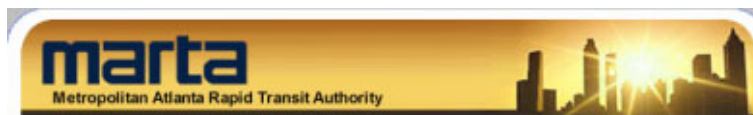


TMT Case Study: MARTA Police Department Transforming Response Time At the Crisis Scene

When the Police Department for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) decided it was time for a change in the way the agency handled crisis news media response, it called on **The Media Trainers**. The result was a series of crisis communications training seminars that helped 28 senior officers on the force reverse long-standing procedures that were damaging the organization's image in the news media.



Needed: A New Strategy

MARTA's Police Department operates as a fully functioning law enforcement agency. Its officers have arrest authority and all the other duties and responsibilities of a major metropolitan police force. Yet, prior to crisis training provided by **TMT**, MARTA's long-standing policy held that, in any crisis situation, police officers on-scene must refuse comment to news media, deferring instead to the organization's communications professionals. But the problem with the strategy was that, like many organizations, the communications staff was small; communications professionals wore many hats, and were constantly challenged with the need to be in several places at one time. Consequently, reporters representing Atlanta's newspapers, radio and television stations

had to wait sometimes for two hours or more before an official spokesperson could arrive, receive a briefing and relay information to the media.

Predictably, the policy often backfired. Instead of increasing the accuracy of information released to the news media, the

practice frequently contributed to reporting misinformation. While on-scene

reporters may have been denied close access to the site of a mugging, derailment, shooting, or other incident, no amount of police authority could prevent them from interviewing — and quoting — anyone in the general vicinity. As deadlines neared, reporters began to seek information from

any source available to piece together the story. That left MARTA vulnerable to high-profile coverage of sensitive events, with the reporting based on information from any source **except** the one with the most reliable and accurate details.

The training aids, scenarios and student participation were excellent. Never a dull moment. I definitely feel I have the basic tools to "withstand" an interview. Thank you.

Like most public agencies, MARTA operates in a glass house. Politics. Public opinion. Operating revenues. Customer confidence. All are constant concerns for MARTA, and none of them were being helped by misinformation reported in Atlanta's hungry news media. Clearly, there had to be a better way to deal with the situation.

MARTA Case Study

Media Training That Sticks

To help overcome the problem and increase the accuracy of news coverage in such situations, **TMT** developed and implemented for MARTA a series of day-long crisis communications seminars that would allow MARTA police officers to employ their already well-developed skills at observation and calm during a storm, to provide reporters with immediate, reliable, factual information about any crisis.

TMT provides its clients with two fundamental elements: 1) unique, individualized training based on deep research; and 2) training that is starkly realistic because it represents both sides in the development of a news story — the media's perspective, as well as that of the organization involved in the news story. Combined, these elements produce crisis communications training unlike any other. And MARTA took full advantage of the benefits.

MARTA's 28 most senior police officers each spent a full day with **The Media Trainers** facing ambush interviews, studying the elements of a crisis, identifying the message themes that help and hurt the image of an organization involved in the throes of a crisis. The officers took on realistic scenarios, used them to identify audiences and plan messages, and to differentiate between speculation and fact, even in the adrenaline-pumped environment of a crisis situation. In role-playing interviews they faced the reporters and the cameras and learned to work in cooperation with the news media to calm fears and get the organization working again in the shortest time possible.

Facing Down Challenges

MARTA executives faced a combined challenge that is perplexing the heads of many organizations large and small, private and public, commercial and not-for-profit. Budget for communications staffs and outside PR support are continually shrinking, yet the number of media outlets continue to grow while new technologies in news reporting make the process simpler, faster and more readily available to news consumers than ever before.

MARTA conquered that challenge with the realization that policies that worked in past decades, just don't fit the realities of the new millennium. With a shift in strategy, simple policy changes, and **TMT Crisis Communication Training** tailored, as always, to the exacting needs of the client, the agency responsible for transporting millions of Atlantans each year improved its ability to swiftly move beyond crisis.

MARTA leadership also faced-down another challenge that inhibits many organizations when it comes to planning and training to meet the demands of a crisis: the "it won't happen to us" syndrome. By recognizing that crisis is a matter of when...not if, and by preparing its critical personal with professional training, MARTA, in effect, covered itself with an insurance policy. As with any insurance policy, there is no guarantee that the bad things won't happen. But there is a guarantee that the organization has a better chance to recover quickly and with as little damage as possible.

This is training that is very much needed. We are always asked for our comments during a crisis. This is one kick-ass class. Keep it in the faces of cops. Needed! Thanks. This was time well spent.