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STAFF REPORT
INFORMATION ONLY

Strategic Communications during Cybersecurity Incident

Date: March 25, 2024

To: Toronto Public Library Board

From: Vickery Bowles, City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the Toronto Public Library Board with an overview of strategic communications during the cybersecurity incident that Toronto Public Library (TPL) became aware of on October 28, 2023.

Strategic communications played a pivotal role in managing internal and external stakeholders and mitigating reputational damage during the cybersecurity incident. TPL's response was characterized by a well-coordinated communications approach that prioritized transparency, stakeholder engagement and reputation management. This report highlights key communications strategies, challenges encountered, and lessons learned for future incidents.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

Providing accurate, timely and transparent communications to the Library's customers, staff and other stakeholders supports TPL's strategic plan objective of investing in staff and an innovative service culture.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan identifies priorities through an equity lens, working to understand and break down barriers for all, with a focus on equity-deserving groups and vulnerable populations. The communications provided throughout the cybersecurity attack and its aftermath have been designed to be as accessible and transparent as possible, so that all stakeholders are able to understand the impacts of the attack, the actions the Library is taking, and how to access Library services while systems and services are being restored.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Cybersecurity has become a pressing issue for public and private organizations globally as cyber incidents have become more prevalent and pervasive. Strategic communication is critical during cybersecurity incidents for many reasons including maintaining trust, managing reputation, legal and regulatory compliance, minimizing impact by providing stakeholders with timely information and preserving business continuity by keeping stakeholders informed about the situation and any operational changes.

COMMENTS

Strategic communications played a pivotal role in managing internal and external stakeholders and mitigating reputational damage during the cybersecurity incident. TPL's response was characterized by a well-coordinated communications approach that prioritized transparency, stakeholder engagement and reputation management. Key components of this approach are highlighted below:

Crisis Communication Strategy: TPL activated its crisis communication strategy to ensure a coordinated response to the ransomware attack. This strategy outlines roles and responsibilities, communication channels, and protocols for engaging with stakeholders, both internal and external. TPL's ITS division had also engaged the Communications, Programming and Customer Engagement division in its ransomware preparedness planning well before the attack occurred. Following this incident, TPL will update its crisis communications plan.

Transparent Communication: TPL embraced transparency as a foundational principle of its communications strategy, and balanced this with the need to protect sensitive information to minimize risk to stakeholders and the security of the organization. Regular updates were provided to internal and external stakeholders detailing the nature of the attack, impact on operations, and steps taken to mitigate the situation.

Consultation and Collaboration: Throughout the incident, TPL consulted with third-party legal counsel with an expertise in cybersecurity issues, and in-house privacy experts on all public communications. These parties offered guidance on communicating transparently while at the same time protecting sensitive information to minimize risk to stakeholders and the security of the organization. TPL also consulted with other public sector organizations that had experienced or were experiencing cybersecurity incidents to gain insights and advice.

Internal Communication: TPL prioritized internal communication to provide timely updates, guidance, and support to employees affected by the ransomware attack. This began on the weekend that the attack occurred and continued with direct manager support, a dedicated employee email address to answer questions, an all-staff town hall dedicated to the cybersecurity incident

and regular email updates from TPL's Library Operations Centre and City Librarian. Through coordinated efforts with the Library Operations Centre, these communications kept staff informed about business continuity issues, changes to operations and service restoration and aimed to provide guidance, support and resources to staff members.

Media Management: TPL implemented a media management strategy to address inquiries from the press and manage the narrative surrounding the cybersecurity incident. This approach evolved over the course of the incident, beginning with public statements and library services updates made available to all media on tpl.ca and moving to interviews and media tours. Throughout the cybersecurity incident, there was intense media interest and scrutiny. As service reinstatement efforts were underway, TPL invited local and national media to capture this unique moment in time at the Ellesmere distribution hub and library branches across the city. The resulting coverage painted a vivid picture of the massive effort undertaken by staff to restore services, as well as the significant impact of library service outages to Toronto residents. A comprehensive list of media coverage, along with a sentiment analysis, is provided in Attachment 1.

Digital Communication Channels: Digital communication channels, including TPL's website, social media platforms, and email communications, were utilized to disseminate information and provide updates to both targeted and broader audiences. These channels helped reach stakeholders quickly and efficiently, and helped TPL stay connected to its customers in a friendly, accessible and informative way. Some strategies that were employed include:

- The creation and usage of a "Service Update" graphic that accompanied every significant update and was used as a consistent visual cue across all TPL channels. These linked to a dedicated space on tpl.ca where regular service and cybersecurity updates were provided.
- TPL created and shared high-quality "behind the scenes" multimedia content across digital channels as staff moved forward with service restoration efforts. This content was exceptionally well-received and helped inspire overwhelming support for the restoration work.
- Email "blasts" were sent to TPL's email subscriber list for major service updates, and TPL's enewsletter provided regular updates on a bi-monthly basis.

The following section provides some metrics of the reach and engagement TPL communications generated as a result of social media and earned media strategies.

TPL's Instagram channel has its most engaged social media audience. During the period of the cybersecurity attach, the channel saw a 12% increase in subscribers from October (41,305) to February (46,387).

A particularly successful piece of content was an Instagram reel produced by TPL which featured behind the scenes footage of the processing of materials at the Ellesmere distribution centre. The video was TPL's highest performing post of all time, and generated:

- 135,248 plays (including 40,312 replays)
- 88,474 accounts reached (including nearly 65,000 non-followers)
- 6,300 likes; 425 comments; 1,094 shares
- 971 new followers

TPL's Twitter channel saw a 3% increase in subscribers from October (59,537) to February (61,500), an increase usually seen over an entire year.

Two email "eblasts" were sent to more than 480,000 active members on February 12 and 29 to share updates about key service restoration milestones. The open rates on these emails were 76%, which is very high by industry rates.

Across all channels, customer sentiment was overwhelmingly positive with very supportive customer feedback, which included appreciation for regular updates and communication.

Since October 28, 2023, TPL has recorded 109 **media articles** about the cybersecurity incident. Of these, the vast majority (95) were neutral in tone, with the remaining 11 positive and three negative.

CONCLUSION

Strategic communication was critical during the cyberattack to maintain trust, manage reputation, and coordinate response efforts effectively. By implementing clear communication protocols, engaging stakeholders proactively, and prioritizing transparency, organizations can mitigate the impact of ransomware attacks and safeguard their operations and reputation.

Looking ahead, TPL will continue to prioritize transparency and honesty in all communications, acknowledging challenges and providing realistic expectations for resolution. A comprehensive post-incident review of TPL's response will be conducted, identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. These insights will help refine crisis communications plans and enhance preparedness for future incidents.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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Vickery Bowles
City Librarian

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: List of media coverage with a sentiment analysis

Attachment 1

Cybersecurity Incident: Media Coverage Summary

Tone

Neutral includes factual information on the situation

Positive includes positive commentary about TPL or how TPL is handling the cybersecurity incident

Negative includes negative commentary about TPL or how TPL is handling the cybersecurity incident

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2023	Oct 29	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library faces cybersecurity incident	neutral
	Oct 29	CBC	Toronto Public Library dealing with cybersecurity 'incident' impacting some services	neutral
	Oct 29	CTV News	Cybersecurity incident takes down Toronto Public Library website, public computers	neutral
	Oct 29	CityNews	Cybersecurity incident at Toronto Public Library leaves some services inaccessible	neutral
	Oct 29	BlogTO	Toronto Public Library hit with cyberattack and here's what you need to know	neutral
	Oct 29	IT World Canada	Toronto Public Library hit by cyber attack	neutral
	Oct 30	The Globe and Mail	Toronto Public Library website, some services affected by cybersecurity 'incident'	neutral
	Oct 30	The Record by Recorded Future	Toronto Public Library facing disruptions due to cyberattack	neutral
	Oct 30	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library cybersecurity attack part of a troubling trend	negative
	Oct 30	Now Toronto	Toronto Public Library website continues to be be down after cybersecurity breach	neutral
	Oct 30	Montreal Gazette	Cybersecurity 'incident' takes down Toronto Public Library website, affects some services	neutral

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2023	Oct 30	The Chronicle Journal	Toronto Public Library website, some services affected by cybersecurity 'incident'	neutral
	Oct 30	National Post	Cybersecurity 'incident' takes down Toronto Public Library website, affects some services	neutral
	Oct 30	Bleeping Computer	Toronto Public Library services down following weekend cyberattack	neutral
	Oct 31	iHeart Radio	Toronto Public Library website, some services affected by cybersecurity ‘incident’	neutral
	Nov 1	Bleeping Computer	Toronto Public Library outages caused by Black Basta ransomware attack	neutral
	Nov 1	Dark Reading	British, Toronto Libraries Struggle After Cyber Incidents	neutral
	Nov 2	SC Media	Black Basta ransomware attack behind Toronto Public Library outages	neutral
	Nov 2	CityNews	Cybersecurity event affecting Toronto Public Library services	neutral
	Nov 2	Tech Radar	Even public libraries aren't safe from ransomware, as Canada's biggest is hit	neutral
	Nov 6	CBC	Key Toronto Public Library services still offline more than a week after 'cyber security incident'	neutral
	Nov 6	CP24	Some Toronto library services could remain offline for another week after cybersecurity incident	neutral
	Nov 6	Toronto Star	Ransomware attack blamed for knocking out Toronto Public Library website for more than a week	neutral
	Nov 7	CBC	Ransomware attack behind Toronto Public Library service interruption, library says	neutral
	Nov 7	CTV News	A ransomware attack hit Toronto Public Library. Here’s what that means	neutral
	Nov 8	The Globe and Mail	Toronto’s public library system was hacked. Here’s which services are and aren’t working	neutral
	Nov 9	Streets of Toronto	Cybersecurity expert on Toronto Library attack and what it means for you	neutral

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2023	Nov 10	CP24	Toronto Public Library confirms data may have been exposed in ransomware attack	neutral
	Nov 10	CityNews	Toronto Public Library says sensitive data may have been exposed in cybersecurity incident	neutral
	Nov 10	Toronto Star	'Sensitive data' may have been leaked in cyber attack, says Toronto Public Library	negative
	Nov 10	Toronto.com	'Sensitive data' may have been leaked in cyber attack, says Toronto Public Library	neutral
	Nov 10	Now Toronto	What is a ransomware attack? Toronto cyber security expert explains following Toronto Public Library breach	neutral
	Nov 10	IT World Canada	Toronto Public Library says 'sensitive' information may have been copied	neutral
	Nov 11	CityNews	'Modern day bank robbery': Still no answers 2 weeks after Toronto Public Library cyber attack	negative
	Nov 13	CityNews	Toronto Public Library board to meet on cybersecurity breach	neutral
	Nov 13	Global News	Toronto Public Library holds meeting to discuss ransomware attack	neutral
	Nov 13	CityNews	Toronto Public Library board holds private meeting on cyberattack	neutral
	Nov 15	CBC	Personal info, including staff social insurance numbers, stolen in Toronto library cyberattack	neutral
	Nov 15	CityNews	Personal information of Toronto Public Library staff stolen in cyber attack, investigators say	neutral
	Nov 15	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library's weeks-long ransomware attack sparks review of city's cybersecurity measures	neutral
	Nov 15	Bleeping Computer	Toronto Public Library confirms data stolen in ransomware attack	neutral
	Nov 15	Financial Post	Data on current, former Toronto library staff stolen in ransomware attack	neutral
	Nov 20	The Record	British Library says ransomware hackers stole data from HR files	neutral

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2023	Nov 23	CBC	Toronto Public Library says services affected by cyberattack to be restored starting in January	neutral
	Nov 23	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library services hit by cyber attack to slowly return starting in January	neutral
	Nov 24	Toronto Star	Cyberattack to keep some Toronto library systems offline into 2024	neutral
	Nov 24	National Post	Cyberattack to keep some Toronto library systems offline into 2024	neutral
	Nov 24	CityNews	Cyberattack to keep some Toronto library systems offline into 2024	neutral
	Nov 24	CityNews	Toronto Public Library says some services won't be restored until January following cyberattack	neutral
	Nov 24	CTV News	Toronto Public Library reeling after cyber attack	neutral
	Nov 24	Global News	Toronto Public Library systems to remain down until 2024 following cyberattack	neutral
	Nov 24	CP24	Toronto library systems won't be restored until 2024 after October cyberattack	neutral
	Nov 29	CBC Metro Morning	A month after a cyber attack took out many Toronto Public Library services, a library manager speaks out	neutral
	Dec 13	Toronto Star	The urgency to combat cyberattacks	neutral
	Dec 21	The Globe and Mail	Toronto Public Library service reductions projected to last months after ransomware attack	neutral
	Dec 21	The Record	Toronto Public Library 'remains a crime scene' after ransomware attack	neutral
	Dec 26	CISO Series	Cyber Security Headlines: First American cyberattack, Iran APT campaign, ransomware victims spike	neutral
2024	Jan 4	Toronto Star	Why I can't wait for the public library to be back online	neutral
	Jan 8	CP24	Toronto Library dealing with Cyberattack Aftermath	neutral
	Jan 11	CTV News	Toronto Public Library book returns stored in 12 trailers since cyber attack	neutral

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2024	Jan 11	CBC	Toronto Public Library storing returned books at 12 trailers off site in wake of cyberattack	neutral
	Jan 11	CTV News	How has the Toronto library cyberattack impacted you?	neutral
	Jan 17	CP24	We truly miss it': Toronto Public Library cyberattack nears 3 month mark	neutral
	Jan 17	CTV News	We truly miss it': Toronto Public Library cyberattack nears 3 month mark	neutral
	Jan18	Global News	Toronto Public Library services near return months after cyberattack	neutral
	Jan18	CTV News	Toronto library still recovering from cyberattack	neutral
	Jan 19	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library gradually recovering from hack, more services back in Feb	neutral
	Jan 19	CBC	Toronto Public Library gradually recovering from hack, more services back in February	neutral
	Jan 19	Toronto Star	Toronto library begins restoring services following ransomware attack, but some user access won't be available until February	neutral
	Jan 19	CTV News	Toronto public library system set to return throughout February	neutral
	Jan 22	Canadian HR Reporter	Toronto Public Library nears full recovery from cyber attack	neutral
	Jan 28	Toronto Star	Devastating cyberattack on Toronto Public Library shows how much it still means to the city	positive
	Jan 29	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library website back online after ransomware attack	neutral
	Jan 30	CP24	Service partially restored on Toronto Public Library's website but catalogue, personal accounts still down	neutral
	Jan 30	Now Toronto	Toronto Public Library says some services restored on its website as it recovers from cyberattack	neutral
	Feb 1	CTV News	Toronto Public Library website partially restored but personal accounts still down	neutral

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2024	Feb 7	CTV News	Public computer access restored at libraries	neutral
	Feb 9	CP24	Public computers can be used again at Toronto Public Library. Here's what's running, and what's not	neutral
	Feb 9	CTV News	Public computers can be used again at Toronto Public Library. Here's what's running, and what's not	neutral
	Feb 12	CP24	Holds resume at Toronto library branches as books put back into circulation	neutral
	Feb 12	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library to put over a million items back into circulation after ransomware attack	neutral
	Feb 12	CBC	Toronto Public Library reinstates circulation, hold services following ransomware attack	neutral
	Feb 14	CP24	Toronto library, zoo attacks show public bodies need to boost cybersecurity: experts	neutral
	Feb 14	Global News	Toronto library, zoo attacks show a need to boost cybersecurity: experts	neutral
	Feb 14	The Globe and Mail	Toronto library, zoo attacks show public bodies need to boost cybersecurity, experts say	neutral
	Feb 20	Toronto Star	Toronto Public Library uncertain whose data was stolen in October cyber attack	neutral
	Feb 21	CBC	Investigation into full extent of ransomware attack on Toronto Public Library still underway	neutral
	Feb 21	CTV News	Library doesn't know whose data was stolen	neutral
	Feb 21	CP24	Toronto Public Library still trying to determine if cardholder data was stolen in cyberattack	neutral
	Feb 24	Toronto Star	How one of Toronto's busiest libraries is recovering after the cyber attack	positive
	Feb 26	CityNews	Toronto Public Library cyber-attack report finds user data may have been compromised	neutral
	Feb 27	CBC	1 million books and 4 months later, Toronto's library recovers from a cyberattack	positive
	Feb 27	CBC	When ransomware hackers go after the public library	neutral

Date		Media Outlet	Headline	Tone
2024	Feb 27	The Globe and Mail	All hands on deck as Toronto's library system begins great reshelving after cyberattack	positive
	Feb 27	CP24	Latest on cyberattack at Toronto public library	positive
	Feb 29	Toronto Star	How this Toronto library is recovering from a cyberattack, one book at a time	positive
	Feb 29	CP24	How this Toronto library is recovering from a cyberattack, one book at a time	positive
	Feb 29	The Canadian Press	A look at the post-hack Toronto library restock	positive
	Feb 29	iHeart Radio	How the Toronto library is recovering from a cyberattack, one book at a time	positive
	Feb 29	TVO	How the Toronto library is recovering from a cyberattack, one book at a time	positive
	Feb 29	CityNews	Toronto Public Library reaches 'major milestone' in recovery from October cyberattack	neutral
	March 1	CBC Here and Now	Radio interview with Area Manager Sarah Bradley	neutral
	March 1	CTV News	Toronto library accounts are active again, but some 'intermittent technical issues' remain due to demand	neutral
	March 1	The Chronicle	Toronto library system recovers after cyberattack	neutral
	March 1	Carins Post	Toronto library system recovers after cyberattack	neutral
	March 1	Radio-Canada	Les usagers de la Bibliothèque de Toronto ont à nouveau accès à leur compte en ligne	neutral
	March 1	Narcity Toronto	The Toronto Public Library Is Coming Back From A Hack — Here's What You Can & Can't Do	positive
	March 5	CBC Metro Morning	Radio interview with City Librarian Vickery Bowles	neutral

strategic communications during the cybersecurity incident

Toronto Public Library Board Meeting

March 25, 2024

Linda Hazzan, Director, Communications, Programming & Customer Engagement

Ana-Maria Critchley, Manager, Communications & Stakeholder Relations

Liza Cooperman, Manager, Content Strategy & Editorial

tpl toronto public library

cybersecurity communications priorities

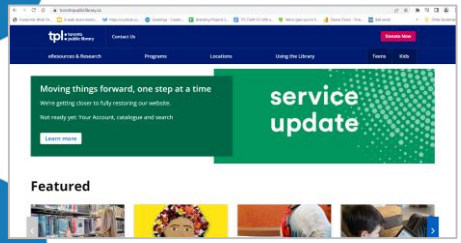
- Transparency
- Stakeholder engagement
- Reputation management

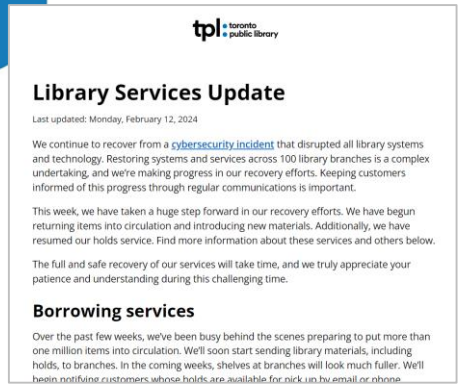
cybersecurity communications
key components

- Crisis communications strategy
- Transparent communications
- Consultation and collaboration
- Internal communications
- Media management

communications: digital

website





tpl toronto public library

Library Services Update

Last updated: Monday, February 12, 2024

We continue to recover from a cybersecurity incident that disrupted all library systems and technology. Restoring systems and services across 100 library branches is a complex undertaking, and we're making progress in our recovery efforts. Keeping customers informed of this progress through regular communications is important.

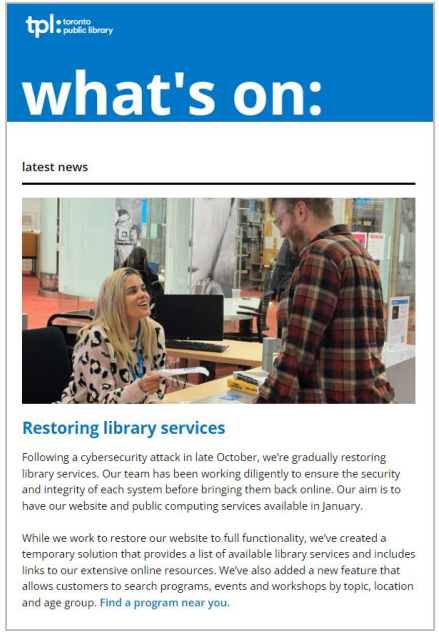
This week, we have taken a huge step forward in our recovery efforts. We have begun returning items into circulation and introducing new materials. Additionally, we have resumed our holds service. Find more information about these services and others below.

The full and safe recovery of our services will take time, and we truly appreciate your patience and understanding during this challenging time.

Borrowing services

Over the past few weeks, we've been busy behind the scenes preparing to put more than one million items into circulation. We'll soon start sending library materials, including holds, to branches. In the coming weeks, shelves at branches will look much fuller. We'll begin notifying customers whose holds are available for pick up by email or phone

email



tpl toronto public library

what's on:

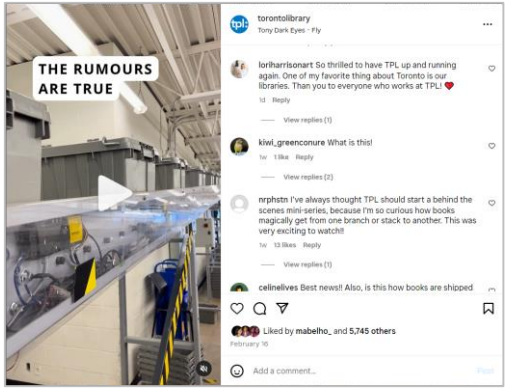
latest news

Restoring library services

Following a cybersecurity attack in late October, we're gradually restoring library services. Our team has been working diligently to ensure the security and integrity of each system before bringing them back online. Our aim is to have our website and public computing services available in January.

While we work to restore our website to full functionality, we've created a temporary solution that provides a list of available library services and includes links to our extensive online resources. We've also added a new feature that allows customers to search programs, events and workshops by topic, location and age group. Find a program near you.

social media



communications: digital

Instagram

most engaged social media audience

12% ⬆ subscribers

BTS content

engaged **1000s** of existing & new followers

X (Twitter)

3% ⬆ subscribers

growth over five months
(usually seen over entire year)

email

480k+ recipients

76% open rate

communications: earned media

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Toronto Public Library gradually recovering from hack, more services back in February

TORONTO
THE CANADIAN PRESS
PUBLISHED JANUARY 19, 2024

CityNews Everywhere

Toronto Public Library's website partially restored months after cyberattack

CBC

Toronto Public Library reinstates circulation, hold services following ransomware attack

Toronto Public Library storing returned books at 12 trailers off site in wake of cyberattack

CP24 WATCH LIVE
NEWS WEATHER TRAFFIC VIDEO CP24 BREAKFAST LIFESTYLE CONTESTS MORE

Service partially restored on Toronto Public Library's website but catalogue, personal accounts still down

Global NEWS

Toronto Public Library systems to remain down until 2024 following cyberattack

109 media articles

95 neutral

11 positive

3 negative

cybersecurity communications
conclusions

Critical to

- maintaining trust
- managing reputation
- coordinating response efforts
- educating/informing library users about changes to library services

thank you
questions?