

ACTION BRIEF

DESTINATION REPUTATION:

NEGATIVE MEDIA COVERAGE

INTRODUCTION

Negative Media Coverage

Negative media coverage can significantly impact a destination's reputation, shaping perceptions among meeting planners, visitors and stakeholders. The rapid spread of information, whether accurate or not, can lead to concerns about safety, event viability and overall destination appeal.

Destination organizations must take a proactive, transparent and solutions-oriented approach to counter negative narratives, ensuring that visitors and stakeholders receive a balanced perspective. This brief provides a structured framework for handling negative media coverage through effective messaging, stakeholder coordination and crisis response strategies.

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SCENARIOS

The following scenarios illustrate real-world situations that destination organizations may encounter when addressing this issue. They are intended to provide context and practical insight into the key findings outlined in this brief.

1 SCENARIO

Isolated Incident Receives National Attention

A single incident, such as a violent crime, discrimination allegation or public safety failure, occurs within the destination and is amplified by national news outlets. Even though the event is isolated, the perception forms that the destination is broadly unsafe or unstable for visitors and events.

2 SCENARIO

Viral Social Media Post Causes Public Relations Crisis

A visitor shares a negative experience on social media related to safety, customer service or cultural insensitivity. The post goes viral, attracting mainstream media attention and prompting public calls for boycotts or event cancellations, even if the issue is swiftly addressed.

3 SCENARIO

Destination Drawn into Controversy Through Past or Peripheral Issues

During event promotion or heightened media attention, the destination becomes associated with broader national debates or resurfaces in older news stories tied to social, political or safety concerns. Even if the destination is not directly involved, the renewed spotlight creates hesitation among planners and complicates sales and marketing efforts.



1. HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, ATTRACTIONS AND AIRPORTS

Transparency and Proactive Storytelling

- ◆ Acknowledge concerns but emphasize the broader reality of visitor experiences in the destination.
- ◆ Encourage visitors and planners to assess the destination firsthand rather than relying solely on media narratives.
- ◆ Highlight successful events, positive visitor feedback and ongoing efforts to enhance the travel experience.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How do we ensure that hotels, attractions and restaurants are aligned in their messaging when responding to guest concerns?*
- ◆ *Are we equipping hospitality partners with positive, fact-based talking points to counter misinformation?*
- ◆ *What platforms can we use to showcase visitor testimonials and authentic experiences?*

Reputation Management and Digital Presence

- ◆ Launch a destination reputation campaign that amplifies positive stories, real visitor experiences and on-the-ground perspectives.
- ◆ Engage trusted industry influencers, meeting planners and travel professionals who can share authentic testimonials.
- ◆ Ensure that hotels, restaurants, and attractions have digital assets ready to reinforce the destination's appeal through social media and guest engagement.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How can we leverage real-time visitor content to counteract negative perceptions?*
- ◆ *Are hospitality partners trained to direct guests to accurate sources of information?*
- ◆ *What strategies can we implement to highlight the everyday vibrancy of the destination despite media narratives?*

Crisis Communication Readiness

- ◆ Develop pre-approved messaging for hospitality partners to use when responding to guest concerns.
- ◆ Provide customer-facing teams with clear guidance on handling inquiries related to negative media coverage.
- ◆ Ensure that all frontline staff are prepared to address safety and reputation concerns in a reassuring and confident manner.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Do we have a centralized repository of talking points and crisis communication guidelines for hospitality stakeholders?*
- ◆ *How do we ensure consistency across all hospitality sectors in addressing media-driven concerns?*
- ◆ *What role can hospitality businesses play in reinforcing a positive visitor experience that counteracts negative narratives?*

2. ELECTED OFFICIALS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Unified and Solution-Oriented Communication

- ◆ Work with government leaders to ensure consistent messaging that reassures visitors and stakeholders.
- ◆ Provide public officials with fact-based updates and key talking points to address concerns raised by media coverage.
- ◆ Emphasize ongoing investments in safety, infrastructure and community initiatives that enhance visitor experiences.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we ensuring that elected officials and government leaders have coordinated messaging when discussing media narratives?*
- ◆ *How can we effectively position tourism as a vital economic driver that requires protection from reputational damage?*
- ◆ *What government initiatives can we highlight to reinforce confidence in our destination?*

Proactive Media Relations and Stakeholder Engagement

- ◆ Facilitate regular briefings with media outlets to ensure they receive accurate, up-to-date information.
- ◆ Engage with business associations, tourism boards and local leaders to align messaging.
- ◆ Address misinformation by proactively providing journalists with fact sheets, expert statements and verified data.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we maintaining strong relationships with local and national media to ensure balanced reporting?*
- ◆ *How can we mobilize government officials and industry leaders to advocate for the destination's reputation?*
- ◆ *What resources can we provide to ensure that media outlets have access to accurate, well-rounded perspectives?*

Crisis Communication Planning and Response

- ◆ Develop a crisis communication strategy that includes press releases, media statements and briefing materials for officials.
- ◆ Provide elected leaders with best practices on handling press inquiries related to negative news.
- ◆ Establish a protocol for rapid response to misinformation, ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned in messaging.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Do we have a crisis response team in place to coordinate with government leaders during media challenges?*
- ◆ *How can we ensure that public officials are well-prepared to handle sensitive questions from the press?*
- ◆ *What proactive steps can we take to build resilience against future negative media cycles?*

3. LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND RESIDENTS

Community Engagement and Public Trust

- ◆ Encourage local businesses and community members to actively participate in shaping the destination's narrative.
- ◆ Highlight success stories of businesses, cultural organizations and community-driven initiatives that enhance visitor experiences.
- ◆ Foster partnerships between law enforcement and tourism organizations to reinforce safety and stability messaging.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *How can we engage local businesses and residents as ambassadors for the destination's reputation?*
- ◆ *Are we creating opportunities for community members to share positive stories that counteract media narratives?*
- ◆ *What strategies can we implement to build long-term public trust and support for tourism?*

Fact-Based Crisis Communication and Response

- ◆ Provide local businesses and law enforcement agencies with clear, factual information on how to address visitor concerns.
- ◆ Encourage businesses to share official updates from the destination organization rather than reacting to media speculation.
- ◆ Ensure that law enforcement agencies are aligned in messaging that reassures both visitors and residents.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Do we have a strategy in place to help businesses navigate media-related concerns without escalating misinformation?*
- ◆ *How do we align messaging between public safety officials and tourism stakeholders?*
- ◆ *Are we empowering community voices to actively contribute to shaping the destination's reputation?*

Reputation Recovery and Media Collaboration

- ◆ Partner with local business owners and public safety leaders to proactively engage with regional and national media outlets.
- ◆ Encourage community representatives to participate in media interviews, op-eds and public forums to offer balanced perspectives about the destination.
- ◆ Work with local journalists and content creators to highlight recovery efforts, improvements and positive momentum within the community.



Key Questions for Destination Organizations

- ◆ *Are we leveraging trusted local voices to communicate the full story of our destination?*
- ◆ *How are we working with media to ensure coverage reflects both current challenges and community resilience?*
- ◆ *What role can local business leaders and public safety officials play in reframing public perception through authentic, on-the-ground perspectives?*

NEXT STEPS AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

Next Steps

- ◆ Develop a unified media response that includes talking points, press release templates and stakeholder briefing materials.
- ◆ Implement a digital campaign that leverages real visitor content to showcase the destination's strengths.
- ◆ Establish a crisis response team responsible for monitoring media coverage and coordinating rapid responses to misinformation.
- ◆ Strengthen relationships with media outlets and industry influencers to ensure balanced reporting on the destination.
- ◆ Conduct media training workshops for hospitality partners, elected officials and business leaders to enhance crisis communication preparedness.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- ◆ Increase in positive media coverage and balanced reporting over a set period.
- ◆ Reduction in visitor inquiries and concerns related to negative news cycles.
- ◆ Higher engagement rates on digital platforms showcasing authentic visitor experiences.
- ◆ Improved sentiment analysis results measuring public perception before and after response efforts.
- ◆ Greater participation from local businesses and stakeholders in coordinated messaging campaigns.
- ◆ Measurable improvements in stakeholder preparedness through crisis communication training initiatives.

Negative media coverage is an inevitable challenge, but destinations that take control of the narrative can mitigate long-term reputational damage. By aligning messaging across hospitality, government, and community stakeholders, destination organizations can provide a cohesive, fact-based, and solution-oriented response. The key to success lies in proactive communication, transparency and collaboration. When destination organizations lead with accurate information and amplify positive visitor experiences, they can shift public perception and maintain long-term traveler confidence.

To understand more about this issue affecting your destination's reputation, learn more at:

<https://destinationsinternational.org/destination-reputation>



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About Destinations International

Destinations International is the world's largest and most respected resource for destination organizations, convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) and tourism boards. With more than 8,000 members and partners from over 750 destinations, the association represents a powerful forward-thinking and collaborative community around the world. For more information, visit destinationsinternational.org.

Future Partners

About Future Partners

Future Partners was founded by Dave Bratton and Erin Francis-Cummings in San Francisco, California, in 2003. It is a team of market researchers that work with over 250 organizations and travel brands around the U.S. and the world to provide insights and strategies that capture hearts, minds and market share. Future Partners connects human behavior and understanding to bring the future of travel within reach. For more information, visit futurepartners.com.



About the Destinations International Foundation

The Destinations International Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering destination organizations globally by providing education, research, advocacy and leadership development. The Foundation is classified as a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code and all donations are tax-deductible. For more information, visit destinationsinternational.org/about-foundation.



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