

Is the new Oscars crisis team too little too late?

 By [Madelain Roscher](#)

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It's been almost a year since the sound of the infamous Oscars slap echoed through our TVs, yet the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is still struggling with the fall-out of Will Smith's assault on Chris Rock.



Source: www.pixabay.com

So, as it stands on the precipice of yet another major scandal, the Academy has announced that for the first time in its history, it has appointed a crisis management team to ensure that this year's Oscars event is carried out smoothly. But is this too little, too late?

It's not a secret that the Oscars television ratings have sunk to the lowest in the show's history over the past two years. And its slide in popularity was only exacerbated by Smith's shocking conduct, as well as the Academy's widely criticised slow and anaemic response.

Notably, the slap caught organisers completely flatfooted, as demonstrated by their failure to prevent Smith from storming on-stage in the first place. Second, the Academy took nearly two weeks to vote on Smith's punishment – hardly the quick and decisive action audiences hoped for.

In other words, the damage has, to a large extent, already been done to the Academy's reputation, and the prestige and dignity of the event. The scandal effectively drowned out any recognition for the other Oscars' winners, and the shadow of the controversy continues to hang over this year's upcoming ceremony – which is why a proactive crisis management approach is vital.

The benefits of a proactive approach

To explain the value of a proactive crisis management approach, it is important to understand that there are essentially three basic stages of successful crisis management: prevention, mitigation, and recovery.

Prevention phase

The first rule of successful crisis management is to stop the crisis from happening at all, which brings us to the prevention phase. Had the Academy had a crisis communications plan or team in place ahead of last year's event to perform the

necessary scenario planning, it might have been better prepared to prevent an unruly or disgruntled guest from approaching the stage.

Mitigation phase

Professional crisis teams will develop a proactive strategy and framework for managing potential risks or threats, and mitigating the impact of crises. Again, this should cover the necessary scenario planning, response teams, spokespeople, and even potential holding statements or communication frameworks to speed up response times and seize control of the narrative.



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If the Academy had a crisis plan in place last year, its communication and responses would have been far quicker, more powerful, and more effective. It would also have managed to control the resulting media frenzy better, reduce speculation, and limit the damage to its brand.

Recovery phase

While crises are not always avoidable, it is critical to put preventative measures in place and to gradually restore reputational strength and public trust. In this case, it was encouraging to see Academy President Janet Yang acknowledge the inadequacy of its response to the Smith incident, and appoint a crisis management team to assist in the lead-up to this year's event.

This team is already facing an enormous task given the current controversy over British actress Andrea Riseborough, whose performance in a little-known Indie film was nominated for Best Actress after celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Courtney Cox, Jennifer Aniston, and Edward Norton campaigned on her behalf.

Riseborough's surprise nomination has been accused of coming at the expense of two Black actresses, Viola Davis and Danielle Deadwyler, once again stirring up the spectre of racism that has haunted the Oscars for many years. So, while the Academy has decided against rescinding Riseborough's nomination, it will hopefully be better prepared to face some tough questions – especially if Riseborough wins.

Anyone with experience in risk management will know the mantra of preparing for the known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns. And, as the Academy's example again teaches us, corporates must plan for any eventuality. Failure to do so is simply planning to fail.

ABOUT MADELAIN ROSCHER

Described as a Public Relations (PR) guru by her peers, Madelain Roscher is the CEO of PR Worx, a full-service marketing-communications agency, which she established in 2001. With 22 years' in-depth industry experience based on an impressive consulting and corporate career, the firm has achieved remarkable successes under her leadership.

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