

# Outdoor Voices

## **Crisis Preparedness Plan**

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August 2016

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## ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Outdoor Voices (OV) is an athletic and athleisure apparel manufacturer and retailer based in the United States. OV differentiates itself from its better-known competitors like Lululemon and Nike by making apparel that is designed to fit into the lives and on the bodies of men and women who approach activity with “ease, humor, and delight.” While OV does not seek to cater to “uber athletes” who need high performance apparel, OV does pride itself on crafting clothing made with proprietary, sweat-hiding fabrics that transition seamlessly from the gym to drinks with friends.

There are a number of possible crises that could pose a risk to OV online; and because OV operates primarily through an ecommerce platform, it is irrefutably vital for OV to stay ahead of and deescalate these issues before they get out of hand. Potential crisis areas include:

### 1. Product quality issues

All of OV’s apparel is designed in their New York, NY studio, and manufactured both stateside and overseas. OV takes great pride in their proprietary technical fabrics, so the spotlight is firmly on the quality and integrity of these fabrics and fits, with the expectation that they will perform as promised. OV could potentially come under fire if their products do not live up to the hype. Some potential issues that could billow into widespread crises could include:

- Poor quality or defective fabrics and products
- Poor fits
- Inaccurate sizing
- Poor product durability
- See-through fabrics (a la Lululemon)
- Product safety recalls

### 2. Factory safety crises

OV manufactures their apparel in locations throughout Hong Kong, Portugal, and the United States. While OV originally started with the intention of keeping manufacturing within the US, according to their website, the decision to move production overseas was made to better

serve customers with higher quality goods. With the move of manufacturing overseas, OV could potentially face a crisis regarding the treatment of workers and working conditions in these distant factories. Some potential issues could include:

- Unsafe working conditions for factory employees
- Unfair / poor wages for factory employees
- Structural disasters
- Manufacturing-related chemical disasters
- Environmental pollution and other ecological scandals / mishaps

3. Executive scandals or un-brand-like outspokenness

OV currently has a relatively young executive management team, which includes Tyler Haney (Founder and CEO) and Andrew Parietti (President). With a young management team at the helm of a growing company (most of OV's current leadership team is in their mid to late 20's), there is the potential for any scandal or vocal outspokenness to quickly hurt OV's online reputation and spread like wildfire through their myriad social networks – which would be particularly damaging in the eyes of the investors who are generously funding the start-up.

**DISCOVERY.** OV will conduct social listening on a daily basis, and will use tools like Google Alerts, Hootsuite, Reputation.com, and others to keep an ear to the ground on digital sentiment and commentary about the brand. A dedicated social media team will continually monitor OV's social channels; track mentions, tags, and associated hashtags; and will engage with audiences when necessary to promptly respond to and deescalate issues.

**TRACKING.** If and when a crisis is discovered, OV will continue to track all mentions and sentiment using existing social listening tools, and will assemble an internal crisis management team to capture all relevant data pertaining to the incident. OV's internal crisis communications team will utilize the company intranet to create an internal project management page to manage these assets, and will also share their findings with employees as necessary to ensure that everyone throughout the organization has been briefed and made aware of the issues at hand.

**ANALYZING.** If the issue at hand does indeed escalate into a company crisis, OV will do "damage control" by taking inventory of all of the crisis' moving pieces, and assessing whether or not OV need issue a formal statement in response to the crisis. All employees and shareholders will be debriefed and advised on how to respond to public commentary and media inquiries.

**ORGANIZATIONAL ESCALATION + ENGAGEMENT.** OV's executive management and crisis communications teams will meet and evaluate the information collected during the discovery,

tracking, and analysis stages to determine how best to respond to the issue. If the crisis is indeed one that could measurably impact the company's reputation, sales, or growth in any way, OV should invariably respond – even if the response is just a simple issue acknowledgement. Depending on the nature of the crisis, OV's crisis management team will use their collective discretion, along with the data compiled during the tracking phase, to determine the appropriate organizational response and scope of the reaction to the crisis.

## STRATEGY

The following individuals and teams will need to be involved in monitoring and assessing the crisis:

1. Tyler Haney (Founder and CEO)
2. Andrew Parietti (President)
3. Biz Lindsay (Head of Public Relations) → Responsible for drafting press releases, talking points, and other internal and external-facing statements pertaining to the crisis at hand
4. Daren Hull (Chief Operating Officer) → Responsible for adjusting company operations (including manufacturing and distribution) as necessary, depending on the scope and nature of the crisis
5. Joshua Goodman (Director of Digital Marketing) → Responsible for monitoring and tracking all digital sentiment and activity pertaining to the crisis
6. Charlie Taft (Head of Customer Experience) → Responsible for addressing all customer-related issues in the crisis, and for briefing customer service / store associates on how to respond to customer queries, comments, and complaints
7. Tim Sharp (Head of Product) → Responsible for isolating and addressing any design / product related crisis issues
8. Zachary Davies (Head of FP&A) → Responsible for tracking the financial impact of the crisis
9. Tara Gilson (Head of Sales & Merchandising) → Responsible for adjusting available merchandise and issuing recalls on specific products if necessary, depending on the nature of the crisis
10. OV Social Media / MarComms Team → Responsible for monitoring, tracking, and analyzing stakeholder sentiment about OV, as well as responding directly to customer queries and commentary on social media

**WHEN TO ENGAGE.** First, OV's crisis management team needs to determine the origin and validity of the claim. Before any statements are issued, OV should collect all available information

and evidence related to the crisis, and should draft a “Tough Q&A” document, complete with approved messaging and straightforward responses to known public queries and concerns around the crisis. OV’s team should also assess whether engaging with the public will help to deescalate the crisis, or whether an early statement might only add fuel to the fire. Dependent on the specific nature and dissemination platforms available and relevant to mitigating the crisis at hand, OV’s team should plan specific channel strategies and bring in all relevant internal teams and external stakeholders to best determine (1) how and when to address the public and (2) who within the organization is best suited to be the “face” of OV’s response.

**TIMELINE.** As an ecommerce retailer that relies heavily on digital channels not only for direct-to-consumer sales, but also for earned promotion, it is essential that OV responds to the crisis in a timely manner – to reduce and mitigate any long term damage to OV’s reputation and the company’s ability to generate revenue.

- Crisis +1 hour: Identify the issue / crisis, and set up and brief the crisis management taskforce
- Crisis +5 hours: Collect all relevant posts, mentions, comments, tags, and other facts pertaining to the crisis using an internal project management tool (ie: intranet); determine the origin and validity of the crisis claim; update and brief the whole crisis management team
- Crisis +24 hours: Continue to monitor and collect public sentiment; issue internal announcements to employees regarding the scandal; draft public / press talking points, FAQs, and social media updates / acknowledgements
- Crisis +48 hours: Depending on the nature and location of the crisis, travel to the site if necessary; continue to engage with and respond to members of the public and the media; launch and publicize a webpage dedicated to the crisis at hand, so that beyond social media, OV site visitors will have a centralized place where they can see all the latest updates regarding the crisis
- Crisis + 1 week: Continue to monitor and document public sentiment and commentary pertaining to the crisis; disseminate new information and statements as they are uncovered; continue to engage with publics and respond to their queries
- Over a week post-crisis: Continue to utilize social listening to keep tabs on internal and external sentiment; contribute more informed statements and responses to media outlets; and try to rebuild brand credibility through social engagement and messaging that helps to return things back to normal
- Long-term: Once the crisis has subsided, review all actions taken and all data collected, to revise and edit the company’s crisis plan; compile a report covering the details of the crisis outlining actions taken, lessons learned, and successes and failures → Share these findings with the public and with internal stakeholders

**THE MESSENGER.** The main message deliverer will be selected depending on the nature of the crisis, however, Tyler Haney (Founder and CEO) and Andrew Parietti (President) will always issue statements in tandem with the crisis situation “owner.” For example, if the crisis pertains to a product quality issues, OV’s Head of Product will serve as a messenger; similarly, if the crisis pertains to flawed supply chain or factory operations, the Chief Operating Officer will be called upon to comment. OV’s public relations, marcomms, and social media teams will also be briefed and educated on how to respond to customer and media queries.

## ENGAGEMENT

**COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES.** OV will respond swiftly and cohesively by prioritizing the following communication channels and activities:

- Initial statement (disseminated via social media, website, email marketing campaigns for subscribed customers, and press releases) informing stakeholders that the issue has been acknowledged and is being addressed.
- Keep stakeholders in the loop by sharing relevant facts as they are collected and discovered – causes, problem origination, scope of the issue, etc.
- Establish clear channels of communication and conversation for all parties involved – including a crisis-specific webpage / chat function, social media, crisis-specific email address, and phone number.
- Inform stakeholders of findings, solutions, and lessons learned to assure audiences that the issue should not occur again.

**PROCESS + ROLES FOR ENGAGEMENT.** As mapped out in the strategy section of this plan, all key department heads at OV should be involved throughout the entire crisis de-escalation process, with those whose departments are most directly impacted taking the lead on message content and dissemination. OV’s Head of Public Relations will play a vital role in ensuring that all messages remain on-brand, and in following with a consistent tone and organizational positioning. Also, as the “face” of OV and as an influential woman in the young entrepreneur and athleisure markets, CEO Tyler Haney must be the first to issue public statements in response to negative sentiment. Depending on the nature and severity of the crisis, other executive management team members may be involved in initial engagement efforts as well, though the vast majority of this responsibility will reside in the hands of OV’s public relations, marcomms, and social media teams.

**DIGITAL PLATFORMS.** OV will utilize the following digital platforms to inform, address, and engage with stakeholders from crisis origination through resolution:

- Social media (including Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook)
- Email marketing campaigns to subscribed customers
- Website (announcement on homepage, with links to a dedicated crisis page)
- Press releases disseminated to various online news channels / sources

## **RESOLUTION**

**NEXT STEPS.** Once stakeholders have been engaged, OV will continue to monitor the situation and keep track of the efficacy of their de-escalation efforts. The crisis management team will continue to meet until all residual murmurings of the crisis have dissipated, and until daily operations at OV have returned to normal. The internal crisis management project will be archived and analyzed for key findings. Most importantly, the executive management and crisis management teams will meet to debrief and discuss the key takeaways and lessons learned from handling the crisis. OV will also disseminate these findings to the public – perhaps as a blog or vlog on their site or on one of their social media platforms.

**ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLICATIONS.** These are a few potential negative implications for OV if crises are not handled well:

- Decreased or ceased funding from investors
- Decreased sales
- Public / consumer distrust
- Negative online sentiment that never truly goes away
- Low morale
- Loss of market share to key competitors
- Decreased or terminated influencer / earned media engagement opportunities
- Decrease in features, web traffic, and positive sentiment as a result of third party / earned media mentions

**LESSONS FOR DIGITAL / SOCIAL STRATEGY.** The outcomes and lessons learned during a crisis can greatly inform and impact OV's digital strategy moving forward. Namely, evaluating the company's reaction to the crisis provides a perfect opportunity for OV to assess their social listening tools and strategies – Was OV able to stay on top of the crisis and respond in a timely manner? What tools were most useful? Could OV have listened more attentively to deescalate the issue sooner or more tidily? Further, the actions taken by OV in the midst of the crisis should color their subsequent digital and social outreach; instead of ignoring the elephant in the room, OV should acknowledge the crisis, explain their actions, and adopt the most effective lines of communication used to manage the situation in their daily operations. Through a crisis, OV has the opportunity to identify the specific social / digital channels that their audiences flock to in these types of situations, and can learn to adapt their content and messaging to best address these individuals. Finally, OV's tone, frequency, and messengers can and should be evaluated and adjusted as necessary throughout all OV digital communications moving forward.