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Crisis Communication

Pushing Aside the Tears to Get the Job Done

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Let's talk Crisis Comm 101

- **Communicate as much as possible...as often as possible**
- **Stay on message**
- **Use other experts where necessary**
- **ID target audiences and flood them with info**

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Crisis Comm Principles

- **Openness, transparency, and cooperation go a long way**
- **During and after the crisis, people are information sinks**
- **Reputation Management starts at the beginning of the crisis**

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Communicate As Much as You Can

- Shooting over at 10 a.m.
- Posted statements to the web simultaneously
- Timeline of events on the web

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Communicate As Much as You Can

- First news conference shortly after Noon
- Two more press conferences on first day
- 11 news conferences across 8 days

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Communicate As Much as You Can

Running the press conference...walking the tightrope

- Issuing a statement alone won't work
- Manage info needs day to day
- Use experts where necessary
- Let the air out of the balloon

CEO out front

- President at all press conferences on Monday
- Live National news on Monday
- Live Morning Shows on Tuesday





Staying on Message

- We will not be defined by this tragedy
- Focus on the families
- Focus on helping the campus heal



Setting Up The Media City

Setting up the Media City

- They will descend in hordes
- What do you or the media need?
 - briefing room
 - work room
 - truck logistics
 - internet access
 - protocols for campus access
 - what's in your plan
- Interaction/interference with victims

How to Manage the Phone Calls?

- Starting Monday morning—dozens of calls per hour (350 interview requests)
- Telecommunications immediately added capacity and priority
- Cellular providers contacted; mobile towers added
- Shifted calls to Joint Information Center by Tuesday afternoon

Joint Information Center (JIC)

- In a major emergency – many agencies.
(State resources available to VT after declaration of state emergency.)
- Make friends with your telecommunications and IT colleagues long before an emergency
- PIOs must speak w same voice
- Do you have plans for a Joint Information Center?
(VT shifted all calls to JIC by Tuesday noon)
- Triage media calls / questions, other outside calls; able to provide basic information when available; direct to website

Joint Information Center (JIC)



Other Issues – Really Important

- Access to bathrooms, food, place to file stories, space to set up make shift program sets
- Filing stories? VT IT lifted Internet access security; wireless access for all. Access to information on university website
- Central location facilitated acts of Hokie Spirit — access to university, state officials, even meals provided by local restaurants

The Role of the Web A Powerful Tool in a Crisis

- The Nexus
- The Control Room
- The File Box

The Backdrop – Blacksburg and Virginia Tech

...tucked between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny



The Backdrop – Blacksburg and Virginia Tech

- Idyllic College Town
- Blacksburg – about 40,000 population
- Virginia Tech – about 26,000 students 6,000 employees
- Top 30 American public university
- What a college is supposed to look like



April 16 Shock, Disbelief, and Profound Sadness

Mass Murder –9 minutes of carnage

•49 people shot

•32 dead

The First Day

- About 1500 first responders
- 27 ambulances from 14 agencies and five hospitals



A Global Event

- 36,000 people from around the world shared condolences with staff
- 15,593 stories logged in first two weeks



A Global Event

- The world mourned with us



The Media City

- About 1,000 journalists and crew
- 125-140 satellite trucks
- 285 news organizations



The Media City

- 60 international agencies
- "...nothing like this in my 30 years as a global correspondent"



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Let's talk Crisis Comm 101

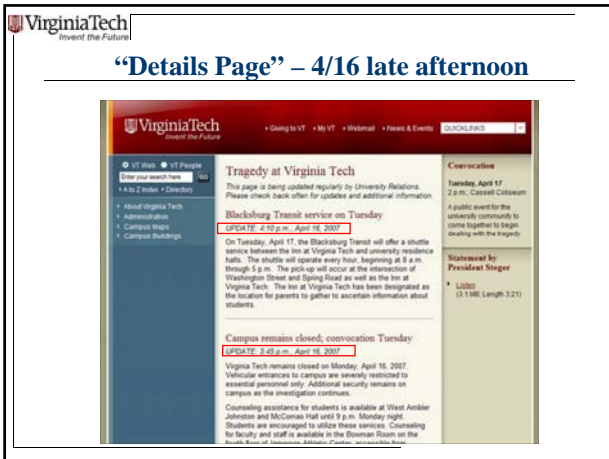
- Have a Plan
- CEO Visible
- Designated Spokesperson
- Communication Command Center

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Home Page Alert Detail - Sample

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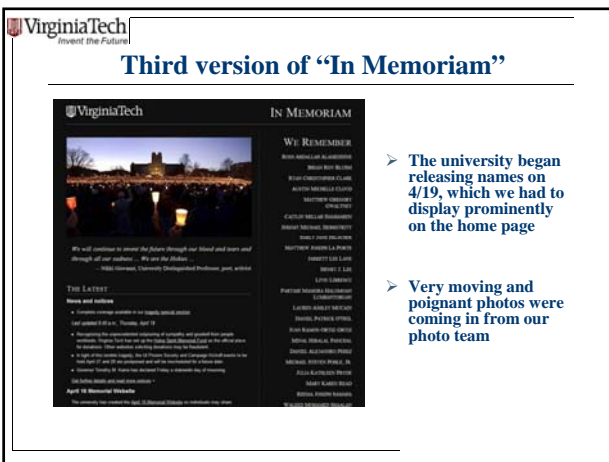
"Lite" Home Page on 4/16





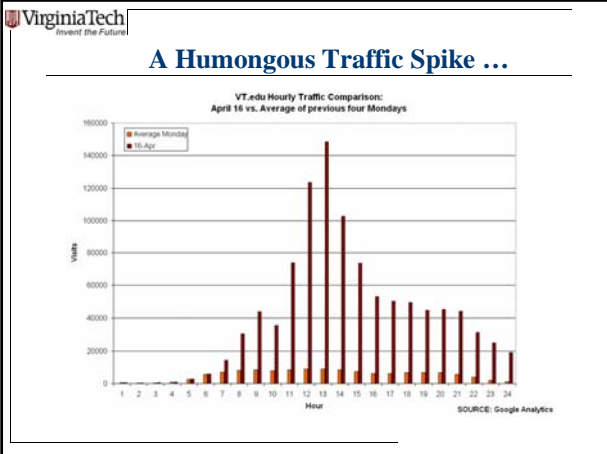


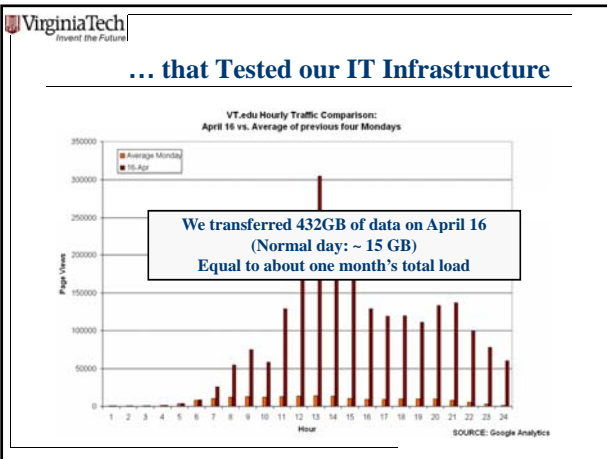




- The university began releasing names on 4/19, which we had to display prominently on the home page
- Very moving and poignant photos were coming in from our photo team







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Surrogate Spokespersons

...campuses are open, accessible places

Spontaneous Student Spokesperson? Almost

You may not control the interviews, but...

- Media Training for selected student leaders
- Advisory to all students' in "rules of engagement"

Surrogate Spokespersons Coping with the Media Circus



Surrogate Spokespersons Coping with the Media Circus



Q. When is a Crisis over?

A. When you say it is...



Q. When is a Crisis over?

A. When you say it is...

**Actually,.... Only the first phase...
the acute phase.**

**“Where do we go from here? This is not the
White House.”**

- Press conference format ran its course
- We ran out of information
- We ran out of steam



Intermediate Phase Stabilizing a Wounded Community

... *Communications Office sets the tone to manage the image*

Intermediate Phase Stabilizing a Wounded Community

- Building on the Hokie Spirit
- Continuing the web story
- Preparing for commencement

Recovery...Summer into Fall *Media Hooks*

- ▶ Commencement
- ▶ New Student Orientation
- ▶ Preparing for back to school
- ▶ Deployment of text messaging
- ▶ Memorial dedication
- ▶ First day back to school
- ▶ Healing Concert
- ▶ First football game

Memorial Dedication



Recovery...Summer into Fall *Issues Management*

You will deal with issues during the chronic comm phase

- Panel Reports
- HS Memorial Funds
- Norris Hall reopening
- Hold the media at bay
- Allow the campus to return to “everyday”

News Conferences and More News Conferences

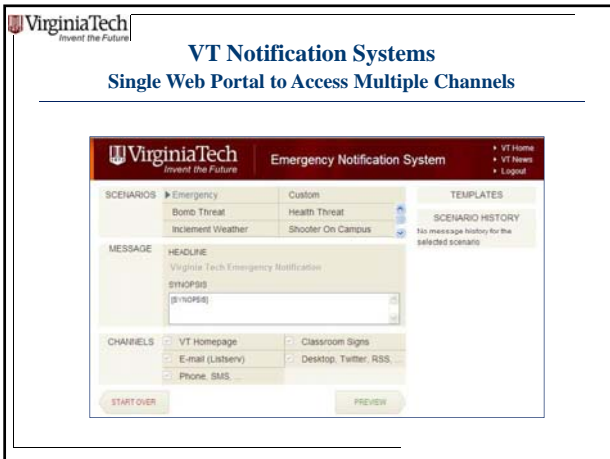


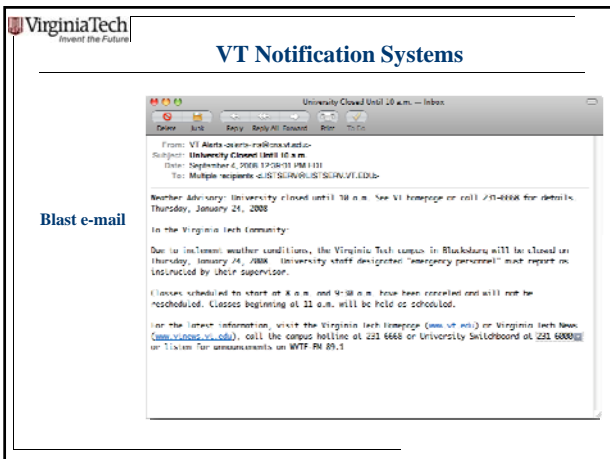
VT Notification Systems A Unified Portal for Varied Channels

- Blast e-mail
- Mobile device – text message, et al (VT Phone Alerts)
- Computer Modules (VT Desktop Alerts)
- Web site alerts
- Classroom digital signs
- Recorded Hotline
- Campus sirens and loudspeakers
- Public media
- Switchboard

(Red – VT ENS Portal)







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VT Notification Systems

Mobile device




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VT Notification Systems



Web site alerts



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VT Notification Systems

Electronic Message Boards






- 358 electronic message boards in all general assignment and most other classrooms
- Messages sent instantly
- Messages preceded by audible tone.
- 150 +/- more being installed

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VT Notification Systems

VT Desktop Alerts





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Issues for Communicators

- Notification – Capability creates expectations.
- Notification systems – do they work? How long to complete notification? Are they quick? Do they have capacity?
- When do you pull the D Ring? What is actionable? What about false alarms? Using alerts too often?
- Who makes the decision to notify – public safety? communicators?

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More Issues for Communicators

- Reliance on too few systems? No single system does it all.
- Cell Phone Network capacity during emergency
- Others will absorb your capacity in real emergency
- Example: Cell phone, campus e-mail; internet

Where Are We Today?

- “Hokie Spirit” remains strong
- Applications at all-time high
- Record enrollments
- Norris Hall (site of shootings) converted to Peace Center
- For some, the tragedy always lingers
- For students, it’s an event of history