

HSMAI SPECIAL REPORT

# Crisis Communications for Hospitality Marketing Professionals

*Case Studies From HSMAI's  
Adrian Awards Program*



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**By Robert A. Gilbert, CHME, CHBA, President and CEO,**  
*Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAI)*

**I**n a crisis situation, business leaders don't just need information. They need inspiration. They need success stories. That's what this HSMAI Special Report — presented with the support of HSMAI's 2020 Organizational Member companies — provides.

While the coronavirus is still very much a developing situation, hospitality marketing professionals should be focusing on how they are positioning their properties, companies, and brands — not just right now, in the midst of the crisis, but in the aftermath. To offer some ideas, we've turned to winners in the Crisis Communication/Recovery Communication category for Public Relations in HSMAI's Adrian Awards competition.

As the 10 case studies we have developed from these destinations' and properties' campaigns show, there is no such thing as a non-recoverable disaster. In the moment, your job is to communicate in a way that prioritizes the safety of your guests, your employees, and your stakeholders. And when it's over, you let them know that you're open for business — and better than ever.

Learn more about these and other Adrian Award-winning advertising, digital marketing, and public relations campaigns at [adrianawards.hsmmai.org/winners-gallery](https://adrianawards.hsmmai.org/winners-gallery).



### ABOUT HSMAI

Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAI) is the hospitality industry's leading advocate for intelligent, sustainable hotel revenue growth. HSMAI provides hotel professionals and their partners with tools, insights, and expertise to fuel sales, inspire marketing, and optimize revenue through programs such as HSMAI's Revenue Optimization Conference, Marketing Strategy Conference, Sales Leader Forum, and Adrian Awards. HSMAI offers organizational and individual membership, with more than 7,000 members in four global regions — the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. — [hsmmai.org](https://hsmmai.org)

# Zika Crisis Communications Campaign

## GOAL

When the Zika virus hit Florida in 2016, Miami tourism declined due to fear of the disease. The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) responded with a campaign designed to position itself as a credible source of information and ensure that the destination remained a desirable place to visit by generating positive press and communicating facts through regular updates.

## CAMPAIGN

Gathering data from reliable sources and working closely with officials at the city, county, and state levels as well as with members of the hotel and travel industries, GMCVB produced YouTube videos, high-profile ads at the Super Bowl and MLB All-Star Game, and placements in *The New York Times*, *InStyle*, and *Bloomberg Businessweek*.

## RESULTS

With GMCVB's campaign generating 160 million media impressions, the destination rebounded with a 2-percent increase in overnight visitors in 2016. A year after the Zika crisis, hotel revenue for Miami-Dade County had jumped 14.7 percent while hotel demand was up nearly 10 percent.

## 36 Hours in Miami and Miami Beach

By PAOLA SINGER NOV. 17, 2016

Once again, the Miami area is reinventing itself, this time as a cultural and culinary hot spot. [RELATED ARTICLE](#)



# Blue-Green Algae Crisis Preparation and Response

## GOAL

As inaccurate and misleading information circulated about the blue-green algae bloom affecting the Atlantic coast in Florida's Martin County in the summer of 2016, Discover The Palm Beaches (DTPB) sought to publicize that nearby Palm Beach County was safe for visitors and residents by disseminating factual information and speaking points to local tourism centers.

## CAMPAIGN

After forming a task force that included representatives from local and state environmental, tourism, and health organizations, DTPB developed a crisis communication plan focused on controlling the narrative by sharing facts with Palm Beach County residents, stakeholders, visitors, and the media. Thanks to a press conference, DTPB was featured on NBC's *Nightly News*, the *Today* show, and in local papers and stations, and live beach cams were added on social media and on ThePalmBeaches.com

## RESULTS

The social media component of the campaign generated more than 300,000 impressions and 20,000 engagements. Not only was there no negative impact on bookings during DTPB's crucial July 4 weekend, occupancy grew to 70.4 percent — a 3.4-percent increase from 2015.



### Record-Breaking Visitation Announced for The Palm Beaches *Discover The Palm Beaches releases 2016 tourism numbers*

*Editor's note:* [Click here](#) for downloadable images of The Palm Beaches.

*Suggested tweet:* 7.3 million people can't be wrong – see for yourself why visitors love #ThePalmBeaches. [www.thepalmbeaches.com](http://www.thepalmbeaches.com) @PalmBeachesFL

**WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (February 15, 2017)** – Discover The Palm Beaches (DTPB), the official tourism marketing corporation for Palm Beach County, has announced record-breaking visitation numbers for 2016. DTPB's year-end hotel performance dashboard data shows a higher-than-forecasted 7.35 million visitors came to The Palm Beaches from January to December, which is a 5.8% visitation increase over 2015.

"We had a historic number of visitors come to The Palm Beaches in 2016, a remarkable eight years in a

## #AlternativeFacts: Bowling Green Massacre

### GOAL

After presidential adviser Kellyanne Conway made reference to a nonexistent “Bowling Green Massacre” during a TV interview in 2017, Bowling Green Area Convention & Visitors Bureau took control of the situation by generating positive awareness of Bowling Green in a way that leveraged the southern Kentucky destination’s enhanced media mentions.

### CAMPAIGN

The CVB offered actual facts about the destination as opposed to the “alternative facts” that Conway shared, emphasizing attractions such as Mammoth Cave National Park, Chaney’s Dairy Barn, and Lost River Cave.

### RESULTS

Within a week of the controversy, traffic to the CVB’s website increased by 84 percent, and there were more than 2 billion impressions from outlets such as CNN, Bravo, and BuzzFeed.



# The Grateful Table

## GOAL

After wildfires devastated California's wine country in October 2017, more than 1,200 wineries struggled against the perception that they had been completely destroyed — even though in reality only 10 were damaged. Visit California sought to encourage tourism and support recovery in the region by addressing these inaccurate perceptions.

## CAMPAIGN

Visit California presented an event called The Grateful Table on the Napa-Sonoma county line in November 2017 that showed that the region was open for business and also served as a fundraiser. Celebrity chef Tyler Florence worked on the menu, while local businesses made donations to support the program. The event was publicized through pre-, post-, and on-site interviews and media placements.

## RESULTS

More than 500 people gathered at The Grateful Table, raising \$150,000 for the recovery effort. The campaign also contributed to a 19-percent increase in visitors to wine country compared to November of the previous year and increases in airport traffic of 5.4 percent in quarter four of 2017 and 30.9 percent in quarter one of 2018.



## Positioning a Luxury Resort Post Hurricane Irma

### GOAL

After Hurricane Irma devastated the Caribbean island of Anguilla in September 2017, Frangipani Beach Resort was forced to close for renovations. Working with the Zapwater agency, Frangipani launched an aggressive reputation management strategy to generate positive awareness of the resort and its reopening.

### CAMPAIGN

Positioning Frangipani as a resort committed to Anguilla, its employees, and its guests, the strong media relations campaign generated attention from *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *USA Today*, and other national publications, resulting in more than 76 million media impressions. The public was kept informed of rebuilding efforts, an employee assistance program, and the resort's new spa and lounge via a series of press releases and website updates.

### RESULTS

Frangipani achieved a 100-percent occupancy rate for two consecutive seasons — 2018 and 2019 — as well as a 50-percent increase in revenue since reopening in December 2017. *Travel + Leisure* ranked Frangipani as the number-one resort in the Caribbean and the number-three resort in the world in its 2018 World's Best Awards and the number-two resort in the Caribbean in 2019.





# #CAREolinas

## GOAL

The #CAREolinas campaign was born when Hurricane Florence was bearing down on North and South Carolina in September 2018 — uniting the Visit NC and Discover SC brands in an effort to empower residents of the two states.

## CAMPAIGN

The campaign was inspired by an illustration in *USA Today* that showed the two Carolinas hugging with the hurricane approaching. The initial design and message of “We share more than a state line” soon evolved into a website and social media campaign, including a Facebook group that connected people seeking help with people providing it. The drawing was also featured on a t-shirt, with proceeds going toward relief and recovery efforts.

## RESULTS

#CAREolinas t-shirts and specialty #CAREolinas wine sales brought in more than \$136,000. The CAREolinas.com website received more than 34,000 visits, leading to more than 2,700 downstream referrals directly to official state relief funds.



# #CoverTheProgress

## GOAL

In 2018, a year after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, the island territory sought to control the tone and nature of the media coverage around the anniversary and discourage rehashing of the destruction while also driving economic recovery and creating awareness that Puerto Rico was open for business.

## CAMPAIGN

A month before the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Maria, Discover Puerto Rico launched a campaign that visited residents who were affected by the hurricane, inviting them to tell their stories of recovery and progress, and showing in images how far the island had come since then.

## RESULTS

While typically 90 percent of one-year-later post-disaster coverage is negative, in this case it was 70 percent positive. The positive press helped to bring in \$445 million and 1.67 million visitors through May 2019, a record amount— which is especially noteworthy in light of World Travel and Tourism Council research showing that travelers tend to stay away from a natural disaster area for close to two full years.



# Dream Drive

## GOAL

Highway 1, the beloved scenic road running up California's coast, was partially closed for more than 18 months starting in 2017, which added up to \$554 million in lost travel spending for the area. Visit California created the Dream Drive to attract both local and international travelers to the coast.

## CAMPAIGN

A convoy of road-trip cars from every decade from the 1930s to the 2010s set out on a caravan drive from WeatherTech Laguna Seca Raceway in Salinas to Morro Rock in Morro Bay, California, where the program concluded with a golden-hour event and car rally. Nearly 100 influencers and members of the media from around the country participated in the Dream Drive, with each one paired with an iconic car to make their journey down the coast.

## RESULTS

The Dream Drive has generated more than a half-billion impressions from more than 755 media placements, inspired visitors seeking their own Dream Drive in California, and signaled that the area is fully open — and drivable.



# Kilauea Volcano Eruption Impact

## GOAL

While the Kilauea volcano was erupting unpredictably throughout the spring of 2018, the Island of Hawaii Visitors Bureau (IHVB) sought to correct misinformation in the media and inform tourists that Hawaii was still open for business. Kilauea has been active since 1983, and only a remote 10 square miles of the 4,028-square-mile island were affected by the 2018 eruptions.

## CAMPAIGN

IHVB developed a website with updated information and resources and publicized the situation to journalists and other media. The message was that Hawaii was safe and nothing had changed.

## RESULTS

The campaign achieved or exceeded all its initial goals, with media coverage by outlets such as *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *Live with Kelly and Ryan*, which itself led to more than 12.3 million broadcast viewers. Despite the eruptions, Hawaii maintained visitor spending of \$2.4 billion — a 6.8-percent increase from the previous year.



# Red Tide Crisis

## GOAL

Red tide is a phenomenon caused by algal blooms that deplete oxygen and release toxins in ocean water. In 2018, southwest Florida was faced with its most intense red tide outbreak in nearly 50 years, killing off marine life and sparking widespread negative media coverage. Eventually Florida's governor declared a state of emergency in Lee County, on Florida's Gulf Coast, which negatively affected visitor numbers along with the entire coastal economy. The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel needed to bring visitors back once the red tide had passed.

## CAMPAIGN

The Beaches launched a campaign that showcased the destination's beautiful beaches and other attractions, starting with a press release that announced that the ocean was back to its normal, healthy state. In February 2019, journalists were invited to stay at an oceanfront resort and experience the natural beauty of the area, and in May, the Beaches hosted a media takeover with Travel Massive in New York City to promote the destination's beer trail.

## RESULTS

Lee County's bed tax brought in a record-high \$5.4 million only six months after the crisis, while more than 500 media placements led to more than 1 billion media impressions, including from 140 publications, 27 broadcast airings, and feature stories in *The Boston Globe*, *Family Traveller*, and *National Geographic Traveler*.

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BEACHES + ISLANDS

### Florida's red tide is finally gone and it's time to hit the beach

Photo: Zhukova Valentyna/Shutterstock

**Skye Sherman**  
Dec 17, 2018

FAR FROM THE palm-studded paradise of beach bums, Florida has been a veritable nightmare for the past several months. The red tide, a natural environmental phenomenon made worse by pollution and other man-made causes, struck Florida and caused irritation, sneezing, and coughing in beachgoers and significant loss of marine life in some areas.

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