

Lessons from Everest: Protecting your reputation doesn't have to be like climbing a mountain

 By [James Wilson](#)

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In the wise words of Warren Buffett, "It takes twenty years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it." Reputation has and will always be an incredibly important facet within a brand or organisation and that is why managing it is vital to a brand's success.

But reputation management has become even more important in the ever-evolving digital world. Add social media to the mix and it is amplified even more. Five minutes? More like five seconds and your reputation is already on its way out the door.



Patrick Conroy on the left, James Wilson on the right

WE had the honour of hearing from Patrick Conroy, a seasoned journalist who documented the highly controversial first South African Everest expedition.

Conroy shared tips on how to manage reputation based on his own experiences on Everest and how, by failing to communicate clearly during a crisis, a reputation can be irrevocably ruined.

Conroy has since written a book from his own perspective, *Everest Untold*, which has inspired the tips on reputation management and crisis communications that he shared with us.

The book reveals how poor communication contributed to the deaths of eight climbers close to the summit of Everest.



Patrick Conroy and team after the successful ascent.



Patrick Conroy (left) and Ian Woodall after the successful ascent.

Communication is key

You need to converse with the right people in the right way. At the end of the day, you cannot monitor and police everything that's being said about your brand, but you can influence what is being said.

People matter most

The way in which you treat not only the people inside your organisation but also those on the outside says a lot about you. How you respond to negativity can ultimately affect your brand. That is why being as diplomatic as possible is extremely important and goes a long way in maintaining relationships with both your external and internal stakeholders.

Be prepared

Not only do you need to prepare for the best but you need to prepare for the worst, too. Identify the key risks for your brand and develop a go-to strategy in the event that something goes wrong. By having a plan, you can control the direction of the conversation before somebody else starts a negative conversation.

Disappoint people at a rate they can absorb

Failure is not and should not be seen as a dirty word. It is usually not intentional but on occasion it does happen and you need to know how to move forward. By telling clients and consumers what they can expect from your brand, as well as highlighting the risks involved beforehand, you can set realistic expectations.

Stability trumps perfection

"In the quest for perfection, you will achieve nothing". This is particularly important in a crisis. Prioritise stability over your ideal outcome because it may be unattainable. Be consistent and stable in all your brand's operations, instead of trying to be perfect. This will help the stakeholders to know what to expect and, ultimately, form a more trusting relationship with you.

The main takeaway from this thought-provoking and enlightening session is that communication is the most important facet of reputation management. Maybe if expedition leaders had these tips to follow, they would have dealt with the challenges differently and ultimately could have avoided the reputational damage of 1996.

ABOUT JAMES WILSON

James is a communications and marketing specialist with more than 17 years' experience. He has worked in agencies and in-house, giving him the full scope of agency and client life...

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