

# Here's how your company can recover after a PR screw-up

 By [James White](#)

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Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn resigned recently after it was revealed that the company was effectively, and intentionally, [cheating on its emissions tests](#). In other recent news, Subway had to sever ties with the face of its company, Jared Fogle, after credible evidence surfaced that he [was involved with child pornography](#).

Such PR disasters are all too common among multinational corporations, but there are steps that they can take to recover.

If your company ever finds itself on the wrong end of a PR disaster, here are some steps that you can take to help restore confidence in your brand.

## 1. Admit what happened

Sometimes silence is deafening. In this case, it can be fatal.

It's best if your company gets in front of the issue as quickly as possible and acknowledges that it happened. If you say nothing about it, you're subjecting your business to a long, slow death by a thousand cuts.

Your communication efforts here should focus on admitting the problem, apologising for the mistake if the mistake was on your end and explaining what's being done to resolve the issue.

## 2. Keep your friends close

Even in the midst of a crisis, there are going to be people out there who are loyal to your brand. Even better, some of those people are in positions of influence. You need to initiate a dialogue with them following a crisis.



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For starters, give your [loyal customers](#) and investors your side of the story. It may be the case that there's more to the problem than what the headlines are reporting. If that's true, make sure they know exactly what happened.

Then, give your friends talking points. You don't have to call them talking points. You don't even have to offer advice about how to describe the screw-up. You just provide them with a brief, bullet-point list of what actually happened so that they can carry your message to others.

In short, make your friends your ambassadors to help improve your image with the general public.

### 3. Generate empathy

If your company messed up, you need to do something to make it right. Put yourself in the mind of the consumers that are in your market and think about what they would like to see in response to what's happened.

Here's what you're trying to get out of this step: You want people to say that yes, your company screwed up, but at least it's doing everything in its power to make things right. That's an excellent step in the right direction after a PR nightmare.

### 4. Think like your competitors

You can be sure that your competitors are going to milk your bad press for everything they can. That's why you need to think the way they do in an effort to stop the bleeding.

What would you do if one of your competitors was faced with the same problem? Answer that question and then immediately find a way to counteract that strategy.

### 5. Begin the healing

Once you've got the short-term items handled, it's time to begin the long, grueling process of rebuilding your reputation. It's an effort that will require constant vigilance.

Begin with a commitment to customer service that goes above and beyond what's expected and what your competitors are practicing. Enforce that customer service quality with periodic reviews and measurements.

Then, conduct field surveys and polls to find out what people think of your company. Learn where you're deficient and remedy those problems first.

Once a PR disaster hits your firm, no amount of advertising will help you recover until you address the setback. Put in place a program that analyzes, rather than ignores, what happened and do what you can to make it right. Many companies have dealt with PR backlashes and recovered. Yours can, too.

## ABOUT JAMES WHITE

James White is a content specialist for SEO Company Go and blogs in his free time at InfoBros. His articles have been published by ConverStations, Thought Catalog and IPWatchdog.

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