How safe is your reputation?

Headlines are often dominated by bad news, so when a company's safety record makes the front pages, it's rarely because they've done an excellent job. We look at ways you can keep your business out of the papers.

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Health and safety policies are in place to protect staff, but they are also a valuable tool when it comes to company image and reputation. Not only can they instill confidence in workers as they go about their everyday tasks, it also ensures there are no hiccups in distribution or production due to illness or injury.

So how do you improve your health and safety culture to support your company's image and reputation as a business that cares for its staff and takes legislation seriously? Your health and safety affects not only those working for you, but also impacts clients, the supply chain, and even the local community overall. Health and safety culture, training staff and the importance of high quality personal protective equipment all affect how well a business performs.

PPE and reputability
Safety equipment is one of the biggest steps towards compliance in the workplace and a true mark of good health and safety.

"Many businesses believe that there is only one level of PPE and are content with the first products offered to them without reviewing their own needs and the use they put the PPE to," says Jeremy Luker, technical product specialist for PPE expert Safeaid.

"By purchasing poor PPE, a company can be given improvement notices by main contractors, work can be delayed by operatives underperforming due to discomfort, teams can be denied access to site if their PPE is in poor condition, and there is a greater risk of operatives being unsafe if their PPE does not conform.

"Engineers wearing PPE are representing their employers at all times, as the logos are always printed on the vests – so how *they* look always has an impact on how professional the *company* looks. It's also worth noting that engineers are less likely to wear poor quality PPE; it is normally uncomfortable and doesn't suit the roles they are doing.

"Often it will be taken off when in the work area, left in the van, or discarded as soon as work gets underway. However, by providing better quality items of PPE, staff take greater care of it, there are less lost or damaged items, and accountability rises."

Culture is key
No doubt many of us are firm believers that the right health and safety training paves the way towards a positive environment where staff are protected in a culture that is open and aware of how to safely work.

The phrase 'all publicity is good publicity' could not be further from the truth when considering health and safety concerns; no company wants to hit the headlines about a worker falling off a building and being killed. Taking steps and measures to safeguard against incidents by providing high quality training not only looks after the people who work for you, but it looks after the company's reputation.

The right health and safety training can have a huge impact across an organisation, not just by decreasing incidents but also by increasing general safety culture. In a recent customer survey by Safety Media, 73% of clients enjoy a safer working environment thanks to the introduction of top quality training but also 67% noticed an increase in the safety culture within the organisation.

The safety culture in the workplace indicates how safe-minded people are when they are not only performing their tasks but in all aspects of their time onsite. Conversations about safety are more frequent, raising of issues and concerns as well as increasing the reporting of incidents and crucially understanding what type of incidents are indeed reportable.

"Training alone cannot completely change a culture," notes Safety Media's Managing Director Toby Roberts, "but the right messaging, along with the right presentation of materials, can go a long way to emphasising the importance of this field and break down some of the negative perceptions people may still hold about safety being 'boring'."

As Toby points out, the majority of training is given within the first week of starting at a new company – it is at this stage that you want to be giving the best impression of your organisation. By providing courses that are concise, relevant and carry industry standards of approval you are demonstrating to your new staff that you are serious about their welfare when in your care.

There are many options when choosing health and safety training, from the very cheap and cheerful which 'get the job done' to more complex integrated health and safety systems which offer more in terms of reporting analysis and quality. When considering your move into health and safety online training be sure to offer your employees what they deserve, and that it is the best that you can afford.

Bottom line
Of course a perception that your company doesn't take health and safety seriously has an impact on your customers' decisions to work with you. If they don't believe staff are being looked after or unsafe working conditions are in place they are likely to look elsewhere. No business ever worries about being considered too safe. It's true that certain corners of the media would have you believe that we live in a nanny state but as the HSE's Mythbusters campaign proved, 99% of 'health and safety gone mad' stories are either gross exaggerations or completely false.

In the real world, both consumers and society reap the benefits of safe businesses.

Since 1974 workplace fatalities have dropped by 86%. As for unsafe businesses, recent reports of poor working conditions at the Sports Direct warehouse led the company's founder and majority shareholder Mike Ashley to be forced to give evidence to MPs and admit why he was running his firm like a Victorian workhouse. The press destroyed Ashley – describing him as "the unacceptable face of modern capitalism".

With more information available to them, the modern consumer has the ability to be more and more selective about the kind of companies they choose to buy products or services from.

Engaging your workforce
Being able to display a robust health and safety system will enable you to protect the future image of the business and improve that all important workforce engagement.

There are a number of aspects in business that can help maintain and uphold a company's image and reputation, such as good corporate governance and ethics. One essential component to any good business is health and safety and it is up to us to ensure our boards hear this.