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Dealing with Tylenol's Tampering in Today's World

With the popularity of social media, PR has changed significantly. Now companies no longer have the leisure of taking their time to respond to issues as they arise. Social media allows messages to travel faster than ever, which means companies can't take until the end of the day to create a response for reporters. Bloggers can publish stories no matter the hour now and Facebookers can post updates whenever they feel the urge. Johnson & Johnson wouldn't have the luxury of taking their time to form emergency response teams to formulate strategies and take weeks to respond or even fix the problem. Globalization demands solutions yesterday, and every day a problem isn't fixed, there is more chance for the company to take an even stronger financial hit. The availability of information today makes the market even more difficult to control.

One way in which Johnson & Johnson would have had to react differently is with their initial response. Upon finding out from a reporter, who was calling to inquire after what they were doing about the issue, they responded that the company knew nothing about the problem. This does little to establish confidence in a company's ability to stay on top of crises as they unfold. Even if Johnson & Johnson knew nothing about it, in today's world of media that response would have butchered their reputation.

The main target audiences for these messages would obviously be consumers, pharmacists, and doctors as all of these have ready access to the product. The issue may have been with the simple over-the-counter, non-prescription Tylenol, but no risks could be taken for a product that contributed such a significant portion of the company's income.

What has changed most since the Tylenol incident originally occurred is that news travels faster than ever now and easily blows out of proportion. Johnson & Johnson would have had their hands full with damage control simply from the inability to control their message. They would not be able to afford

full disclosure in today's society without inciting a public panic. While full disclosure may be a goal of the company, they would need to downplay the crisis and focus instead on what the company is doing to avert the crisis. Media relations would be of utmost importance simply because of how much sway TV celebrities and news websites can hold on the market.

Delivering a finished product more than six months after the reported incident is quite slow in today's economy. While the tamper-proof packaging that Tylenol was now offered in was nothing short of revolutionary, the response is still what would be considered indescribably slow in today's world. Consumers would have demanded a new product within the next two or three months.

Social media and the blogosphere would have played a large impact on the control of information. Johnson & Johnson would have needed to identify key locations to distribute statements regarding the situation and what the company was doing to solve the problem. In all likelihood, the company would be forced into an audit of manufacturing processes to prove the safety of the product, just to satisfy consumers. Johnson & Johnson was interested in full transparency back in 1982, which means sharing a lot more information in today's world. While 100,000 stories were run in the U.S. back then regarding the Tylenol crisis, today's world of media could easily reach into the millions.

Johnson & Johnson's responses to the issue were still quite remarkable and may have done well in today's world. They gave compensation to the victims of the crisis, in addition to counseling and financial assistance. This was an incredibly selfless act on a company's part that was not at fault of the tampering, and yet the manufacturers bent over backwards to ensure the problem never happened again. Yet at the same time I can see this going the same direction as BP. The oil company took great measures to help with clean up and lessening the damage to the surrounding environments. While they were not fully to blame, they took on the majority of repair costs. BP's reputation still suffers from this problem, though with time it may yet be forgotten. The same can be said of Johnson & Johnson. The public would be slow to forgive and it could take many years yet before Tylenol became a leading pharmaceutical product again.

Sympathy may have been Johnson & Johnson's PR campaign, but I don't think it would have been as effective in today's world. Consumers are quick to anger and slow to forgive, quick to blame and slow to apologize. Were this accident to happen today, it could cost the company more than it did in the 1980s. But at the same time, if tampering were to occur in today's world, they could have quickly proven the true perpetrator and potentially shrugged off a great deal of the financial loss. Of course, that may just be my naïve outlook on the situation.