. This acknowledgement is long overdue, and we apologize for having benefited from selling Native-inspired designs without directly honoring Native culture or communities. While Minnetonka has evolved beyond our original product set, moccasins remain a core part of our brand, and this past summer we began to step up our commitment to the culture to which we owe so much. For many years, we have privately supported Native causes in our home state of Minnesota — but simply giving back is not enough. We are taking a more active and public stance in supporting Native communities. We intend to move forward in a manner that acknowledges and honors the Native American culture, design, and people who have influenced our brand and business."

(Miller, 2020)

From here, the letter continues by reframing the conversation from "cultural appropriation" to how moving forward, the company will make changes. Just like White's Boots would be significantly impacted if they stopped sourcing cordovan (high quality horse leather) from France, Minnetonka Moccasins would be significantly impacted if they simply stopped selling moccasins. This technique of reframing the controversy from the small issue (appropriation / horse leather) to the "big picture" (Commitment to Native American Community / Commitment to environmental sustainability)

This is a long-term commitment but should pay dividends since White's Boots can be a leader in sustainable luxury fashion. Some key elements:

1. Identify and control #hashtags

What hashtags are being used currently? Of those currently in use, is there a way to start using them with more positive spins by posting engagement and outreach under the same tag? Neutral and positive tags will dilute the negative messaging, as long as this is followed up with action from the company. If no hashtags are being used, develop appropriate ones for the campaign. (See: Social Media plan)

2. Identify where the negative media reports are coming from.

By identifying what organizations or groups may be leading the negative media, White's Boots can get a better handle on the specific concerns of the issue and address it appropriately. Is the main concern the use of horses? Is it the sourcing from France? Is the concern international or only in the US? Is the concern from customers or only from environmental groups? Doing the work to dig down into the details will allow the company to specifically target their responses and suggestions for greatest impact.

3. Seek out positive brand ambassadors through social media

Use social media (see: Social Media Plan) to identify potential influencers or groups that would be supportive of assisting or advertising company efforts to “be greener” and “more environmentally aware”. An example may be partnering with a vegan leather company to find a way to use or create a high-quality luxury vegan leather option for products. Or, reducing the company carbon footprint or water usage – any environmental improvement by the company can be celebrated.

4. Find partners – from a variety of places!

There is immense national and international opportunity for media engagement with the right partnership. Partnerships have boundless opportunities:

- a. Social Media Influencer: Partnership could advertise White's Boots environmental commitments, leading to great brand visibility and new potential customers.
- b. Supply Chain: Since White's Boots is not along in sourcing and using horse hide, it is in the best interest of businesses at all levels of the supply chain to have a unified message. It is a great opportunity to create a co-op in the PNW of “members in good standing” with a newly developed standard of environmental assessment and performance. The co-op could be founded in part by White's Boots (perhaps in association with the local university environmental department?) along with other members of the supply chain (ranchers, retail, etc) with a mission to develop and establish sustainable environmental practices throughout the region for leather working.
- c. Environmental Group: Is there an environmental group who is contributing to the negative press that can be engaged with for potential partnerships? For example, a group concerned with the amount of water that is wasted due to the leather manufacturing process may be willing to partner to create water-saving strategies in the company. Seek opportunities to create bridges, not enemies – The “Opportunity Lead” is critical in making this work.

5. Find inspiration!

Internationally, there are groups that rank and evaluate leatherworking companies environmental sustainability efforts. In the UK, this is the Leather Working Group (2021) – they provide guidance, training and auditing to improve environmental stewardship from leather companies and are already well established in the UK with customers that include Adidas, New Balance and Dr. Martens. This could be a good group to join, or a group to replicate locally as well.

6. Think Long Term

Environmental sustainability and company environmental responsibility is only going to become a bigger and bigger part of social expectations in the coming years. Use this opportunity to expand in this area early as a pioneer, and slowly implement and celebrate positive changes. Do not rush to create band aids – think sustainable, long term solutions and benefits.

CRISIS TEAM

The following table identifies the main crisis team leaders, roles and expectations

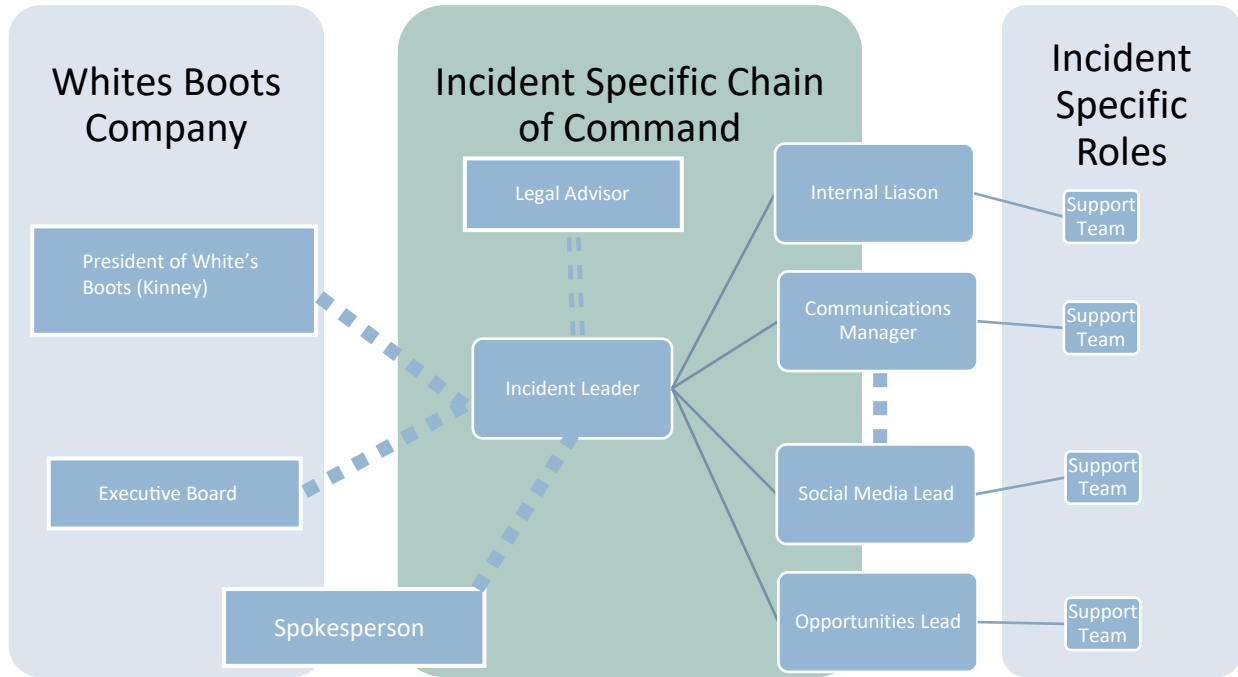
Who	Role	Expectations
President White's Boots <i>(Recommended due to established local media relations and notable position in company. Position allows him to engage without monopolizing time away from regular business needs)</i>	Spokesperson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single voice of White's Boots official company policy. - Personal social media use during time as spokesperson reflective of company policy and values - Available for all press conferences - Final review of all official press releases - Not required to be full time role
Board representative (Voted on by Board leadership)	Incident Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary point of contact and source of truth. They see the big picture, manage all the moving pieces, know what's been tried and what's still on the radar, plan for and manage next steps. Sets performance expectations. - Facilitate leadership team in determining appropriate courses of actions for short and long term goals. - Confident team leader, good listener, strong problem-solving skills, able to delegate and able to provide "big picture" views. - Liaison between company and crisis management team - Expectation would be that this person's full-time focus is on this crisis response and not routine operations. Full-time commitment to this issue until out of crisis stage.
Lawyer	Legal Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical expert in legal matters related to publicity and speech. - Provides general legal review of releases, policy and proposed actions. - Initially, may be heavily involved until messaging is under better control then may move to an "optional" or as needed role as an advisor
HR Director or Operations Department Lead	Internal Liaison	<p>Responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring internal communications are released in appropriate and timely ways - Collecting employee responses/concerns/questions and taking for action as appropriate. - Liaison between routine company business/employees and crisis management team. - May create and lead support team that report directly to them for this incident if needed.

Who	Role	Expectations
PR Team Lead	Communications Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Familiar with public communications - Responsible for writing and releasing official communications both internally and externally. - Works closely with spokesperson. - Responsible for scheduling and approving all media touch points (scheduling press conferences, media interviews, tv spots, etc) - Responsible for maintaining media page on official website. - Gather, use and report on data from media monitoring - Work closely with Social Media Lead - May create and lead support team that report directly to them for this incident if needed.
Marketing Department Lead	Opportunities Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinate, lead and record post-mortems - Actively identify potential opportunities - Future and long-term tactics - Creative problem-solving skills - Able to engage with stakeholders and concerned parties and facilitate positive atmosphere for negotiations and communications. - May create and lead support team that report directly to them for this incident if needed.
Best Employee for position based on skill (From PR or marketing department?)	Social Media Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible for communication on social media channels - Identify messaging, potential hashtags, general trends, etc - Gather, use and report on data from social media monitoring - Work closely with communications manager - May create and lead support team that report directly to them for this incident if needed. - Position may be combined with communications manager when the roles significantly overlap

CHAIN OF COMMAND

Below is a visual representation of the Chain of Command for this incident based on crisis team chart.

Figure 1: Chain of Command



Key

	Main role: Routine operations <i>Boxes that cross over colors will split time between crisis and company business as needed</i>
	Main Role: Crisis management and response <i>Boxes that cross over colors will split time between crisis and company business as needed</i>
	Communicates with (two way)
	Advisory role (as needed)
	Heirarchy role

SEQUENCE OF COMMUNICATIONS

In most cases, it is most appropriate to ensure that communication with internal stakeholders is prioritized over external communications: Crisis Leadership; President/Executive board; Senior leadership; Managers; Employees. After internal communications, then prioritize professional partners; media with established relationship; and other traditional / social media. (Charles, 2019)

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

CRISIS MONITORING

It is important to acknowledge the negative media post / feedback as soon as possible – an immediate solution is not required but acknowledging the situation quickly and with a holding statement will allow for time to implement or develop the crisis communication plan and avoid reacting reflectively. (Newberry & Dawley, 2019) It is important to track all outgoing media communication (and incoming as well if the manpower is available for use in post-crisis post-mortem.), which can be done either manually or with the use of a media monitoring tool. At a minimum, google alerts is a good basic tool to track mentions, but there are excellent tools available with a great deal of functionality and data gathering. Two recommendations include Brandwatch (which judges how the brand is being perceived in media) and Hootsuite, which provides a single dashboard to effectively manage several different media streams from a single application as well as several services to track hashtags, data, traffic, mentions and more. Continual monitoring of brand mentions and general reception and engagement of the public is important to measure the success of tactics and communications.

In addition to using tools to track social media and traditional media engagement, it is important to also pause ongoing and scheduled posts. “It’s critical for all communication to be planned, consistent, and appropriate in tone. A scheduled post will be none of those things.” (Newberry & Dawley, 2019) Instead of routine posting and scheduled engagement, more focus should be on connecting with the public. Use the social media plan for detailed suggestions, but in general, all outgoing social media messaging should be short, avoid arguing, demonstrate concern and try to move the conversation to direct messages. Try to control the message by driving traffic to the official company website once the additional webpages are live to provide consistent messaging.

ESTIMATED COST AND SURVIVABILITY OF CRISIS

This event is in the early stages, and it is possible for White’s Boots to swiftly engage and minimize loss and reputation damage with effective messaging and transparency. Most of the crisis response actions recommended in this document are existing policy or programs, but costs may accumulate based on the need for specialized support (legal and website design most notably). There may also be additional costs if existing programs (Hootsuite) require upgrading or supporting programs to expand capabilities and tracking. The largest costs will be associated with finding and pursuing opportunities – however, these costs would be similar to expected existing budgeting for research and development. The annual revenue of White’s Boots is reported to be “just shy of \$12 million” and largely based on sales. (Thomas, 2020) It is anticipated that any significant cost in responding to this crisis will be countered by an increase to sales to maintain annual profit expectations even with a quarter reflecting a greater than anticipated loss. Due to the currently minimal negative media engagement, it is unlikely that White’s Boots will be permanently impacted by this crisis unless there is a catastrophic failure of the Incident Leader and crisis plan.

MEDIA PLANS

NEWS MEDIA PLAN

Guidance for all media interaction in this section is based on the “4Rs” identified in Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Marketing Communication. (Caywood, p. 409, 2012) These guiding posts for framing media communication are: Regret, Resolution, Reform, and Restitution.

Regret:

Initial communications should express that the company is taking the reports seriously and highlight that the company regrets that this issue has been overlooked. *It is important that White’s Boots does not apologize specifically for using horse hide in its boots as the company will continue to use a variety of products now and in the future.* This general regret is appropriate for the initial holding statement (See tactics M2, above and “Holding Statement”, below for details and a suggested template), but the echo of regret in the follow up to the holding statement should be used as a springboard to the actions the company is taking to make things right (Resolution, next).

Resolution:

When the company is prepared to make their first official press statement, it should include at least one immediate, meaningful action and a promise for continued follow-up/action. In this case, the immediate action to show that White’s Boots is moving towards a resolution is the updating of the webpage (See tactics M3 in previous section) to allow customer transparency in products and sourcing. *This is the first step in taking control of the narrative.* This immediate action shows commitment to transparency as well as creating time to look further into the issue and see what the real impact and concerns are before jumping immediately into action based on assumptions.

Reform:

This is where White’s Boots takes control of the narrative, so the *media releases and approach are critical to success in changing the narrative with this step.* White’s Boots can create a conversation about sustainability and environmental ethics rather than specifically focus on the use of horsehide. Outreach from this step will focus on White’s Boots making a commitment to source supplies ethically (See tactics X4, above). This will involve developing a new webpage as part of the brand site to explore all the materials used in White’s Boots. This as an opportunity to highlight the quality, durability, and sustainability of the products, why White’s Boots works with these specific suppliers, and what sustainability/environmental positives there are to these sources. Making the materials and products used transparent to the customer while also committing to partnering only with companies that meet White’s Boots ethical standards (Note: must be developed) represents a willingness to reform while also creating a more general issue (sustainability and ethics) instead of focusing only on the specific issue (horsehide).

Restitution:

With White’s Boots now in control of the narrative and with an impression of being a leader in environmental conservation, ongoing efforts can be highlighted as supporting this new initiative. Restitution comes from the willingness of the company to take action in response to media reports (See “Proposed Plan” section, previous) as well as company commitment that all products will include sourcing information so that consumers can be more informed moving forward.

HOLDING STATEMENT

The initial holding statement will be attributed to President of White's Boots, Eric Kinney. *Prior to release, this statement should be vetted through legal for possible ramifications for litigation and will have final release approval from top leadership in the company.* This requirement shall not, however, cause undue delay to releasing the statement as soon as practical. This suggested statement is based on guidance from *The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Marketing Communications*. (Caywood, 2012):



“White’s Boots is committed to producing quality leather boots around the world. We are also dedicated to sustainable and ethical practices for our company. We take these concerns very seriously and are looking into these reports to identify how we can make this right.”



Note: There are resources available to create statements and releases online professionally if the marketing department is uncomfortable with the tasking to create a holding statement. (<https://www.demandmetric.com/content/holding-statement-media-template>)

SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

White's Boots does not currently have an active social media policy for crisis communications. While this plan will be developed, until it is complete, the following are key elements of the policy all employees should be aware of.

1. Don't worry about responding to negative posts on behalf of the company: instead, you can pass the post along to the Social Media Lead to engage representing White's Boots.
2. Remember... your local post may have global impact!
3. Be conscious when mixing business and personal lives. Kindness is always better than trolling.
4. While you are free to post whatever you like on your personal social media, be aware that if you in anyway represent White's Boots intentionally or otherwise, that this company will not tolerate discrimination (including age, sex, race, color, creed, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identify, nationality, disability, marital status, political status or any other legally recognized protected group under the law.)
5. Clarify that your opinions are your own.
6. Remember...what you say and post on the internet is permanent.
7. Questions? Input? Suggestions on this developing policy? Please stop by to chat with the HR department, or send your thoughts to HRsocialmedia@whitesboots.com. We want to create a realistic, successful policy together with our employees, and can't do it without you!

Note: This policy should be reiterated to the Crisis Response Team and all employees during initial statements from company leadership.

Social Media	
Facebook	Post regarding efforts to make sourcing transparent. Emphasize commitment to leaning into developing environmentally sustainable commitments. Engage and respond to commentors
Instagram	Engage with influencers, develop and drive #hashtags. Engage and respond to commentors. Visual storytelling re: sustainability efforts
YouTube	Videos from where materials are sourced to highlight humane/ environmentally ethical treatment of resources.
Twitter	Engage with influencers, develop and drive #hashtags. Engage and respond to commentors
White's Boots Website	Update descriptions of products to reflecting sourcing, materials and product information. Create FAQ & Media pages to drive traffic

Traditional Media: Television	Messaging:
KREM TV (@KREM2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holding Message 2. How White's Boots will move forward, focusing on maintaining the traditional skilled artisanship but also expanding to ensure that the company is on the leading edge of environmental sustainability. 3. Lean into White's Boots history through the lens of protecting natural resources (line of workbooks)
KOMO TV (@KomoNews)	
KING 5 (@King5Seattle)	
KXLY-TV Channel 4 (ABC) (@KXLY4News)	
Channel 2 (CBS) (@KREM2)	
KHQ-6 TV Channel 6 (NBC) (@KHQLocalNews)	
KIRO 7 Seattle (@KIRO7Seattle)	

Traditional Media: Print and Radio (US)	Messaging:
Spokesman Review (@spokesmanreview)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holding Message 2. How White's Boots will move forward, focusing on environmental sustainability. 3. Big picture vision of the company's (new) environmental and sustainability pledge
Seattle Times (@seattletimes)	
Seattle Post (@ThePostSeattle)	
The Stranger (@TheStranger)	
Portland Tribune (@PortlandTrib)	
New York Times (@nytimes)	

International Media:	Messaging:
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AP (@AP)	1. Holding Message 2. Very brief press releases on the company focusing on sustainability and environmental awareness (change the narrative) Drive traffic to the company website.
Tokyo Fashion (@TokyoFashion) #TokyoFashion	
Vouge Paris (@VougeParis)	

Potential Hashtags:		
#sustainabilitychallenge	#gogreen	#WBpledge

Social Media Handle	Details
@treehugger	Sustainability Influencer
@Nick_Offerman	Celebrity Ambassador for White's Boots brand
@nature_org	Potential partnership to develop or support sustainable efforts. Nature.org has partnered with companies in the past for similar efforts.
@forum4thefuture	Non-profit dedicated to solving sustainability problems, potential partner or social media engagement.
@uksustain	Non-profit dedicated to improvement of sustainable farming and techniques – may support positives of using all parts of the animals to be as sustainable as possible.
@CSRint	Influencer. Green news, highlights sustainably made products
@huffpostgreen	Huffington post twitter for "green" news – excellent POC for advertising sustainability and environmental efforts
@GuardianSustBiz	Twitter account on sustainability, another account to spread information on White's Boots efforts to step into environmental conservation and sustainability.
@davidcoethica	Influencer, Liverpool, general green news.
@michelleforgood	Conscious lifestyle influencer, focused on ethical fashion products.
@aditimayer	Sustainable fashion photography influencer
@englishlassinla	Ethical and sustainable fashion influencer
@candicemtay	Sustainable lifestyle education and influencer (Canada)
@estelle_spch	Conscious fashion influencer (Paris)

ATTACHMENT 1: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Is it true White's Boots supports the slaughter of animals just use their hides for leather?

No, White's Boots does not slaughter animals only for hides. Generally, most of the hides used in the modern-day tanning process are sourced from slaughter facilities where cattle, horses and other animals are processed for their meat. There is not such a demand for general leather products than an animal is slaughtered just for its hide, so the leather White's Boots sources are from hides considered a "by-product" from meat production.

2. What is horse leather?

Horse leather is known as "**cordovan**": it can be a more rigid leather, making the break-in period longer, and also lends itself to a brighter appearance and is also used in making leather shoes or clothing due to its smoothness.

3. What is "cordovan"?

Cordovan refers to the leather from the rear flanks of heavy workhorses: This is a special, naturally water-repellant leather. Supply of this leather is very limited as it is not sourced from breeding or sporting horses, and only a few specialty factories even produce the fine quality leather in the world, most of which are in France, although cordovan manufacturing was perfected in America.

4. Are your materials ethically sourced?

Absolutely. White's Boots takes great pride in associating only with companies that also maintain the high standards of ethics in their products and business management practices. For example, we do not source materials from countries with non-existent or minimal animal laws. We also do not source materials or labor from any country with high risk of labor abuse, and we ensure all our direct business contacts maintain the same standards we hold for ourselves with worker health and safety standards, living wages and labor rights.

However, we also recognize that we have not been as transparent as we should have been with how our materials and products are sourced and made, and we pledge to change that moving forward by including this information on our company website, whitesboots.com

5. I have additional questions

Please reach out to White's Boots via our company webpage or by email community@whitesboots.com for any additional questions or concerns you have not addressed by this FAQ. Check back often for updates!

(Leather Dictionary, n.d.)

ATTACHMENT 2: TOWS

Key Publics	Threats	Opportunities	Strengths	Weaknesses
Customers	Negative reputation Loss of confidence in quality of material Conflicting/Incorrect information (Made in US but sourced from France?)	Launch “sustainability” efforts to lean into general environmental dedication Reach new potential customers Create positive brand awareness	Growth of brand recognition outside of sales	Can become quickly bored with media: short attention spans Wildly different cultural norms between three areas (US, JP, Europe)
Investors/Financial analysts	Loss of confidence in brand expansion	Emphasizes importance of both short and long term goals	Create confidence in company leadership and plans	May fixate on short term costs
Media / Social Media	Conflicting/incorrect information Non-customers leading the narrative to support their personal cause (Not specific to White’s, but general to vegan ethics)	Reach new audiences Tell new “Stories” Find new ways to engage in current social events	Opportunity to expand on existing engagement and advertising relationships Potential exposure to new partners	Short attention spans Not having ownership of hashtags Brand ambassador response unknown
Employees	Personal social medias Internal vs External conflicting messages	Creative engagement opportunities Demonstrates company loyalty	Loyalty to company and product	If employees lose confidence in company, cascading negative effects
Industry Associations	How White’s responds will impact business relationships Potential of negative connotations to spread	Potential new partners Potential opportunity to engage wide range of companies in environmental commitments	Not a unique attack to Whites; most industry associations use similar resources, so mutual interest in unified and sustainable response.	Perception of “passing the buck” or “throwing under the bus”

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