Bridgestone/Firestone Recall: 
A Case Study in Public Relations

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bridgestone/Firestone tire recall was a massive safety crisis that affected thousands of drivers, particularly Ford Explorer drivers. Firestone’s Wilderness AT, ATX and ATX II tires had an abnormally high failure rate. The result was many deaths, lawsuits and a mandatory recall. The company endured negative publicity and negative perceptions with its publics. In response, the company attempted an image repair campaign entitled “Making It Right.”

Bridgestone/Firestone did not follow proper crisis communication objectives and is therefore an example of unsuccessful corporate public relations. The following is an analysis of Bridgestone/Firestone’s tire crisis in the United States.

II. RESEARCH

About Firestone

Firestone has a history of crisis. The company held a recall after tread separation problems with its 500 series tires. In October 1978, congressional hearings into the 500 series took place. Firestone recalled over 10 million tires, the largest tire recall in U.S. history. The defective 500 series tires were determined to be the cause of 34 deaths. Multiple lawsuits were settled out of court (O’Rourke, 2001).

Publicity was constantly negative during this first recall (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2000). Firestone was slow to respond to customer complaints. It blamed drivers for under-inflating their tires. The company fought with the federal government for months before agreeing to recall the tires. As a result, Firestone endured excessive losses, new management, job cuts, factory closures, and a move of headquarters. Bridgestone
acquired the struggling company in 1988, merely depending on the Firestone name to sell
tires (Jain, 2001).

Bridgestone/Firestone’s tumultuous history with its publics repeated itself in the late 1990s. The company was forced to react in both situations, and, once again, nearly all of its relationships were tarnished because of its poor public relations practices. This had much greater repercussions for Bridgestone/Firestone’s image even though the second crisis had a smaller recall than the first.

**Governmental Considerations**

Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company were secretly recalling and replacing tires in its overseas markets since the early 1990s. However, the companies provided no notification to the United States government.

Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company frequently agreed to confidential settlements with accident victims in the United States and other countries. The two corporations got the court proceedings sealed. It was even able to close courtrooms to viewers, claiming a right to “preserve trade secrets” (Jain, 2001).

Beginning in July 1998, Sam Boyden, a research analyst for State Farm Insurance, e-mailed the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) to report 21 tread severance cases linked to Bridgestone/Firestone’s ATX tire. He persistently sent e-mails to NHTSA about the increasing number of accidents involving Firestone tires (Firestone/Ford Fiasco: Timeline and Internal Documents).

In April 1999, the NHTSA evaluated the Bridgestone/Firestone ATX II and Wilderness AT tires using its Uniform Tire Grading Report. These tires received the test’s lowest grade on stress test temperature. Overheated tires are a leading cause of tread
The vast majority of comparable tires received higher grades (Firestone/Ford Fiasco: Timeline and Internal Documents).

In May 2000, NHTSA opened a formal investigation into Bridgestone/Firestone’s ATX, ATX II and Wilderness tires after determining that they may have been the cause of over 80 fatalities in the United States and 40 in Venezuela (Firestone/Ford Fiasco: Timeline and Internal Documents).

Federal law requires automobile and automobile parts manufacturers to send copies of all their safety bulletins to NHTSA. However, tire manufacturers, including Bridgestone/Firestone, had not done so for years (Jain, 2001).

**Corporate Considerations**

According to *Modern Tire Dealer*, Bridgestone/Firestone sold $350 million worth of tires to Ford Motor Company in 1999. Bridgestone/Firestone was the largest supplier of tires to Ford with a market share of 38 percent of total Ford volume. Goodyear was a remote second with a market share of 23 percent (Jain, 2001).

Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company ended their 100-year-long relationship because of this crisis. They blamed each other for the devastating tire failures and resulting injuries and fatalities.

Bridgestone/Firestone had dual concerns about its relationships with other automobile manufacturers. Firstly, other automobile manufacturers were concerned about using Bridgestone/Firestone tires on their vehicles. Hirohide Ikeno of Honda said he was “extremely worried” about consumer backlash against the Bridgestone/Firestone name. Secondly, Bridgestone/Firestone executives were fearful that their aggressive stand
against Ford Motor Company in regard to taking the blame for the tire failures may affect their business relationships with other automobile manufacturers.

In August 2000, as anxiety about Bridgestone/Firestone tires grew, Sears announced that it would stop selling Bridgestone/Firestone ATX, ATX II and Wilderness tires at its 1,130 automobile care centers. Tom Nicholson, Sears’ spokesman, stated, “There’s no recall, but until we have more information from Firestone, the responsible thing to do is to discontinue sales until we have some answers” (Pickler, 2000).

In response, Bridgestone/Firestone maintained that its tires “are among the safest tires on the road.” Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company added that there were no plans for a tire recall in the United States. Bridgestone/Firestone blamed Ford for recommended improper tire inflation levels on the Explorers.

**Cultural Considerations**

American consumer culture developed an affinity for Sport Utility Vehicles in the late 1990s. At this time, SUV structure and design became much safer. Consumers perceived SUVs as being much safer as well. Automobile manufacturers made SUV frames less rigid and much heavier. This change was also implemented to satisfy the consumer demand among business professionals for more luxurious SUVs. Ford, primarily perceived as having a rugged image, offered more luxurious amenities on its Explorer. The Ford Explorer SUV was perceived as being more luxurious, hence, safer (O’Rourke, 2001).

Cultural differences played a major part in regard to the amount of CEO involvement during the recall. Ford Motor Company’s CEO, Jacques Nasser, led his company through the crisis. Through the media, Ford heavily emphasized Nasser’s
leadership in response to the crisis. This harshly contrasted with Bridgestone/Firestone’s approach. Gary Crigger, Executive Vice President of Bridgestone/Firestone, announced the recall, and not the company’s CEO, Masatoshi Ono.

Ono’s behavior was considered normal among business leaders in Japan. The most successful CEOs are masters of “nemawashi.” Nemawashi is the unhurried, quiet agreement-building process that is necessary to make decisions. Great Japanese CEOs are able to drastically increase company sales (Jain, 2001), whereas great American CEOs are great spokespeople. Few Japanese CEOs are comfortable with talking to the media. Lower-level staff usually handles this responsibility (Jain, 2001). This cultural difference in CEO involvement was a detriment to Bridgestone/Firestone’s image.

Ono was supposed to be the face of Bridgestone/Firestone. This showed Americans that, just like Bridgestone/Firestone tires, Ono could not handle the heat. He did not show the leadership that Americans expect a CEO of a major corporation to possess.

Publics

Employees

Bridgestone/Firestone’s crisis did not begin when tire treads began to separate on America’s roads. It began with the employees at its tire manufacturing plant in Decatur, Illinois.

The United States government built the Decatur plant in 1942 to manufacture and store equipment for the Defense Department. It was shut down in 1961 and was subsequently acquired by Firestone in 1962 to manufacture tires.
Air conditioning was installed to reduce humidity in the plant in 1999, though it was not utilized throughout the entire plant. Large mixers blend raw materials under extreme heat and pressure.

The equipment was outdated. Equipment age is a significant factor in the effectiveness of bonds between tire belts. Although no specific improvements have been confirmed, Bridgestone/Firestone asserted that it continuously updated the equipment at its plants (Jain, 2001).

Serious labor problems plagued the Decatur plant for two years. Bridgestone sent Yoichiro Kaizaki from Japan in 1991 to restructure Firestone’s operations. Kaizaki demanded that employee wages be contingent upon worker productivity. Due to this reorganization, Bridgestone/Firestone faced a highly publicized strike by Steelworkers Union members from 1994 to 1996. The company only hired replacements who were not affiliated with the Steelworkers Union (Krueger, 2004).

Rex Grogan, a renowned tire engineering expert, alleged that Bridgestone/Firestone hired inexperienced replacement workers and cut corners by using improperly handled and inferior materials in order to meet strict production deadlines. He said that Bridgestone/Firestone was “trying to make a tire, which is a handmade article, with people who’ve never made a tire, and they were also trying to get increased quantities out the door.” Grogan added that many shortcuts were taken in the manufacturing process. “You’ve got to have very rigid housekeeping standards to make sure that the material doesn’t get stale,” he said. “But if you’re trying to squeeze a lot of tires out, the temptation is to say ‘Aw, well, it’s only a couple of days of overage, we’ll use it, it looks all right.’ And it’s not” (Meyer, 2000).
William “Max” Nonnamaker, President of Nonnamaker & Associates, an Akron tire consulting firm, concurred. “They were forced to use drier setup stock, or the builders themselves, being inexperienced, didn’t know the difference between dry and proper set up stock” (Meyer, 2000).

Four former Bridgestone/Firestone employees, each with over 30 years of work experience at the Decatur plant testified about the working conditions there. They said that tire builders were paid an hourly rate based on meeting production quotas. Tire inspectors were pressed to examine 100 tires per hour, and final tire inspections lasted a mere 10 to 15 seconds – if at all. They also added that old materials were used to make tires and that the plant’s temperature conditions could have damaged the set up stock (O’Rourke, 2001).

Darrell Batson, who had worked as tire inspector at the Decatur plant from 1965 to 1995, explained the plant’s use of benzene to restore the adhesiveness of set up stock that had been unused for too long. Excessive benzene use can compromise the quality of tire material (O’Rourke, 2001).

Bridgestone/Firestone’s Vice President of Public Affairs, Christine Karbowiak, described the former employees as “disgruntled.” She said that the company stood by its manufacturing processes and procedures. According to her, Firestone procedures ensure that “only quality products go out the door” (Jain, 2001).

Consumers

Bridgestone/Firestone estimated that nearly 6.5 million of the recalled tires were still on the road.

Citing a lack of replacement tires, Bridgestone/Firestone said that it was going to take up to 18 months to finish its recall. It planned a three-phase process. The first phase offered replacement tires to Arizona, California, Florida and Texas consumers. This phase was to be completed in October 2000. Next were Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Oklahoma and Tennessee residents. The third phase involved the rest of the country after these two regions were served. The consumers were to be mailed letters about how to get their tires replaced (Jain, 2001).

New York’s Attorney General, Eliot Spitzer, commented that he found “the terms of the recall wholly inadequate because of the failure to treat all affected consumers equally. This unequal treatment unfairly results in many consumers having to bear unnecessary safety risks for an undetermined period of time.” (Letter to Rosalyn Millman, 2000).

His constituents agreed. Consumers were irate. They did not want to drive around for so long with such faulty tires. They began requesting replacement of all Bridgestone/Firestone tires, even those not recalled.

Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company only offered such a large-scale recall after they were intensely pressured to offer American motorists the same safety precautions that were being offered to their overseas customers. Gary Crigger, Executive Vice President of Bridgestone/Firestone, announced that the recall was unconditional, and that “no matter how many tires, no matter how many miles they have on them, we
will replace them with new tires” using either comparable Firestone tires or competitors’
tires (Firestone Tires Recalled, 2000).

Dealers

The recall wreaked havoc on nearly 8,500 Bridgestone/Firestone dealers. They
built their lives around a brand in turmoil. Many debated defending the company they
relied on or cutting their losses and supporting another brand (Jain, 2001).

Chris Tolleson, second generation independent Firestone dealer in Richland,
Mississippi, financially and emotionally struggled as a result of the recall. At a dinner
party, a woman asked him if her 16-inch Firestone tires were recalled. He told her they
were safe, but later recanted. He wondered if the recall would be expanded, and if he was
giving the woman a false sense of security (Jain, 2001).

Michael Upton, a dealer in Jackson, Mississippi, experienced an 80 percent
decline in his sales. He took down the Bridgestone/Firestone signs at his stores and
requested that the company take back his inventory. “Why should I even mention
Firestone,” he said, “when I know what my customer is thinking about the name?”

Media Relations

Breaking the Story

In February 2000, KHOU news in Houston reported a connection between traffic
deaths and lawsuits against Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company. KHOU
reported that these deaths were being caused by instantaneous tread separations in
Bridgestone/Firestone tires.

Prior to the story’s broadcast, Bridgestone/Firestone issued a statement to defend
the tires’ quality. According to Christine Karbowiak, Bridgestone/Firestone’s
spokeswoman, the news story “contains falsehoods and misrepresentations that improperly disparage Firestone and its product, the Radial ATX model tire.” Karbowiak warned KHOU that reporter Anne Werner’s words “may be grounds for finding of actual malice” (Tomkins, 2000).

On April 30, 2000, investigative reporter Mark Skertic’s article called “Faulty Tires Carry Fatal Consequences” was on the front page of the *Chicago Sun Times*. The next day, the NHTSA mailed letters to all tire manufacturers insisting information about why safety concerns had not been reported.

The media transitioned the story from a quiet situation to a full-blown crisis. The Bridgestone/Firestone crisis received extensive media coverage. CBS thoroughly covered the crisis on *60 Minutes*. CNN provided explicit images of wrecked Explorers and swarms of consumers at recall locations. The *New York Times* and *USA Today* also used graphic images on their front pages.

Many attacked the Bridgestone/Firestone brand using comedy. Jay Leno’s *Tonight Show*, which is seen both nationally and internationally, parodied the crisis by showing a child swinging on a Firestone tire that subsequently exploded. Other comedians re-branded the tires as “Tombstones” and “Gravestones.”

*Agency Issues*

The world’s largest public relations agency, Burson-Marsteller, worked for both Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford Motor Company. Due to an impending recall and an inevitable conflict in public relations strategy between two of its clients, the agency severed its ties with Bridgestone/Firestone in May 2000.
Fleishman-Hillard began working for Bridgestone/Firestone in July with a $2.5 million per month agreement. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Bridgestone/Firestone did not inform Fleishman-Hillard of its oncoming crisis. The next month, Fleishman-Hillard executives determined that “they were receiving incomplete and questionable information from Firestone executives in the United States, and this made it difficult to give good advice or to effectively represent the company” (Jain, 2001).

Once again, Christine Karbowiak went on the defensive. Karbowiak disagreed with Fleishman-Hillard, insisting that Bridgestone/Firestone did certainly provide total and accurate information to the agency.

Fleishman-Hillard wanted Bridgestone/Firestone to be proactive by issuing a public apology and quickly recall and replace tires. Fleishman-Hillard resigned in September 2000, citing that it “could no longer be of service to Firestone.” Bridgestone/Firestone did not follow most of Fleishman-Hillard’s recommendations, and appears to have ignored its advice (O’Rourke, 2001).

Eventually, Ketchum became Bridgestone/Firestone’s new public relations firm. Ketchum handled crises for Wendy’s after a store shooting and FedEx Corporation after a plane crash. Mark Schannon, a partner with Ketchum, believed that Firestone was willing to make changes. “I really believe Firestone will do what it says it’s going to do. It’s determined to be more responsive, to move more quickly, open up the process,” he said. However, he warned, “It’s a very large company. I think it’s not going to happen overnight” (O’Rourke, 2001).
**Legal Counsel**

Bridgestone/Firestone heavily relied on its law firm for counsel, more so than it relied on its public relations agency. Unfortunately for the company, Donelson, Bearman & Caldwell withdrew itself as Bridgestone/Firestone’s legal representation. Due to its involvement with Ford, the firm had conflicting interests (Jain, 2001).

### III. Objectives

Crises are special circumstances that all organizations should be prepared for. Determining the objectives in crisis campaigns is difficult because there is usually very little time for thorough planning. Jerry Hendrix and Darrell Hayes offered four general objectives for crisis or emergency public relations campaigns.

1. To provide accurate, timely information to all targeted internal and external audiences
2. To demonstrate concern for the safety of lives
3. To safeguard organizational facilities and assets
4. To maintain a positive image of the organization as a good corporate or community citizen.

In order for an effective public relations process to occur practitioners should have a crisis communication plan in case an emergency were to happen. In the Bridgestone/Firestone situation there was not a plan. Firestone had undergone a similar recall in 1978 which was not effective. One would assume the company would learn from its mistakes. However, in 2000 when it was faced with its second recall, history repeated itself and it continued to make some of those same mistakes.
Bridgestone/Firestone faced a huge public relations problem largely because it did not follow the emergency communication model for its second crisis.

Bridgestone/Firestone did not provide accurate and timely information to all targeted internal (its employees) and external audiences (consumers, dealers and the media). There were initial reports as early as 1992 that Ford Explorers with Bridgestone/Firestone tires were experiencing tread separation. Situations around the world continued to occur in the 1990’s. It was not until August 2000 that Bridgestone/Firestone publicly addressed the situation and demanded the recall of the defective tires. Bridgestone/Firestone had known of the problem for quite some time but avoided the situation and only addressed the media because of the reports that had began to surface of the dangerous and deadly situations.

Bridgestone/Firestone attempted to demonstrate safety and concern for the citizens. A press release issued by the company stated, “At Bridgestone/Firestone, nothing is more important to us than the safety of our customers” (Bridgestone/Firestone corporate news web page, 2001). In the initial press release, the company warned customers to take additional steps to maintain proper inflation of their tires. “When under inflated, all radial tires generate excessive heat,” said Gary Crigger, Vice President of Bridgestone/Firestone, “Driving on tires in this condition can lead to tread separations. Maintaining the proper inflation level will enhance the performance and lifespan of these tires” (Bridgestone/Firestone corporate news web page, 2001). Bridgestone /Firestone had demonstrated safety and concern for its citizens. But when reports began to surface about the number of deaths and injuries, consumers began to quickly realize the company had not done enough.
Bridgestone/Firestone also did not safeguard its organizational facilities and assets in an effective manner. Instead, it recalled the tires in three phases. Phase one began in Arizona, California, Florida and Texas. The second phase was in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Oklahoma and Tennessee. The final phase was to include the remainder of the states. Replacements in some parts of the country were not expected to be completed for 18 months. This caused problems on a number of levels. Consumers began to feel they were ranked in an order of importance and did not feel secure in the meantime. Bridgestone/Firestone should have handled the recall all at once. Instead, it prolonged the situation and continued to put lives at risk.

It was difficult for Bridgestone/Firestone to maintain a positive image of the organization as a good corporate or community citizen. It failed the community on its prior objectives, which made this last objective hard to achieve. If the company had properly followed the emergency public relations objectives, its image may not have been negatively affected as much as it was.

IV. PLANNING AND EXECUTION

Public Relations Model/Program

Bridgestone/Firestone had clearly betrayed the public’s trust. The company was in desperate need of a campaign that would repair its image. According to James E. Grunig, the two-way symmetric model uses communication for organizations to negotiate with their publics. This resolves conflict and promotes mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its publics, and is an effective model of communication. Bridgestone/Firestone should have followed a two-way symmetrical public relations
model. However, its campaign was a reactive program and the company did not have a plan ahead of time to help avoid the problem’s escalation.

**Theme and Messages**

In 2000, Bridgestone/Firestone launched the first part of its campaign – the tire recall. The second part of its campaign was launched in 2001 through television and newspaper advertisements. The theme of its campaign was “Making It Right” and it encompassed “You Have Our Word On That” and “We’ll do whatever it takes, however long it takes, to gain your trust.” It also promised, “We’ll make it right. It’s that simple” (Making It Right, 2001). Overall, this campaign was its effort to fix the problems and make things right. The image repair campaign incorporated five strategies in its execution: mortification, corrective action, bolstering, denial and shifting the blame (Smith).

Bridgestone/Firestone’s CEO, Masatoshi Ono, engaged in mortification: “I come before you to apologize to you, the American people, and especially the families who have lost their loved ones in these terrible rollover accidents” (Firestone Detailed, 2000). Ono later resigned and his replacement, John Lampe, continued to use mortification. Lampe announced in a telecast, “My first act as new CEO is going to be an apology for those who have suffered personal losses or had problems with our products” (Incantalupo, 2000).

Bridgestone/Firestone used corrective action as its primary strategy (Smith, 2007). The theme of its campaign, “Making It Right,” assumed that the company was wrong and intended to correct its actions. Bridgestone/Firestone recalled the defective tires and offered to replace those with new ones.
In the midst of the crisis and the image repair campaign, Bridgestone/Firestone recognized the importance of exuding confidence in its brand. The company bolstered its efforts and stated, “We believe in our tires.” (Making It Right, 2001). It wanted the world to know it believed in its product and the quality of its tires.

The company relied on outside sources to bolster its reputation. In a series of televised advertisements, auto-race legends Mario and Michael Andretti were used to boost Bridgestone/Firestone’s reputation. Michael Andretti stated, “Firestone has a great heritage in racing and in the automobile industry. My dad [racing great Mario Andretti] and I are glad to be a part of Firestone’s ongoing efforts in promoting highway safety” (Michael Andretti, 2001). Mario Andretti also stated, “Firestone is committed to building quality tires” (2001). These celebrity endorsements reflect the company’s efforts to bolster its damaged reputation (Smith, 2007).

Bridgestone/Firestone also incorporated the denial strategy. Bridgestone’s president, Yoichiro Kaizaki said, “No structural deficiencies had been found in the tires themselves.” It also shifted the blame to others. It blamed the Ford Explorer SUVs because the model had the highest number of problems and had also recommended the wrong level of tire pressure. The blame was also shifted to the consumers for their improper tire maintenance. It even shifted the blame to its Decatur, Illinois manufacturing plant because the defective tires had originated from that one plant. For Bridgestone/Firestone, the denial and the shifted blame were its worst strategies. The blame game ended its 100-year relationship with Ford. As Bridgestone/Firestone continued a denial strategy, its image continued to deteriorate, especially when it had openly blamed its own manufacturing plant.


Media

The use of media played a key role in getting its messages out to the public. The company used a variety of controlled media to reach its audiences with the “Making It Right” campaign. The campaign, planned by Grey Worldwide advertising agency, included print advertisements that ran in the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Tire Business, Modem Tire Dealer, Automotive News, Ward’s Auto and other individual dailies throughout the country. The commercial campaign was broadcast to cable news and entertainment channels. An interactive website that promoted tire safety was also created in addition to in-store promotions, brochures, car clinics and Internet advertising (Smith, 2007).

However, the uncontrolled media that surrounded the crisis put a huge damper on Bridgestone/Firestone’s efforts. The media negatively framed the organization. Some of the unfavorable titles for articles published were “Ripped tires and blown reputations,” “Throwing the breaks on tires that peel out,” and “Peeling apart.” Stories further negated the company’s efforts using titles such as “They just don’t have a clue how to handle this” (Smith, 2007).

Effective Communication

Overall, the “Making It Right” campaign was not an effective form of communication. The image repair campaign, “Making It Right,” was too little and too late. In “Making It Right” commercials, Bridgestone/Firestone urged consumers to check their air pressure monthly. By doing so, the company failed to accept responsibility and implied that consumers were responsible for improper maintenance. It denied responsibility and shifted the blame to its partners, consumers and manufacturers.
V. Evaluation

Attitudinal Changes

Harris Interactive conducted an Internet poll in September 2000. It found 25 percent of 814 people surveyed said that the tire recall will either “extremely” or “very likely” influence their decision to purchase a Ford Motor Company product. However, 67 percent said that the tire recall will either “extremely” or “very likely” influence their decision to purchase a Bridgestone/Firestone product. A mere 14 percent said that Bridgestone/Firestone’s actions were timely and responsible. However, 26 percent said that Ford Motor Company was timely and responsible.

In a CNN and USA Today poll conducted in June 2001, respondents stated that 31 percent had a favorable opinion of Bridgestone/Firestone while 56 percent had an unfavorable view. The results prove its image repair campaign was not very effective.

Behavioral Changes

People’s attitudes about Bridgestone/Firestone affected their behavior. In November 2000, Bridgestone/Firestone reported a 40 percent decline in the United States replacement tire sales during September and October 2000 compared to September and October 1999.

People purchased more tires from Bridgestone/Firestone’s competitors. Bridgestone/Firestone’s loss was other manufacturers’ gain. Its crisis gave other tire manufacturers the chance to highlight great public relations practices. Many of Bridgestone/Firestone’s competitors raised their production levels to help replace the recalled tires in a timely manner.
Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., also based in Firestone’s hometown of Akron, Ohio, increased its tire production by 250% due to Bridgestone/Firestone’s recall. Goodyear emphasized its own safety record by utilizing the slogan: “Serious Technology. Freedom from Worry.”

Michelin increased production by 400 percent. It worked with Ford Motor Company to effectively meet its needs. Michelin posted information on its website so customers could learn which particular Michelin tires could replace their recalled Bridgestone/Firestone tires. Michelin also posted helpful information on how to get reimbursed for the cost.

Though Goodyear and Michelin’s bottom line was money, they were perceived as being tire companies that quickly took action to get American drivers back on the road. It capitalized on Bridgestone/Firestone’s inability to do so. Not only did the competitors financially benefit, but reaped excellent public relations benefits as well.

VI. CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bridgestone/Firestone did not properly handle this crisis. It was slow to react and shifted the blame to others. It was not until the NHTSA began looking into the case that Bridgestone/Firestone took responsibility for its actions. Many lives were lost because of its lackadaisical methods of dealing with the tire recall. Bridgestone/Firestone failed the public on its ethical responsibilities. The situation’s entire handling is a paradigm as to how public relations professionals should not handle a crisis.

Bridgestone/Firestone did not have clear objectives. These objectives should have been specific, measurable and timely. This would have made the company’s efforts more effective.
Corrective action should be immediately implemented in all crisis campaigns. Corporations facing crisis should use the two-way symmetrical communication model with its publics. Doing so ensures transparency and therefore increased credibility.

Corporations should always act responsibly. Had Bridgestone/Firestone done so (starting with its employees at the Decatur, Illinois plant) it probably would not have endured a full-blown crisis. If the recall had been effectively executed, then the situation would have probably faded from the media and public consciousness.
References


