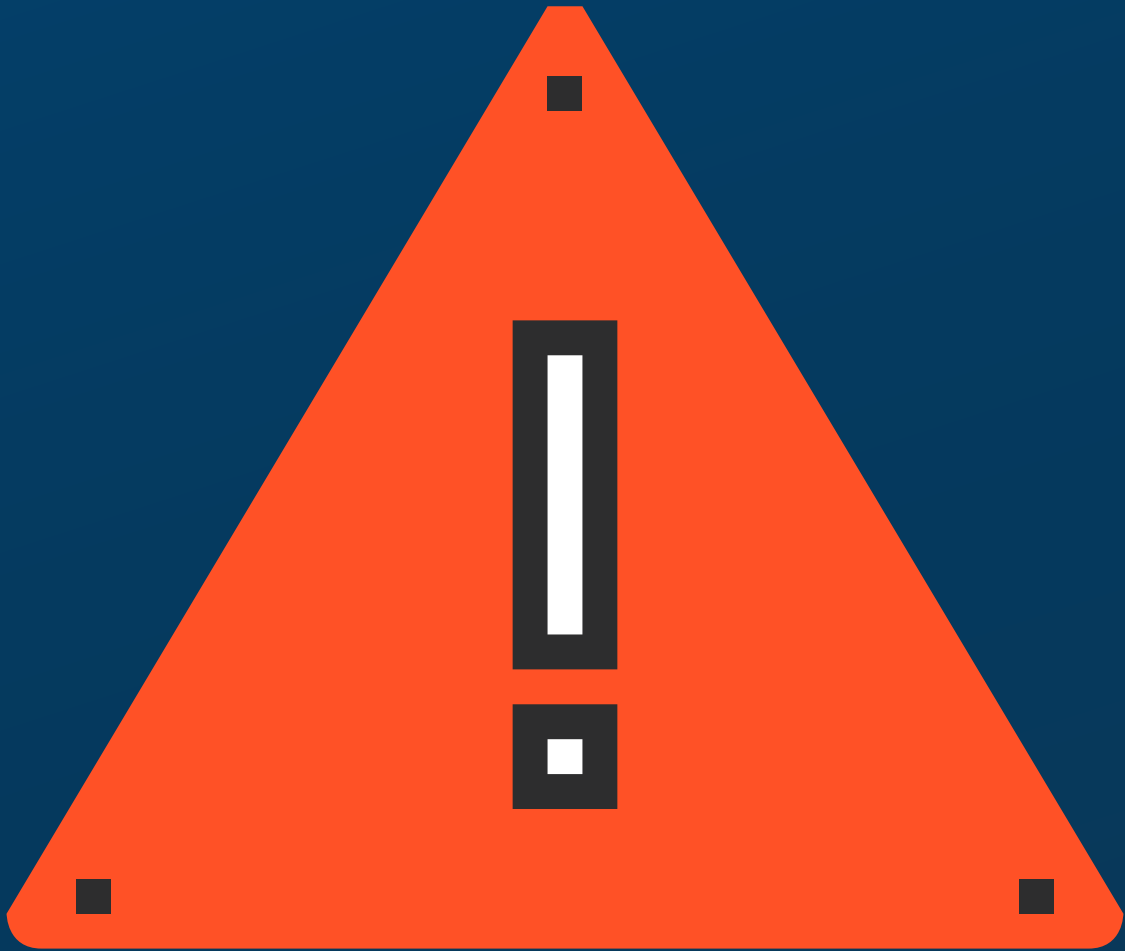




MONITORING A PR CRISIS:

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE



WHAT IS A PR CRISIS?



IT'S A POTENTIALLY REPUTATION-DAMAGING, BUSINESS-ALTERING, AND/OR UNSAFE SITUATION THAT REQUIRES IMMEDIATE ATTENTION AND ACTION.

In late 2020, we surveyed PR and comms professionals about the importance of crisis management. We found that **85% of respondents believe that crisis comms grew in importance** from 2019 to 2020. We have to agree.

PR and comms professionals have had a tough time recently. The year 2020 taught us all how much is out of our control. Forces (external or internal, human-made or natural) are waiting in the wings, ready at any moment to throw brands into crisis.

THE ROLE OF MEDIA MONITORING IN A PR CRISIS

March 25-27, 2021 saw over 1,600+ PR and comms professionals virtually attend Agility's first annual Crisis Comms Mastery summit. It was an inspiring and informative event, made possible by the participation of 15 industry experts.

Over 14 sessions, three main themes emerged: Prepare, Respond, and Resolve. The broad stages of managing a PR crisis. The summit broke down these themes and taught registrants how to make their client's or their own brand as resilient as possible.

In every stage of a PR crisis, media monitoring plays a key, but often uncredited role. The information and insights media monitoring provides allows brands to:

- ✓ Prepare for and mitigate the damage of a potential crisis
- ✓ Respond in a timely and effective manner
- ✓ Resolve the crisis and become a stronger brand

How does media monitoring do this? We're going to use this page to deep dive into the numerous ways monitoring can help you and your team successfully navigate a PR crisis.

Here's how we're going to break it down:

- Why is media monitoring essential to PR crisis management?
- Potential sources of a PR crisis
- Setting up media monitoring to detect and monitor PR crises
- Effective media monitoring during a PR crisis
- Why you should monitor others' PR crises
- Media monitoring solutions for a PR crisis
- Evolving from a PR crisis with media monitoring

WHY IS MEDIA MONITORING ESSENTIAL?

We can think of a lot of reasons why investing in a good media monitoring tool can help you combat a crisis. Most PR teams already have some sort of monitoring setup, but it's vital they align its use with their crisis management strategies. **Here's our top five reasons why:**

01 FORESIGHT TO AVOID A PR CRISIS

Media monitoring gives PR teams knowledge. The best teams know to share that knowledge with key stakeholders in the organization. Armed with the latest relevant coverage—including potential sources of tension—leaders can sniff out a potential crisis and side-step it.

02 EARLY PR CRISIS DETECTION

Think of monitoring as having a crisis radar. The earlier you have a heads up, the longer you'll have to prepare. Plus, media monitoring helps you avoid ending up red-faced when your CEO comes banging at your door wondering why you didn't inform them of this threat. No one wants to be in that situation.

03 GUIDING A PR CRISIS RESPONSE

Before responding to a crisis, you must gather the facts of the situation as quickly as you can. What's being said where and by whom? If you know the sentiment of your audience, you're far less likely to respond in a tone deaf manner.

04 UNDERSTANDING THE PROGRESSION OF A PR CRISIS

An effective media monitoring tool with built-in PR reporting functions will show you when crisis-related coverage is accelerating or slowing down. You'll be able to benchmark important indicators (like sentiment) and keep a close eye on your brand's recovery.

05 FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

While a crisis is usually perceived as generating only bleak outcomes, always remember that it can also provide learning and growth opportunities. A crisis demonstrates PR's ability to deal with an unexpected event. Additionally, media monitoring can identify opportunities to get in front of a larger audience, build new media relationships, and connect with your audience in different ways.

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF A PR CRISIS

How exactly does one prepare for all the unknown factors that can result in a crisis? Short answer, you can't. There are countless ways an unexpected event can disrupt your brand. You're likely familiar with most of the main categories of potential crises:

- Natural or human-created disasters (hurricanes, plane crashes, workplace accidents)
- Product issues (recalls, defects)
- HR/policy conflict (discriminatory policies)
- Employee issues (sexual harassment)
- Spokesperson indiscretions (insensitive or offensive comments and behaviors)
- Legal/criminal charges (embezzlement, insider trading)

Christina Hennessey, Chief Content Officer for Throughline Group came up with at least [50 ways to have a crisis](#).

SETTING UP MEDIA MONITORING

Media monitoring is an invaluable asset to a crisis comms team. Much of its benefit comes from setting up your monitoring processes to optimize your crisis management activities.

Getting the best results from your monitoring solution starts with preparation and know-how. Our in-house team of monitoring experts broke down this initial prep into five simple steps.



- **Step 1:** Choose your keywords
- **Step 2:** Set up searches
- **Step 3:** Use coverage alerts
- **Step 4:** Send media briefings
- **Step 5:** Assess the crisis

STEP 1

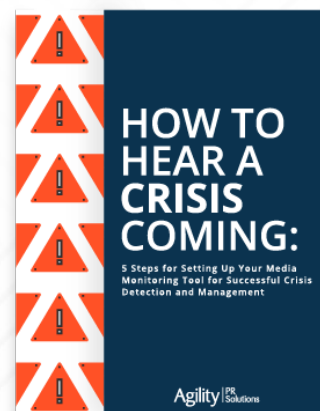
Choose your keywords

Crisis detection starts with the keywords you track, so it's crucial to pay attention to them.

An overlooked keyword can result in a missed threat to your brand's reputation. Here are some categories to keep in mind when building your list:

- Your organization's name, brands, and products
- Spokespeople (C-suite, board members, and anyone else taking a public-facing role)
- Partners, suppliers, and vendors
- Competitors and their products
- Industry terms and governing associations and bodies
- Events and charities your organization is involved in
- Other vulnerabilities you're aware of (hint: what's keeping you up at night?)

Download [How to Hear a Crisis Coming: 5 Steps for Setting Up Your Media Monitoring Tool for Successful Crisis Detection and Management](#) for tips and worksheets on how to choose your crisis-detection keywords.



STEP 2

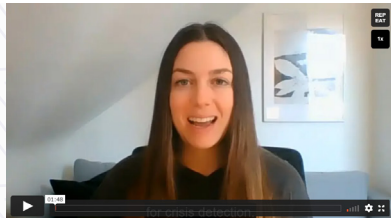
Set up searches

When setting up searches in your media monitoring tool, **you need to balance their specificity** with the total number you create.

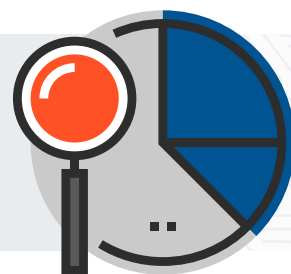
In other words, do you want a lot of very specific searches, or fewer broader ones?

Your preference will depend on a variety of factors, like the size of your communications team, how complex your organization's structure is, and the amount of coverage alerts, media briefings and reports you want to create.

Here's a quick video on how to set up a media monitoring search for crisis detection.



VIDEO:
SETTING UP A MEDIA MONITORING SEARCH FOR CRISIS DETECTION



For more practical tips on setting up your searches, check out [this guide](#).

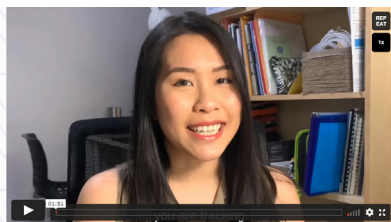
STEP 3
Use coverage alerts

Automated coverage alerts are especially useful in scenarios where having **real-time notifications of media coverage is crucial**—like a PR crisis.

Alerts are an essential step in early crisis detection. They notify PR pros of media mentions meeting certain criteria.

Generally, you should set up alerts for anything that worries your comms or leadership teams. Do you need to keep a close eye on sources of disinformation? Should you know immediately if your brand gets covered in a specific outlet? Do you prefer to see alerts right away about mentions with negative sentiment?

Here's a video explaining how to set up a coverage alert for crisis detection.



VIDEO:
SETTING UP A COVERAGE ALERT FOR CRISIS DETECTION



Check out the [two main questions to ask yourself when setting up coverage alerts](#).

STEP 4

Send media briefings

Media briefings are the peanut butter to coverage alerts' jelly.

While both alerts and briefings play key roles in guiding a brand through a crisis, they have distinct purposes:

- **Coverage alerts** send email notifications about a new media mention immediately.
- **Media briefing** emails contain a set of mentions (often curated) and are usually sent on a daily or weekly basis.

It's best to think of a coverage alert as a heads up on a single mention sent to a handful of key individuals on your team. Whereas a media briefing is a more complete story of your brand's coverage, often sent to members outside of the communications team.

With media briefings you curate the most relevant stories for sharing with stakeholders. What qualifies as important to you? Maybe it's mentions that indicate where the crisis is headed or mentions in notable outlets.

Check out the [three main considerations when setting up media briefings](#).

STEP 5

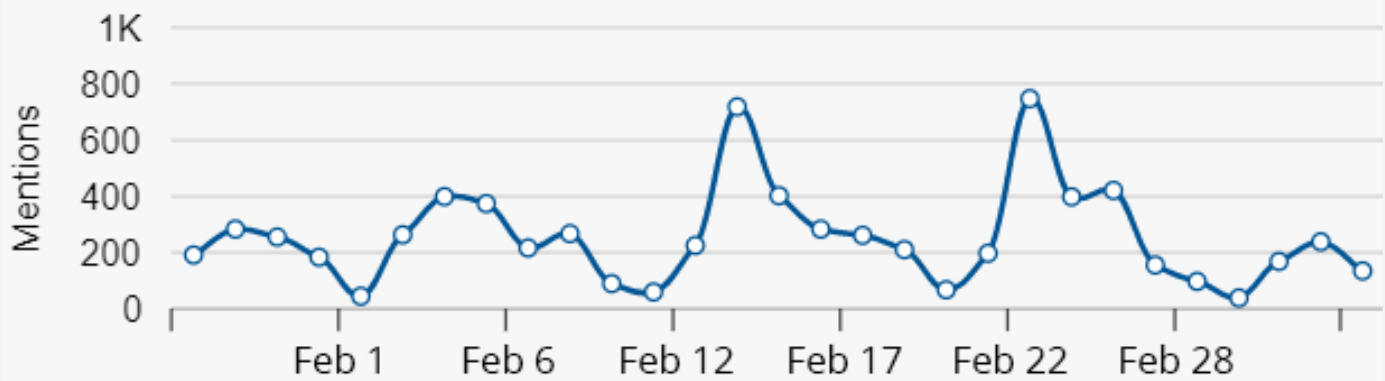
Assess the crisis

Reporting is **crucial in understanding how a crisis is progressing** and when a brand starts to regain control of their image.

Regularly creating reports during a crisis helps your team see the impact of the latest coverage and determine next steps. It will also help you understand how your crisis response is being perceived by the media and the public. Our monitoring experts recommend setting up a series of reports and sharing them with your crisis team and other stakeholders.

Luckily, reports are easily compiled in any top-tier media monitoring tool. If your organization has complex needs you can also request [media intelligence services](#) to track the evolution of a crisis. For example, tracking the volume of your brand's coverage over time can help you determine overall shape, any notable spikes, and when the story is dying down (or resurging).

With coverage over time, you can annotate when the crisis occurred, when your organization responded, and other key events in the timeline. This will give you a clear view of why spikes or drops in coverage appeared. It will also help highlight how timely your response was to the crisis.



You may not know your exact reporting needs ahead of time, but it's good to understand the available reporting capabilities. Check out our guide [How to Hear a Crisis Coming: 5 Steps for Setting Up Your Media Monitoring Tool for Successful Crisis Detection and Management](#) for common PR reports you should have access to through your media monitoring provider.

EFFECTIVE MEDIA MONITORING DURING A PR CRISIS

To successfully weather a crisis, brands should have a proactive media monitoring strategy in place. Brands must also be agile and reactive, adapting their monitoring practices as the crisis progresses. Evaluate your needs and how media monitoring supports them to keep your program running like clockwork.

Here are our five tips on how to stay nimble and informed:

01 GET ALL THE FACTS

Collecting the facts is critical at the beginning of—and throughout—a crisis. Rapidly analyzing what's happened so far will help you with your initial response and provide direction on how to best monitor the emerging crisis. Make sure you have the full picture by meeting with all involved parties, seeking out the unknowns, and being on guard for misinformation.

02 REVISIT YOUR SETUP

As you learn more about the situation, enhance your tracking capabilities by making regular tweaks to your media monitoring searches. Consider separating different story angles and organizing your coverage with naming conventions and tagging. Remove keywords sparingly!

03 PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO SOCIAL

It's well-known that social media can make news of a crisis spread like wildfire. It can also be the point of origin. Whether it's an unflattering hashtag on Instagram or a retweeted video on Twitter, a crisis can escalate rapidly when the algorithm boosts the visibility of the story.

As a preventative measure, regularly update your social media keywords and dedicate a team member to monitor the coverage. This will be critical in detecting the early signs of a crisis. For best results, adjust your searches regularly, use automated alerts, and review posts mentioning your brand.

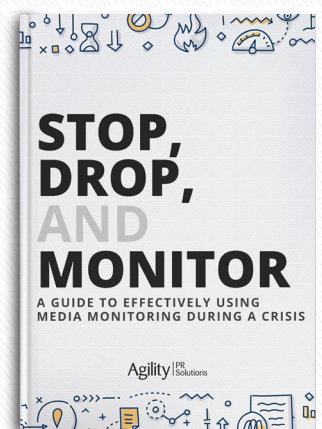
04 TRACK JOURNALISTS COVERING THE CRISIS

One area where a PR crisis can have a silver lining is media relations. Consider the journalists (or influencers) covering the crisis as partners rather than adversaries and train your spokespeople to do the same. Monitoring these journalists may provide you opportunities to control the narrative. Reach out to them to offer your brand's statement and exclusives with spokespeople. These actions may result in establishing relationships with new contacts who will continue to cover you long after the crisis is over.

05 TRACK OTHER PLAYERS' RESPONSES

There's a good chance you aren't in this crisis alone, but you may not have access to the involved parties. For example, competitors or former clients. If you are unable to work directly with an involved party, it's critical to track their media coverage. Analyze their responses with your crisis team. Keep an eye on their non-crisis activities. Get the full picture of their coverage by monitoring beyond their brand name (like you do with your own organization).

For more tips on monitoring during a crisis, check out our guide [Stop, Drop, and Monitor: A Guide to Effectively Using Media Monitoring During a Crisis](#)



WHY YOU SHOULD MONITOR OTHERS' PR CRISES

As important as it is to track your own brand and crisis-related coverage, it's equally important to track the coverage of other relevant parties. Observing another brand going through a crisis, whether a competitor, partner, or other industry player, means you'll see them at their most vulnerable. How they operate while navigating a crisis can provide you with valuable insight—but only if you add them to your searches.

Here are six reasons to track your competitors' next crisis using a [top-rated media monitoring tool](#):

- 01 SIMULATION TESTING FOR YOUR CRISIS TEAM.** A crisis that only indirectly affects your brand is the perfect scenario to practice your team's response processes and see what works and what doesn't.
- 02 IDENTIFY POTENTIAL THREATS.** If your brand could easily replace the current brand in the headlines, it's time to kick your own crisis management activities into high gear.
- 03 GLEAN COMPETITIVE INSIGHTS.** Dissect the messaging points communicated and actions taken by the brand experiencing the crisis. Evaluate the success of their response and debrief with your crisis and leadership teams about lessons learned.
- 04 FIND OPPORTUNITIES.** A competitor's dumpster fire can be your time to shine, connect with new audiences, and better position your brand in the industry. Look for opportunities to story hijack recent coverage.
- 05 INFORM TIMING FOR PR ACTIVITIES.** If news coverage is being dominated by a certain story, you may want to reschedule your own announcements and PR activities.
- 06 PR AGENCY ADVANTAGES.** Sharing insights gained from a competitor's crisis with your client is an excellent opportunity to build a stronger relationship. Especially if those insights could aid them in the future.

For more details on monitoring your competitors' crises, read our blog post [6 Reasons You Should Monitor Your Competitors' Crises](#).

MEDIA MONITORING TOOLS FOR A PR CRISIS

There are three main types of monitoring solutions:

- ✓ Free or cheap options
- ✓ Paid media monitoring tools
- ✓ Premium media monitoring services

ARE YOU EQUIPPED TO HANDLE YOUR NEXT CRISIS WITH YOUR CURRENT MEDIA MONITORING PROVIDER?

FREE OR CHEAP MEDIA MONITORING OPTIONS

If your media monitoring budget is non-existent and you still want to do something to prepare yourself for a potential crisis, consider setting up some [Google Alerts](#) to track coverage in online news and blogs. Augment this with [free social media monitoring options](#).

But be warned... the results will be bare-bones and you'll probably miss some mentions, which isn't ideal for crisis monitoring. Plus, you won't have many options for sharing the coverage with others in an efficient manner, nor will you have any ease crisis reporting options.

Trying to make the case to your leadership team to invest in a paid media monitoring tool? We recommend sharing the limitations of the free tools and why media monitoring is critical for detecting a crisis (covered under "Why is media monitoring essential to PR crisis management?").

Having some budget to work with opens up a lot of options for you. When we say media monitoring tools here, we're referring to cloud-based software tools.

A [media monitoring tool](#) is one that you set up (usually with the help of the provider) and maintain yourself. It includes a dashboard, the option for you to receive automated coverage alerts and media briefings, and integrated reporting capabilities that make it easy to share the progression of the crisis with all your stakeholders.

PAID MEDIA MONITORING TOOLS

PREMIUM MEDIA MONITORING SERVICES

When your needs are a little more extensive, it helps to have a personalized, fully managed service at your disposal—a provider who can be a partner in tracking your crisis.

If you're working for a large organization that generates a lot of media coverage, or has complex monitoring needs, a managed media monitoring service will be the best fit. You fall into this category if you...

- Need someone to help separate the wheat from the chaff
- Want advanced analysis and measurement
- Care about quality of coverage, not just quantity
- Require someone to create custom reports that meet your needs exactly
- Trust sentiment analysis to a human over a piece of software

Agility PR Solutions' media intelligence services provides exactly that. It's a mix of powerful monitoring tools and human-augmented, fully managed services. Our media analysts set up and fine-tune keyword searches, curate executive-ready daily briefs, and add context and sentiment insights in a way that only a human can. And we always make sure you're delighted with every curated report and media brief delivered!

The difference between this and an automated tool is the level of analysis you'll get. An automated monitoring tool gives you with the quantity of your coverage; a managed service gives you quantity and quality. When you know the quality, you can more easily measure your PR efforts and connect them to your organization's business goals.

You can learn more about the types of media monitoring tools available in [Media Monitoring: The Ultimate Guide.](#)



EVOLVING FROM A PR CRISIS WITH MEDIA MONITORING

A PR crisis is primarily associated with doom and gloom, and for the most part that reputation is rightly earned. No one likes to be blind-sided by a threat that could damage their brand's or their own reputation.

However, it's important to recognize that a well-handled crisis can set the stage for many beneficial possibilities for a brand and its PR team. Tools like media monitoring provide a significant advantage here. Practitioners paying attention to what's being said about their brand will more easily identify and seize on these opportunities.

Here are five ways you can capitalize on a crisis and come out of it stronger than before with the help of media monitoring.

✓ DEMONSTRATE PR'S EFFICACY

A crisis is your chance to perform in the spotlight for your leadership team and colleagues, as they will look to you for guidance. This is the time to prove how well you keep your cool and perform under pressure to mitigate damage and regain control.

How can media monitoring help? Keep stakeholders in the know during a crisis with media briefings and reports from your media monitoring tool. Use benchmarks like coverage sentiment before, during, and after a crisis to show how PR activities are helping to recover your reputation.

✓ FORGE NEW MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS



A crisis may be your opportunity to build a relationship with a media contact from a sought-after publication, or influencer with a large following. Even if your coverage is negative, make a good impression by working cooperatively with the media. Be responsive and honest.

How can media monitoring help? Use media monitoring to identify and contact those reporting on your brand's crisis. Most media monitoring solutions also provide details on the journalist's reach and past articles they've written to help you prioritize who you want to work with.

✓ INCREASE YOUR PR BUDGET



A crisis is often the time to make a persuasive case for allocating more resources to the PR team. Be sure to lead with the benefits of new investments in the short-term (handling the crisis) and long-term (recovering your brand's reputation, avoiding future crises).

How can media monitoring help? Pull press clippings of the current reactions to the crisis from the media and public. This will make a powerful statement about the severity of the crisis and why additional resources are necessary.

✓ AUGMENT YOUR BRAND'S AUTHENTICITY

Journalists and the public can sniff out anything less than a genuine response to a crisis and will condemn it across traditional and social media. This is the most crucial time to ensure your brand's actions align with its stated values. Drive this point home to your leadership team. They need to make high-level decisions that set forth a more authentic path for your organization and allow you to connect more effectively with your audience.

How can media monitoring help? Social media coverage is a great barometer for the perceived authenticity of your brand. Carefully review social posts and flag those that reference incongruity or hypocrisy in your organization to see if the claims have merit.

✓ LEARN FROM PAST MISTAKES



At the very least, every crisis is a learning opportunity. When a brand makes a concerted effort to learn from their past mistakes and do better in the future, it's oftentimes noted and respected by critics.

How can media monitoring help? Benchmark media coverage before and after any responses or statements you put out. Provide coverage briefings to show leadership how your brand is currently perceived and what must happen to avoid negative coverage in the future.

If you're ready to learn more about how media monitoring can help with crisis management, [book a demo](#) today! One of our representatives will walk you through our top-rated solutions and help you choose the package that makes the most sense for your brand.