THE **SOCIAL** SHAKE-UP

eBook:
CRISIS MANAGEMENT
on Social Media

MillerCoors' CCO on What Makes Large Brands Vulnerable to Crises

By Social Shake-Up Editors

It seems a given that communications has risen in stature recently. As communicators are expected to take the corporate temperature, their influence has spread throughout a company. That's one of the conclusions contained in the Arthur W. Page Society report, The CEO View: Communications at the Center of the Enterprise (2017). This has led CEOs to increasingly rely on chief communications officers (CCO) "not just for occasional counsel and advice, but also as key leaders and contributors playing a critical role alongside other C-Suite members in creating and implementing company-wide strategy," Page president Roger Bolton has argued in our pages (PR News, May 15, 2017).

Pete Marino
CCO
MillerCoors

This rise in prominence of communications and PR led MillerCoors CCO Pete Marino to return to the discipline after working in other areas. Indeed, Marino reports to MillerCoors CEO Gavin Hattersley. "One of the reasons I wanted to come back to communications was because the industry was changing for the positive," he tells us in an interview that coincides with Page's CCO podcast. [The podcast is available at: http://bit.ly/2rTn1rm] "When I started in the mid-1990s, communications was definitely the proverbial red-headed stepchild of whatever function it was part of."

Ironically, though, communications' stature has risen due, in large part, to the need to contain crisis and protect brand reputation. To paraphrase Dickens, "It's the best of times for communicators because it's the worst of times." For Marino, "a lot of [PR's rise] has to do with the role and impact that social media has played for brands...when you think about reputation management and what Warren Buffett said, ("It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it."), that 5 minutes is probably down to about .5 seconds today… communications needs to be the eyes, ears, heart and soul of the company... because…the court of public opinion is much more influential and punitive than the court of law can be."

Why PR Blunders Still Happen

True, social media's ability to amplify a crisis fast has made communicators a hot commodity. A question: If CEOs know the importance of communications and how quickly social can go on the attack mode, why are PR disasters, such as United Airlines' incident with Dr. David Dao, still happening? "Certainly there always are going to be one offs or two offs," he says, adding, "enlightenment [about communications' importance] is still to come for some companies."

"The way United correlates with [MillerCoors] is that anytime you have a company with thousands of employees, you're at the risk of someone having a bad day, someone getting set off on the wrong thing," he says.

"The company needs to take responsibility for all of it." While Marino believes "in many situations the person who instigates [the incident] has to be partially responsible, the brand has to stay above the fray or you're back on your heels all the time."

Going deeper, he says, "I almost guarantee the communications function at United gave its leadership team swift and accurate advice that probably would have taken out a lot of the vitriol from the [public's] response very quickly." What prevented United from responding quickly and well, he says, likely stemmed from union and HR concerns.

Following from that we ask about messaging at MillerCoors. You have a message you want to disseminate, how do you do it? "For us, issuing a press release is mostly to get something on the record," he says. "We'll ask, 'What's the best way to get this ball rolling?' We might pitch it to a reporter or several or put it on the blog."

The MillerCoors Blog and Transparency

Speaking of MillerCoors' blog [millercoorsblog.com], Marino emphasizes transparency. "We don't want people to think we're trying to dupe or deceive them in any way. We, MillerCoors, have a perspective on the beer industry, whether it's our brands or competitive brands, and we want to make sure we're putting our point of view out there." Writing about competing brands may be unusual, although "everything we do on the blog goes past [the] legal [department]."

A perusal of the blog shows it's fairly even handed. One recent lead paragraph mentioned how beer sales began the summer sluggishly, including those of category leader Anheuser-Busch InBev (ABI) and MillerCoors. Another story discussed ABI's interest in rolling out a Halloween-themed label for Budweiser in October. The story ends with, "Budweiser has been losing volume and share so far this year, according to Nielsen. Volume was down 9.2% during the four weeks ended June 17 as it lost 0.4 points of category case share."

A favorite question that The Home Depot CCO Stacey Tank asks on the Arthur Page podcast is "What would you do with an unlimited budget?" We ask Marino for details. "I'd build out a newsroom to help frame and underscore the narrative of the MillerCoors organization and the American beer business." He'd staff it with "serious, ambitious people who can write with specificity and clarity. And most often they'd have a reporting background." They'd also have digital and analytics experience, he adds. ■

How Large and Small Brands Monitor to Prepare for Social Media Crises

By Phil Watson

Preparing your company for a social media crisis has one reoccurring theme: speed. In the past when a crisis occurred, there usually was one day, or at least a few hours, to prepare. Today, as we know, you may have minutes. Or worse, damaging news may be circulating before you're even aware of it.

While social media's speed is a challenge, there are steps brands can take to be ready. The first simply is identifying potential problems. Social media listening and analysis can be a canary in the coal mine for PR. When you learn of a critical issue early, you can prepare for a more favorable outcome.

A Checklist for Social Media Crisis Preparedness
1. Daily monitoring of any social media channel your company owns.
2. Third-party tools and alerts for conversations about your organization occurring outside the social media channels you own.
3. Senior leadership educated on the importance of social media. Educate company leaders on the risks organizations face in social media so when a crisis happens you're not starting from social media 101.
4. Assign roles before a crisis: who monitors social; who creates responses that were not anticipated before the crisis; who approves those responses; and who responds to incoming engagements related to the crisis.
5. If you have multiple brands/channels, have an established means of communication to stop publishing content quickly if a crisis develops.
6. Regularly test access to all channels your company owns. A crisis is not the time to learn you lack the new password to one of your social media channels.

Owned and Non-Owned Social Media

To understand social media monitoring for a crisis, it's necessary to differentiate between owned and non-owned social media. Owned social media includes your company's Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram accounts. When someone engages with you on these accounts, you receive a notification.

Non-owned social media is everything else; a virtual jungle of disjointed conversations that defy easy monitoring. These conversations may take place on Twitter or Facebook and not include your company's official name. They may appear on Reddit, City-Data, 4Chan, blogs, comment sections under articles, special interest forums and more. There are no notifications when your company is mentioned in these places.

Monitoring for Crisis

There are countless case studies where social media crises caught organizations off guard. Often these companies didn't respond quickly, or at all, and paid a steep reputational price.

Monitoring owned social media can be done via native platforms or third-party response tools. There are plenty available at varying prices. Small and large companies should procedurally require daily channel monitoring. This is critical not only for customer service, but crisis preparedness. Should conversation about your company heat up in a negative way, you likely will be tagged in a mention.

Scans for incoming engagements should be conducted several times daily for owned social media channels. For large companies, the volume of incoming engagements necessitates staff monitoring channels into the evening hours and on weekends. Staffing should be scaled to your company's average volume on owned channels.

Non-Owned Social Media

Now for the hard part: Non-owned social media. Since your company is talked about in perhaps millions of blogs, message boards, forums and other networks, there's no way to cast a net that catches all those unstructured mentions in a coherent way. There is a host of free tools, though, and Google Alerts is among the most useful. There also are plenty of paid tools that track and analyze social media data.

Paid social media listening tools typically are necessary for a large company with high volumes of conversation. Popular brands average well more than 1 million social media mentions monthly. Fortunately, listening tools can analyze large amounts of social media data. Most also have alert systems that scan keywords and inform you as soon as the tool's web crawlers find them. Some tools also detect algorithmic changes and alert you to signals that something unusual is happening with conversations about your brand.

Influencer identification is another key to catching social media crisis early. Your company may be mentioned every few seconds on social media; you can't keep up with each mention. But if someone who has an unusually large following mentions your company, you want to know right away. A key part of monitoring for crisis is notification as soon as a famous or influential person mentions the company. Most listening tools are capable of providing an immediate alert so you can decide quickly whether to engage with the influencer.

Where Social Media Crises Originate
Facebook: The largest social networking channel has made it easy for users to share content, including negative news about brands, companies and organizations.
Twitter: News travels particularly fast on Twitter. Consumers often start complaints about companies on this platform.
Mainstream news: When a story breaks in local or national media, it often immediately makes its way to social media.
Blogs/forums/comment boards: Millions of conversations are taking place on these platforms daily; users typically are passionate about the niche subjects these platforms cover.
YouTube: One of the original corporate social media crisis cases began on this platform. While it's not the most active platform for engagement, videos negatively focusing on companies can quickly gain traction.

Monitoring Competitors and Customers

Situations may occur outside of social media monitoring alerts. When setting up your listening, be mindful of influential voices in your industry. Do you have customers with a high level of influence? They may be holding conversations not directly about you, but are relevant to you. The same goes for competitors. A competitor may get dragged into a situation that your company can use as an early warning.

Crisis or Not?

Once you've set up an effective monitoring program, you'll likely go though growing pains identifying what is and what is not a crisis. As you fine-tune your listening parameters, learn to filter out irrelevant noise.

It's clear brands should have a crisis plan that includes protocols about who is alerted. Generally this includes your organization's crisis team. Be careful not to cry wolf. If your crisis team is receiving posts every few days and the crises don't materialize, the importance of social media crisis monitoring will be diminished in your organization.

When does an incident become a social media crisis? Ask the following questions:

- Could this cause long-term harm to our reputation?
- Could this have a negative financial impact on the company?
- Could this harm employee morale or recruiting efforts?
- Could this result in legal issues?
- Are there environmental, health or safety concerns stemming from this post?
- Is someone with a high level of influence saying negative things about us?

If yes is the answer to any of the above, it's probably worth consulting your crisis team.

It's a Crisis. Now What?

As we said above, you may have minutes or days before a social media crisis breaks. For example, if you know there is a product recall or other negative company news that will be announced, you have time to prepare. Whether you have three days or three hours to prepare, there are similar steps that should be taken:

1. Black out your social media: This means no publishing of unrelated content for the duration of the crisis. When a company is in the midst of a storm of negative conversation, publishing product-related content gives the public an impression of an unorganized and tone-deaf organization.

2. Prepare your responses: In a crisis you likely will have many people engaging with your social media channels. Create a list of questions/comments you will most likely receive and prepare responses. Have the planned responses approved so you can avoid getting approvals during the crisis.

3. Extend responding capabilities: For some companies, this means 24-hour-a-day coverage of social media chan-

nels. If you're a large, consumer-facing brand and your crisis is related to product safety, you likely will see a high volume of engagement from concerned consumers. With extended coverage, your team can quickly answer most concerns with pre-approved responses.

4. Measure your social media crisis: It's easy in the fog of a crisis to forget about measurement, but it's a critical component. Measuring engagement volume, sentiment and demographics of those engaging and times of posts will help benchmarking for your next crisis. Also measure the most influential people talking about the crisis. This data, when viewed visually, can tell the story of the crisis from a unique vantage point and forecast when it will subside.

After the Storm

Eventually the social media conversation about your crisis will subside and you can return to normal social media operations. While

Takeaways
1. While speed can kill on social media, monitoring a brand's owned and non-owned social media can afford it time to respond to and shape conversations about the crisis.
2. In addition to monitoring your brand's social media for inconsistencies in activity, keeping an eye on a competitor's social media can provide a heads-up about a potential crisis.
3. Part of your crisis planning must include procedures for determining whether a situation has the potential to become a crisis. Should it be determined that a crisis exists, another set of predetermined steps should follow, such as halting non-crisis-related social media publishing and starting crisis-mode monitoring and response operations.
4. A crisis is a bad time to educate senior executives about the risks organizations face on social media. Make sure they're briefed in advance.
5. Similar to #4, a crisis is a poor time to be crafting responses to questions from the public. Ready pre-approved answers for as many questions as you can anticipate.

there is no standard time to wait until resuming normal posts, it's worth noting that when United Airlines faced its well-documented crisis in 2017, it stopped publishing non-crisis-related content on Twitter for nearly one month. Similarly, it's important to establish and communicate a date when the crisis is over officially and social content publication can resume.

Within one week of the crisis, while it's still fresh, create a report that visually shows the impact on social media. This will help your organization better understand social media. It also will help you benchmark for the next time your company faces a crisis. ∎

Phil Watson leads corporate social media for Michelin, North America. @iamphilwatson

How Walmart Uses Numbers and a Human Touch to Define Social Crises

By Social Shake-Up Editors

Summer 2017's news was strewn with large brands learning difficult lessons about crisis management, from Uber to Bell Pottinger to Equifax.

Walmart experienced a few of its own social media crises that summer, so we were fortunate when Walmart's Dan Kneeshaw, senior director, global communications, digital strategy & brand engagement, shared the brand's views of social crises with us.

Not If But When

Dan Kneeshaw,
Senior Director,
Global
Communications,
Digital Strategy
& Brand
Engagement,
Walmart

When a brand has 2.3 million employees serving 260 million customers weekly at 12,000 outlets and online properties in 28 countries, the "sheer scale" and "brand visibility" of Walmart poses "challenges" to reputation on social "that we face on a regular basis." Facebook and Twitter posts provide most of the issues, he adds. The common element often is "visual," since "nearly everyone has a phone" with a camera. As social grows, so does the possibility for social crisis.

With so many possibilities for social incidents—the brand monitors social "constantly," he says—Walmart's social response unit is precise in its definitions. A social crisis for Walmart is "any issue or event that has escalated to a broad point of public attention and poses a direct threat" to "Walmart's brand reputation," Kneeshaw says. The brand also classifies the types of issues it's confronting, including: state of emergency (a hurricane, for example); offensive items (such as illegal drugs); and flashpoint issues (hot topics where you "drop everything and act," including racist, sexist or LGBTQ discrimination, videos of negative customer service or any incident involving a celebrity).

By the Numbers and the Tools

In terms of the social conversation, Walmart considers itself in a viral crisis when it monitors 4,000+ mentions per hour; an emerging trend is defined as 2,000-3,999 mentions per hour. The brand signals the "all clear" when no more than 2,000 mentions per hour are tracked.

A tip: To calculate benchmarks for your brand, monitor mentions over time when social conversation is normal and when it's abnormal; set thresholds based on these figures.

Walmart uses three tools to monitor: Brandwatch (for real-time mention alerts); Crimson Hexagon (Walmart uses it largely on owned platforms to assess sentiment); and NewsWhip (shows which articles are being shared "on the more private platforms like Facebook," allowing Walmart to "prepare for what's coming").

Responding and Being Human

For incidents that rise to the level of social crisis, Walmart often deploys a cross-func-

tional command center, which consists of members of the social media response team and other teams as needed, such as legal, marketing, press relations and corporate affairs and HR.

The brand takes action based on a protocol included in its social crisis response playbook. If you lack a written plan for responding to social crises, Kneeshaw says, "Today is the day to create one." Trying to cobble together a protocol in the middle of a crisis when "all hands are on deck…will not help you."

In addition to having the correct team members involved in social crisis response, he says, Walmart emphasizes that the written response be posted on the platform where the crisis originated.

Beyond that the brand emphasizes responses be human. "Forget corporate-speak…be as real as you possibly can" when composing a response or apology

statement, Kneeshaw says. "When we sit down with legal and other departments we sometimes forget that people are at the other end of a statement and they want to be spoken to as people." Generally Walmart sends an acknowledgement quickly that an incident is occurring; after investigating and gathering information, it will issue a "sincere apology…if Walmart is at fault." The apology statement should be "honest, transparent and use language that addresses emotionally-affected individuals."

A tip: Think how you'd communicate with your family and use similar language. ∎

Takeaways
1. The possibility of social crisis is rising as more people access social platforms. Be prepared.
2. Don't wait for a crisis to occur to create a social response playbook.
3. Abandon corporate-speak in your social responses.

What ESPN's Suspension of Jemele Hill Meant for Your Social Media Guidelines

By Social Shake-Up Editors

By the time we were in month 10 of the Trump administration, things were playing out as expected, as far as brands were concerned. As it was during the 2016 election, public discourse continued to be bitter, divisive and full of rage, which put brands and individuals in difficult situations. The crux of the issue for brands: We have free speech in this country, yet brands are also free to set limits on acceptable behavior and to suspend or fire employees.

If you're wondering how important this issue is, just ask an executive at ESPN. In fall 2017, the sports programming company suspended SportsCenter co-host Jemele Hill for a series of tweets on Oct. 8 from her own Twitter account in which she suggested boycotting the Cowboys and the advertisers that support the team, after Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said, in effect, that any Cowboys player who took a knee during the national anthem would not be allowed to play in an NFL game.

That led to a tweet from ESPN saying that this was Hill's second violation of the company's social media guidelines in a span of a few weeks. On Sept. 11, 2017, she had called Trump a white supremacist in a tweet. This led to a sit-down at ESPN that included Hill and top executives, after which she wrote on ESPN's The Undefeated blog, "It was the first time I had ever cried in a meeting. I didn't cry because [then-ESPN president John] Skipper was mean or rude to me. I cried because I felt I had let him and my colleagues down. Since my tweets criticizing President Donald Trump exploded into a national story, the most difficult part for me has been watching ESPN become a punching bag and seeing a dumb narrative kept alive about the company's political leanings."

Her Oct. 8 tweets picked up the "national story" where she had left it off. What she might not have considered—and what played into her suspension—is that some of

Jemele Hill ✔️
@jemelehill

Or, how about not patronizing the advertisers who support the Cowboys? You can watch and do that, right?
twitter.com/palmerneill/st...

9:36 PM - Oct 8, 2017

💬 262   ↻ 696   ♡ 2,247

ESPN'S STATEMENT ON JEMELE HILL

"Jemele Hill has been suspended for two weeks for a second violation of our social media guidelines. She previously acknowledged letting her colleagues and company down with an impulsive tweet. In the aftermath, all employees were reminded of how individual tweets may reflect negatively on ESPN and that such actions would have consequences. Hence this decision."

ESPN

ESPN PR ✔
@ESPNPR

ESPN's Statement on Jemele Hill:

2:19 PM - Oct 9, 2017

💬 4,490   🔁 3,093   ♡ 4,513

the Dallas Cowboys' sponsors are ESPN's sponsors as well. From ESPN's viewpoint, it was a case of a media company's employee calling for a boycott of that company's own sponsors.

You may be asking, what specific language in ESPN's social media guidelines did Hill violate? How can any social media guideline anticipate this scenario? Short of being able to provide a copy of the company's guidelines, we can tell you that they boil down to "if you wouldn't say it on our TV or website screens, don't say it in social."

That leaves a lot of room for interpretation, especially in today's highly-charged climate, but it's a rule of thumb most of us understand. We all know it's much easier and safer to express fury and strong opinions on social media than it is to express them in face-to-face situations or on, say, national television. But still—there's that gray area between personal expression in one's own social media accounts and one's responsibility to an employer.

ESPN's Skipper tried to address this gray area in a note to employees on Sept. 15, 2017, just a few days after Hill's "white supremacist" tweet. "ESPN is not a political organization," Skipper wrote. "Where sports and politics intersect, no one is told what view they must express. At the same time, ESPN has values… We had a violation of those standards in recent days and our handling of this is a private matter. As always, in each circumstance we look to do what is best for our business. In light of recent events, we need to remind ourselves that we are a journalistic organization and that we should not do anything that undermines that position."

This attempt at clarity didn't prevent Hill from her tweeted suggestion on Oct. 8 of a boycott of the Cowboys'—and, unwittingly, ESPN's—advertisers.

This is a new environment we're moving in, as individuals and as organizations. Many of us are grappling with it. Unfortunately for Jemele Hill and ESPN, they grappled with it on a global stage and tangled with the president of the United States.

It's been a learning process for ESPN and, no doubt, for Hill, and for every brand that watched this play out. "Every company is learning how to evolve in a brand new and very fluid world, and sometimes that process can be complicated," Chris LaPlaca, SVP, corporate communications for ESPN, told PR News a couple of days after Hill's suspension.

Reflecting on Hill's suspension, another brand communicator, Miri Rodriguez, storyteller for Microsoft, told PR News that it's getting more difficult to navigate the blurred lines between personal and professional rep-

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

With Jemele Hill at the mike, it is no wonder ESPN ratings have "tanked," in fact, tanked so badly it is the talk of the industry!

5:42 AM - Oct 10, 2017

💬 44,017   🔁 20,065   ♡ 95,089

resentation on social channels.

"In today's world, someone's digital personal brand is no longer defined by that person's own determination and parameters of what freedom of speech constitutes but instead by her digital audiences and, if employed, by the brand she represents professionally," she said. "This may be unfortunate, but the reality is that after the birth of social media, organizations were forced to rethink how an employee reflects the brand's culture and values and created guidelines to ensure brand reputation was protected. Whether

right or wrong, if you decide to work for an organization, you are expected to respect and abide by their established guidelines and that includes social media."

Rodriguez's underlying point is that, yes, we still have freedom of speech in the U.S., but each individual's digital audience—and that can include one's own employer, hateful trolls (both domestic and foreign) and, sometimes, the White House—has equal and perhaps greater power to strike back.

Try working that into your social media guidelines. ∎

How to Set Up and Interpret a Social Listening Stream Head Off Crisis

By Daniella Peting

As a public relations practitioner, you are aware of the crises that your organization may face and how to manage each crisis via traditional PR tactics; however, those same tactics may intensify or extend the crisis if executed via social media.

In this article, you will learn the importance of creating a social listening stream, the components of a useful social listening stream and how to use the social listening stream to determine when and how to respond to crises via social media.

The Importance of Social Listening

Ten years ago communications about your organization were primarily one-to-many, controlled by your PR team and deemed authentic. Now these same communication tactics may be perceived as deceptive if applied via social media. With the addition of this new communication medium, conversations are now one-to-many and one-to-one and require different approaches. These approaches can be determined by expanding your monitoring capabilities to include social listening.

Social listening—as defined by **Sprout Social**—is "the process of tracking conver-
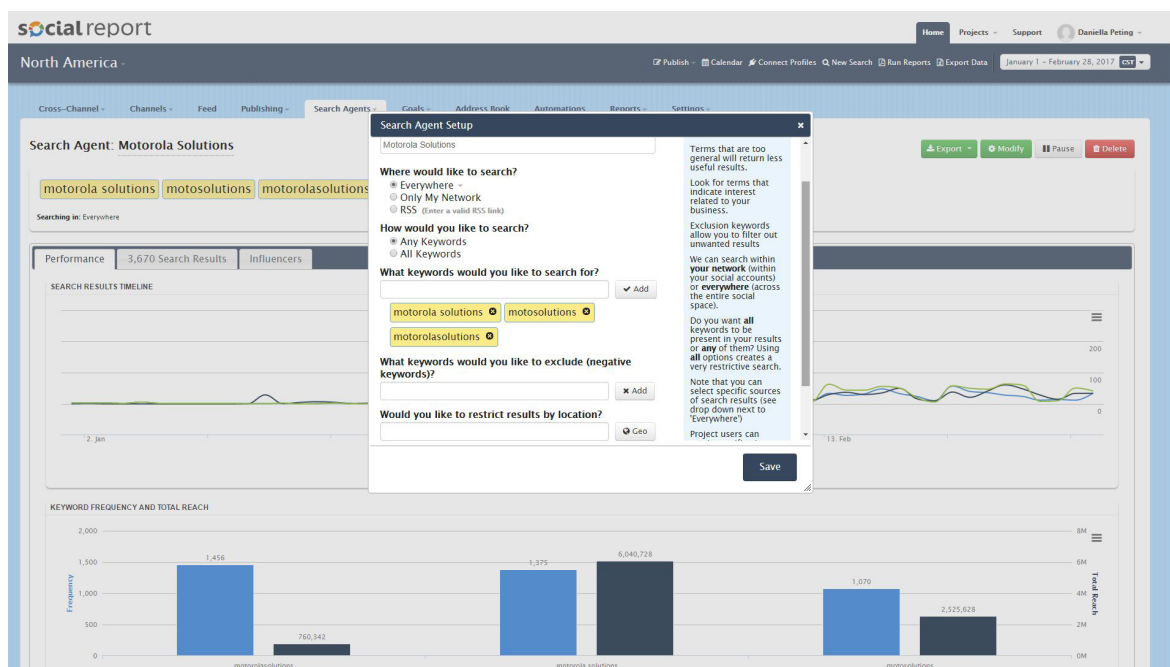
An example of how to set up a broad social listening search of a company via a social listening tool.
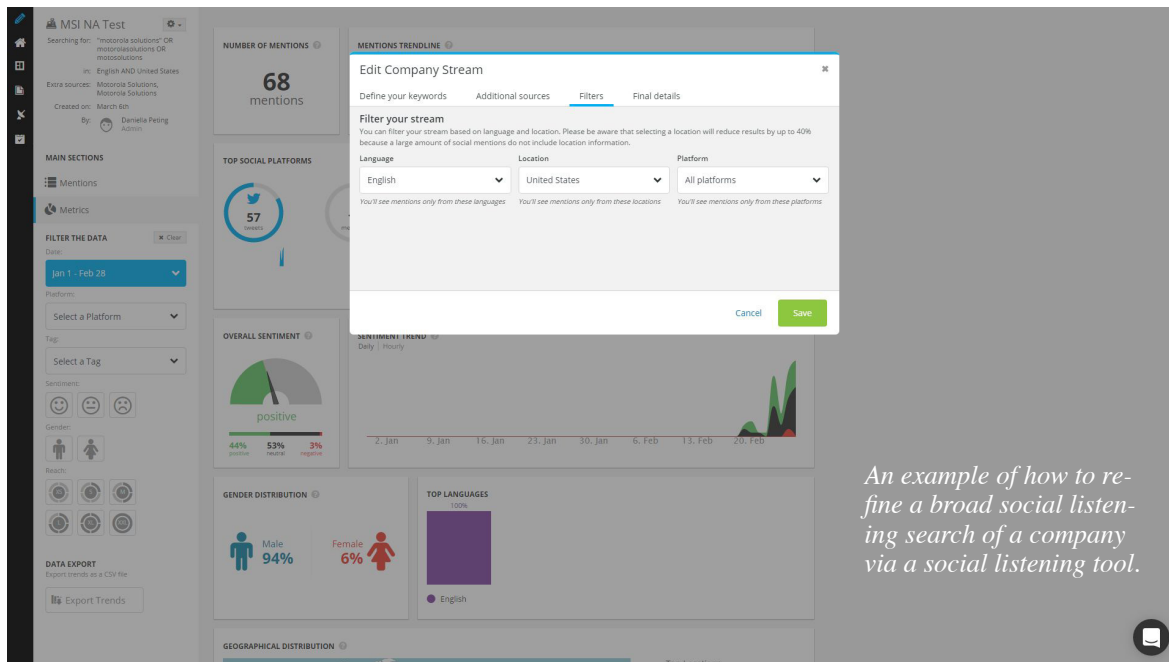
An example of how to refine a broad social listening search of a company via a social listening tool.

This image is an example of conversation influencers. The column on the left illustrates the persons who have posted the most about the conversation during a specific period of time. The column on the right illustrates the persons who have the largest share of voice regarding this conversation during a specific period of time. The share of voice is determined by either the audience size or the reach, whichever is greater.

sations around specific phrases, words or brands, and then leveraging them to discover opportunities or create content for those audiences."[1]

The process of social listening is similar to the process used to monitor mentions of your organization via print, radio or television, but it is immediate and more comprehensive. According to **HootSuite**, social listening is more than "searching for and collecting data and mentions of your brand, industry and audience conversations, [it is also the process
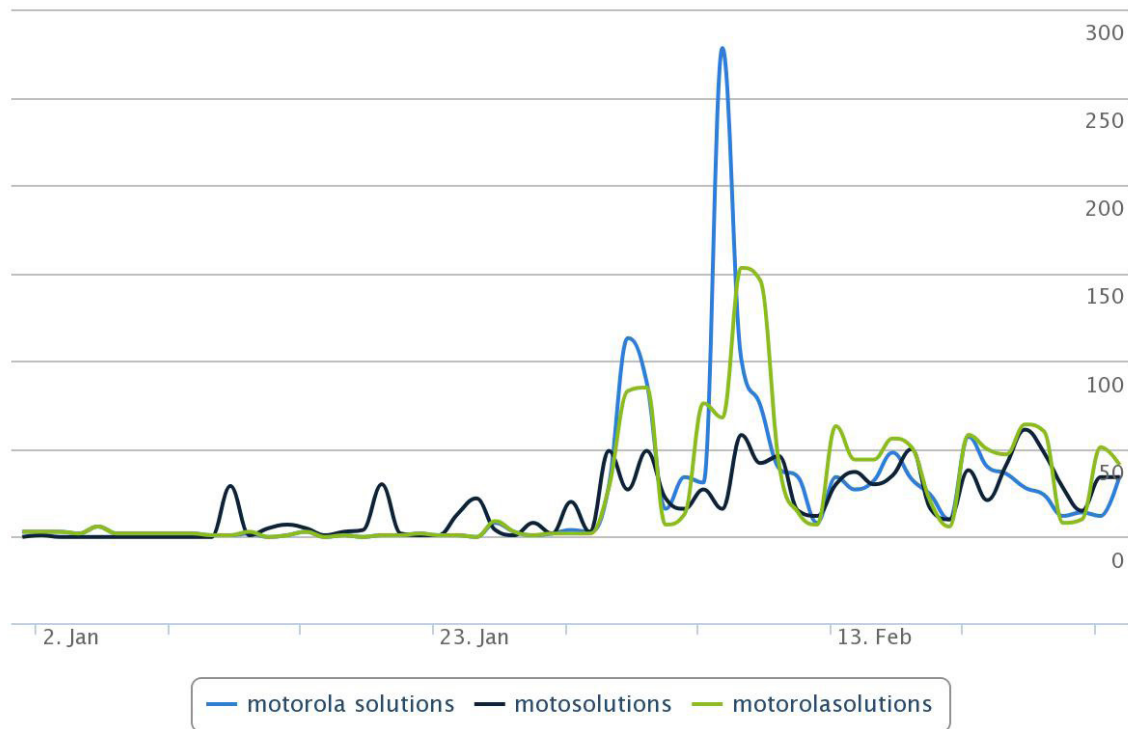
This image illustrates a sudden or large increase in conversations about a brand and/or company via a social listening tool.

of] analyzing this information and taking action—turning the data you have collected into a viable strategy."[2]

By adding social listening to your crisis management plan, you will learn the following:

1. who is talking about your brand;

2. what is being said about your brand;

3. when the conversations about your brand are occurring;

4. where the conversations about your brand are occurring;

and determine the following:

1. why the conversations about your brand are occurring; and

2. how you will address the conversations about your brand.

Now that you know the importance of social listening, we can explore the components of a useful social listening stream.

The Components of a Useful Social Listening Stream

Successful social listening is not a set-it-and-forget-it activity. In fact, it requires many resources to be useful, e.g., tools to gather and analyze social data, persons to set up and manage the tools, persons to interpret the data and communicate the analyses, persons to prioritize the results and develop strategies based on the results and persons to execute and manage the tactics.

If you have a social media team, it will assume these aforementioned roles and consult you for set up, reporting, messaging and es-

An example of conversation sentiment. Sentiment may be positive, neutral or negative and is determined by the words used in and the structure of the post.

calation strategies, which we will address in the next section. If you do not have a social media team, then you will need to assume these aforementioned roles beginning with the selection of a social listening tool.

When selecting a social listening tool, look for one that 1) "analyzes data and aggregates points of commonality, 2) finds themes without being prompted by keywords, 3) automates the highly labor-intensive aspects of recording, analyzing, categorizing and visualizing data and insights, 4) enables leaders to evaluate the analysis and 5) offers a genuine price value."[3] Although free tools are available, you should invest in solutions like SocialReport or HootSuite Insights that provide insights like message frequency, reach, placement and sentiment, poster demographics and keyword identification.

Once you have selected a social listening tool, you will need to set it up. Begin by determining what you want to learn from your social listening stream. For the purpose of crisis management, I recommend that you start with a broad search of your brand name, including all spelling variations of your brand name, in all social networks, in all physical locations and in all languages, and create notifications for sudden or large frequency (amount of messages) increases. Once your stream starts to aggregate and analyze data, you can adjust the settings to achieve the results you need.

Now that you have created a useful social listening stream, you need to know how to
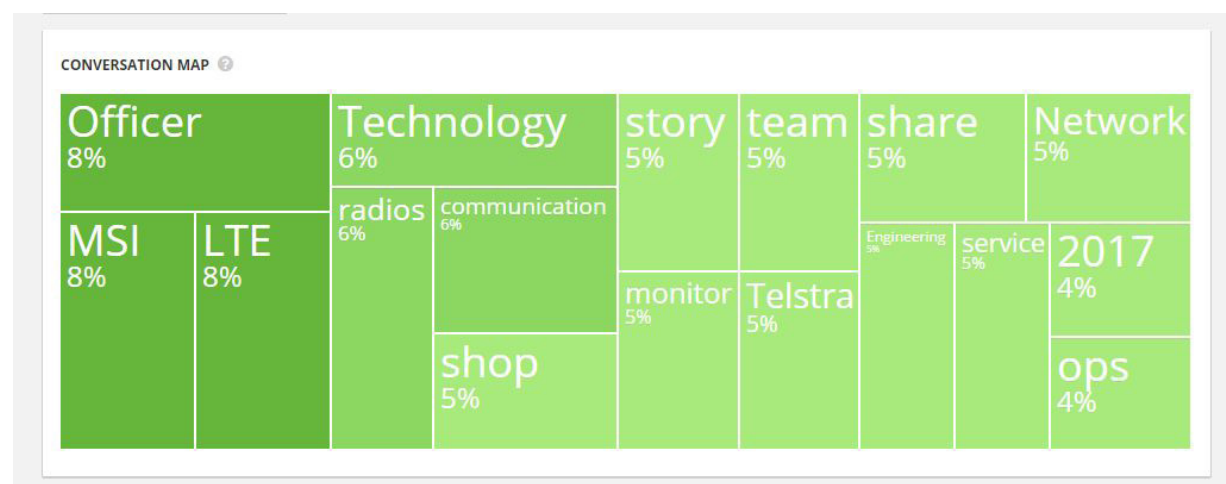
This image is an example of a conversation map. Some social listening tools create conversation maps based on the frequency of words used in a conversation during a specific period of time.

interpret the results from your social listening stream and determine when and how to respond to crises via social media.

Interpreting the Results of Your Social Listening Stream and Identifying the Correct Course of Action

As your stream gathers information, look for sudden or large increases in conversations. If you notice sudden or large conversation increases, *do not* respond immediately. Instead, monitor the conversation's frequency (number of messages), reach (number of people receiving the messages) and influencers (persons who have posted the most regarding this conversation or have the largest share of voice in this conversation), sentiment and keywords. If the conversation's intensity lasts beyond 24 hours, you may have a crisis to manage; however, conversations losing intensity within 24 hours are less likely to be considered crises. If you are unsure, consult with your social media team. They will know if the conversation has become a crisis.

If you determine that you indeed have a crisis to manage, allow your social media team to determine the best manner to respond to the crisis. As a PR practitioner, you are trained to get in front of the conversation by responding with prepared statements that support your organization's position and/or refutes the alleged accusations about your organization, but this tactic may not be the best course of action for social media. Prepare statements for use should the need arise; however, only use these statements if absolutely necessary and allow the social media team to revise these statements to reflect the voice and medium to which it is shared. Remember that unlike other forms of communication, social media is more emotive and reactive, so it is better to err on the side of caution when responding to a crisis via social media.

Now that you see the value of incorporating social listening into your crisis management plan, schedule a meeting with your social media team to learn how your teams can work together better. You both bring unique and valuable skills to your organization that will both be needed in a crisis. ■

Daniella Peting is Social Media Center of Excellence global co-lead and North America social media manager at Motorola Solutions. @dnpeting

1   Beese, J. (2015, November 18). What Is Social Listening & Why Is It Important? [Web log post]. Retrieved March 5, 2017, from http://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-listening/

2   Fontein, D. (2016, April 16). A Guide to Social Media Listening for Your Business [Web log post]. Retrieved March 6, 2017, from https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-listening-business/

3   Neely, D. (2010, May 25). Social-Media Listening vs. Social-Media Monitoring: Truly Connecting, or Merely Collecting? [Web log post]. Retrieved March 6, 2017, from http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2010/3634/social-media-listening-vs-social-media-monitoring-truly-connecting-or-merely-collecting

How PR Pros Combat the Growing Threat of Weaponized Social Media

By Richard Levick

The weaponization of social media played a critical, albeit insidious, role in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, particularly as the race came to a close. Take the now-famous *BuzzFeed* analysis showing that in the final three months of the campaign, the top-performing fake election news stories on Facebook generated more engagement than the top stories from major news outlets such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Huffington Post and NBC News. Fake news continues to steal all the headlines, of course. But it's just one way social media is being weaponized. Botnets, high-frequency automated messaging saturation and similar tools also are being deployed by bad actors to spread false and often fraudulent information via social platforms. Social channels are the main depositories for bogus information because, let's face it, that's where most people get their news and information these days, and ill-inspired campaigns will garner the most traction.

> **The various tools used to spread misinformation… are encroaching on the corporate sector—and senior communicators need to brace themselves.**

Now, in a potentially dangerous omen, the various tools used to spread misinformation throughout the political arena are encroaching on the corporate sector—and senior communicators need to brace themselves. The methods required to detect, respond to and mitigate these attacks via social platforms require a rethinking of PR strategy-cum-crisis communications, especially among publicly traded and global companies.

To bolster their value in the eyes of the C-suite, PR pros must be proactive as the weaponization of social channels is taking a severe toll on business. Losses linked to reputational damage at publicly traded companies grew 461% during the past five years, according to a recent study, with a large spike in anger among the general public and the weaponization of social media the primary culprits. The study, which was released in December 2016 by **Steel City Re** and **Hanover Stone Partners**, is based on an analysis of reputational-related losses for roughly 7,500 companies covering the past five years.

It's an unsettling chain of events online. When social media channels started to emerge in the early 2000s, the narrative was that they would improve understanding throughout the business landscape and break down barriers between companies and consumer/social activists. But, more than a decade later, it hasn't exactly turned out that way.

These days the pressing questions for senior communicators are not so much how brands can use social media channels as a charm offensive—that's the easy part—but,

Risk-Based Relative Cost of Loss from Reputation-Linked Event

Year	Value
2011	100%
2012	132%
2013	259%
2014	227%
2015	231%
2016	461%
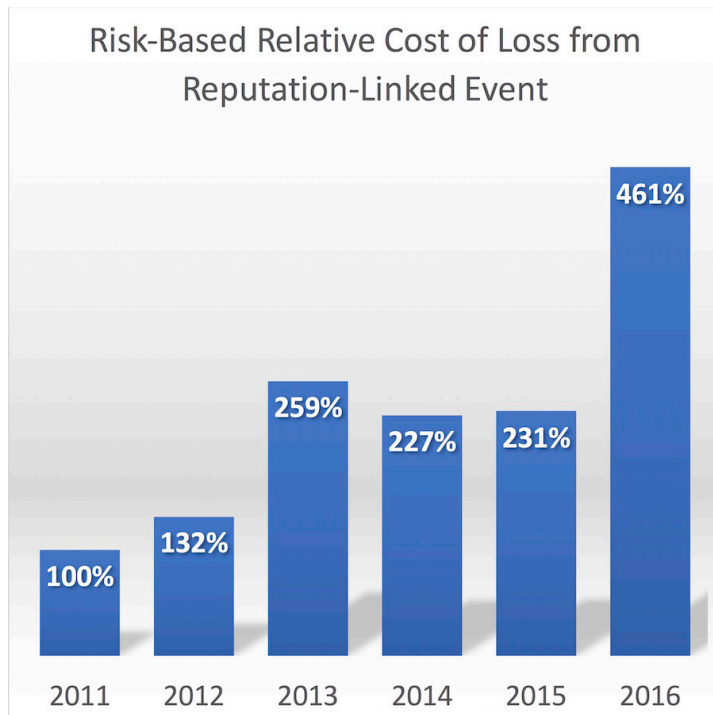
Losses linked to reputational damage at publicly traded companies grew precipitously during the past five years.

rather, how to defend their companies against increasingly vituperative and nasty attacks via Facebook, Twitter, et al.

As social channels become more powerful, PR pros need to develop and steer the best practices required to prevent and mitigate attacks via social platforms. They also need to establish the guardrails to protect brand reputation and ensure that such attacks don't devolve into severe crises.

Indeed, whether it's from a sitting president or an irate individual with a modem who will stop at nothing to attack a brand or organization (even for making honest mistakes), PR managers must be able to confront myriad parties that are using social channels as the online equivalent of precision-guided missiles. With that in mind, here's a strategic blueprint for how senior communicators navigate what remains uncharted social media terrain.

Know the Rules of the Road (and the Regulatory Landscape)

There are two sets of rules communicators must follow when it comes to developing a defense against weaponized social media. First, communicators must understand the terms, services and conditions of the various social platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which are varied. For global companies whose social channels are inexorably moving to the core of their marketing communications activities, knowing the granular details of each specific social channel is mission-critical.

Second, PR pros have to stay abreast of the regulatory landscape both at home and abroad. When defending your brand against a possible attack you don't want to expose the company to accusations of having a double standard. Hewing to regulations doesn't necessarily mean you can't fight fire with fire. But the way in which you respond must be above board and transparent (you also need to be cognizant of the message your response sends to the marketplace). You must make sure your communications via social channels adhere to **FTC** rules for the U.S. and European Union (EU) regs for European-based operations. At the same time, there are many countries in which FTC and/or EU regs don't apply. That's why it's important that communicators exercise caution when considering the origins of an attack via social media. PR pros are paid to know the difference between someone who's simply angry with your product and has a legitimate gripe and a concerted attack by "sockpuppets," or a false online identity typically created by an individual or group to push their own views and agendas.

Constantly Assess Potential Threats

Communicators need to constantly track threat assessment via social media platforms. The Keystone Pipeline, GMOs, fracking, sugar, you name it: The coming communications crises for these issues, and more, was always foreseeable with a close and constant reading of the digital tea leaves. Remember, companies advertise, critics and activists organize. Your adversaries need to leave their footprints to find allies. Communicators also must learn about the trends in hashtags used by critics; NGO fundraising and communications strategies; who **Change.org** or #Grabyourwallet are listing; and what videos are trending, to name a few. Such tracking gives communicators a clearer window into what's next and what they may need to anticipate. If you track successfully enough, you can modify behavior, negotiate or counterattack, as the opportunity dictates, without being caught off guard.

Contain the Engagement

In the event of an attack, it's usually crucial to keep the exchange strictly to the platform on which it happened. If your brand or organization gets attacked via Facebook, it does you no good to open up your defense strategy to, say, your Twitter followers. You want to isolate the audience that's been exposed to the attack and not let the issue seep into other channels. However, if the attack toggles from one social platform to another it's a strong indication that it's probably a coordinated, well-funded and sustained attack and you'll have to respond accordingly.

There are also exceptions to this rule that are well worth noting. **Nordstrom** didn't respond to President Trump's criticism via Twitter, but on other platforms. The rule here is, if there is already enough attention on the issue a cross-platform response may be just what the doctor ordered.

Cultivate Relationships With Social Channels Beyond Sales

Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are scrambling to develop new policies designed to cut down on fake news appearing on their platforms. Nonetheless, the onus remains on communicators to develop and nurture relationships with senior executives from all the social channels, including technical support and content teams. By having a strong relationship with these skill sets, communicators can learn about the "dirty tricks" that social media channels uncover among users and, in the event of an attack, they'll know whom to speak to in order to get the issue resolved as quickly as possible.

Know Them Before You Need Them

Another effective tool to combat social media attacks is to develop audiences and influencers now, during peacetime, so when the company is attacked various stakeholders can act on the company's behalf and dismiss the fake news and/or negative chatter. This area of defense is not to be underestimated among communicators. A third-party player, with a large number of followers and a solid reputation, may be able to share mitigating technologies regarding an attack. In a similar vein, you need to cultivate influencers in-house. By keeping them abreast of the challenges presented by weaponized social media, employees can serve as a bulwark against social media attacks. What is more, by having employees share in the defense, you're improving brand affinity among employees, which is crucial for employee retention and encouraging *esprit de corps*.

In the topsy-turvy world of online communications, it's probably not a matter of if your brand will be attacked via social channels, but when. If it hasn't happened already, don't lull yourself or the company into a false sense of security. Possessing an "it can't

happen here" mentality is bound to make matters worse once you come under attack. If you don't have the proper protocols in place now—during peacetime—to respond effectively and mitigate damage to your brand and your stakeholders, it's not going to get any easier once the warheads start landing. ■

Richard Levick, Esq., is chairman and CEO of LEVICK. @richardlevick

# 3 Tiers of a Social Media Crisis (and How to Manage Each One of Them)

By Katie Goodale

It is no secret that the digital landscape has forced public relations practitioners to completely reengineer their crisis communications plans and policies. We once had time to collect information, craft statements and communicate with constituents before the next news cycle. In today's always-on world, if you are not communicating in real time you're already too late. Reporting now happens in the moment, via multiple online channels, by anyone with an online audience. Established media contacts are no longer information gatekeepers. Instead, the world is talking about your brand whether you are part of the conversation or not.

In this real-time news landscape, it is easy to assume that crisis communications in social media must be reactionary. Brands often focus their resources on watching for negative comments and stories across their social platforms, with the measure of success being how quickly they can post a canned response to a complaint or potentially harmful story. While speed is key, taking this one-size-fits-all approach to issues management in social media can fan the flames of major issues and turn minor hiccups into reputation killers.

To break free of one-track crisis management on social media, savvy communicators are looking at social crisis events in terms of tiers. By evaluating your brand's vulnerabilities and bucketing in one of the following three zones, isolated incidents are extinguished before gaining traction and widespread issues are mitigated more quickly.
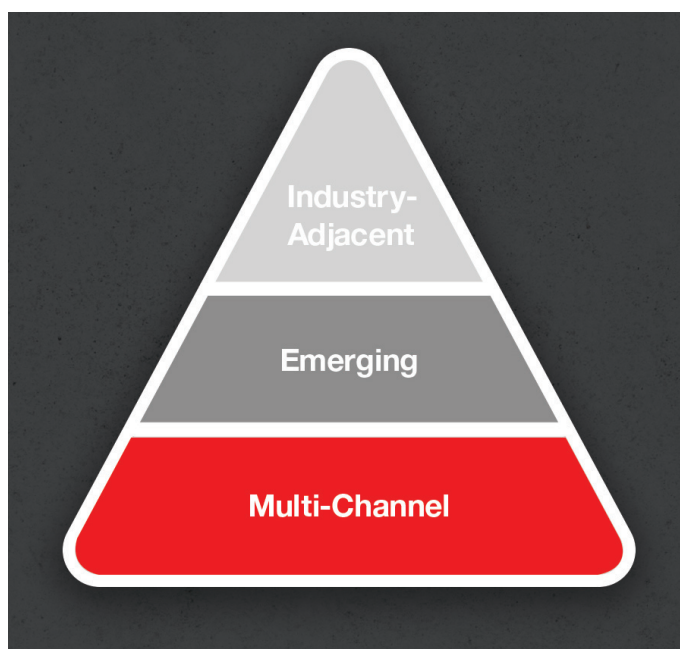
Thinking in Tiers

Not all crisis events are created equal—so the content and goal of your response to an issue should vary as well. By tiering possible social media crises before an issue is ever encountered, your messaging and protocol will match the severity and impact of a crisis. In the moment of a social media crisis, this exercise helps social media managers take a step back and evaluate the best course of action without the burden of emotion and chaos clouding their judgment.

Tier 1: Multi-Channel

- **What it is:** A multi-channel crisis event is an unexpected, at-fault sit-

uation with a high level of publicity across channels. While these events will likely travel beyond the digital world and into traditional media outlets, social is a key place where updates and messaging should be shared and updated frequently. Social platforms also provide a window to changes in public sentiment related to a crisis event, giving social media managers the ability to evaluate if key messages and statements are resonating with their target market.

- **What it looks like:** Multi-channel crisis events on social media include posts and conversations related to significant negative brand events. These include allegations of workplace discrimination, impropriety or violence, product integrity issues and recalls, natural disasters or security breaches.

- **Prepare by:** Multi-channel crisis events have the potential to cause significant damage to your brand's reputation and bottom line, so creating a robust issues management plan with protocol for online and offline channels is well worth the effort. Be careful not to file the plan away once complete. This evolving document should be evaluated and updated quarterly and used to run real-time drills for the key internal players on your team.

Your authenticity will take a hit if your community sees the same three canned statements used for all fan and follower responses.

- **Manage it by:** If a multi-channel event has reached your social channels, the response must be authentic, fast and accurate. Statements and key messages

should be posted within the channels where the crisis is occurring—not just in a designated area of your website. Ensure that all social channels are consistently monitored and that fan posts and your responses are logged, especially in the early hours and days of the crisis event. Because a multi-channel crisis will likely garner a high volume of comments, ensure that all responses are on message but varied—your authenticity will take a hit if your community sees the same three canned statements used for all fan and follower responses.

Tier 2: Emerging

- **What it is:** In an emerging crisis event, your social community is bringing you an issue on those platforms first—and it's up to you to extinguish it before it gains traction and becomes a multi-channel event. An emerging crisis is small-scale and can likely be managed within your social channels if spotted early and handled quickly. Conversations on social and posts to your pages are typically how these crisis events come to light, versus an inquiry from an external source. While emerging crises could escalate if they attract enough eyeballs, direct communication typically defuses them before they cause widespread damage.

- **What it looks like:** Customer complaints, service issues and changes to a brand's offerings with the potential to cause confusion or anger are considered emerging crisis events.

- **Prepare by:** Because service issues make up a large number of emerging crisis events, evaluate your organization's customer pain points and develop

protocol and messaging for specific situations. Monitoring social channels is key for spotting and addressing emerging events before they pick up steam.

- **Kill it by:** A common brand mistake is to treat emerging events like widespread crises. While it may feel like 30 complaints about a faulty product requires a community-wide post with an apologetic statement, chances are that mass communication around emerging issues will draw more attention than one-to-one responses. Immediate and personal issues resolution is the best way to prevent an emerging crisis from becoming a multi-channel situation that takes the narrative out of your hands.

Tier 3: Industry-Adjacent

- **What it is:** An industry-adjacent crisis occurs when a competitor, vendor or business partner is embroiled in a social media crisis. While it may not appear to be a problem for your brand, a negative halo effect could put your company in the (unwanted) spotlight.
- **What it looks like:** Any significant crisis event that does not begin within your organization, but could be connected to you via your business or industry relationships. For example, one of your vendors could take a political stance in a tweet, leading to anger and questions from your own fans and followers.
- **Prepare by:** Industry-adjacent crisis events are dangerous blind spots for brands. Look outside your own organizational vulnerabilities to identify potential landmines in your business relationships. Form alliances with key associations and industry groups to speed communication if an event does occur.

- **Kill it by:** As soon as an industry-adjacent crisis begins, start drafting key messages and posts that distance your organization from the issue in the event you are approached for comment. Highlight corporate initiatives, protocols and proof points that will instill confidence in your brand. Don't forget to evaluate planned social posts in light of the industry crisis.

Evaluating Your Social Media Crises

Now that you're familiar with the three tiers of social media crises, it's time to apply them to your own brand. The first step is to truly understand your audience and the political, economic and cultural landscape that surrounds them. You can't prepare messaging for every issue your brand may encounter, so this examination of your customer's mindset will focus attention on the crisis events with the possibility for the most significant impact.

By evaluating your target audience beyond basic demographics and intersecting those findings with your brand's role in their lives, you can prioritize what crisis events could have the most impact on your business and your customers' relationship with you. For example, a financial institution entrusted with personal customer data will tier crisis events very differently than a baby food producer responsible for infant safety and nutrition.

Get started by brainstorming a list of potential crisis events that could impact your brand on your social platforms. Once your list is complete, assign them to one of the three tiers, updating the list quarterly based on activity on your social channels and shifts in consumer mindset.

Creating a Crisis Prevention Protocol

With a prioritized list of crisis events in each tier, you can begin to create messaging and response protocol for each. While no cri-

sis can be fully planned for, thinking through how you'd respond to issues is much more effective when cooler heads prevail.

Prepared posts and messages aren't effective when they aren't deployed at the right time and place, so invest time in training and running crisis drills for your social media monitors. Helping them understand the nuances of each tier can keep major events from gaining steam and seemingly harmless complaints from blowing up. These are the people on the front lines of a crisis, so ensure that they have the right listening tools and support to maintain a 360-degree view of your brand.

Finally, remember that the issues within your brand's tiers are fluid. Plan to consis-

tently update your list of crisis events based on your customers' perspectives on cultural and political events. Likewise, an industry-adjacent crisis could shift the mindset of your target audience, requiring new ways of approaching emerging and critical events for your organization.

By throwing out a one-size-fits-all approach to crisis management on social media, you can protect your brand and keep the focus of your digital community on your content. ∎

Katie Goodale is associate director, PR & social media at Hiebing. kgoodale@hiebing.com

Navigating the Two-Way Social Media Superhighway in Times of Crisis

By Robert S. Fleming

Contemporary organizations face numerous challenges that have the potential of compromising their success and, at times, their survival. These challenges may involve crisis events or situations originating within an organization and/or those occurring within the environment in which the organization operates. A proactive approach to crisis management enables the enlightened organization to anticipate and, ideally, prevent or minimize the impact of crisis situations, as well as effectively and efficiently manage and recover from those crisis situations that confront the organization.

While some crisis events will originate from external forces as in the case of natural or man-made disasters and economic or market forces, others may have their origin within an organization. Examples of organizational crisis situations include defective products, product tampering, catastrophic accidents, illegal activity or financial impropriety. Organizational technology failures resulting in loss of data, security breaches (identity theft), service interruptions and/or system failure have unfortunately become all too common in the contemporary business world.

The business impact of crisis situations may include reduced sales/revenues, reduced market share, customer/contract loss and reduced profitability. A contemporary organization's ability to weather the storm of a crisis situation through proactive crisis man-agement will be instrumental in reputation management, as well as enabling the organization to survive, avoiding business failure in some instances.

The Role of Communication in Times of Crisis

Among the numerous lessons that organizations take away from a crisis experience is the essential role of communication during a crisis situation. An effective crisis plan must incorporate appropriate communication strategies and tools in the interest of ensuring that all organizational stakeholders receive information that is accurate, complete, credible, professional and timely throughout a crisis. An organization must be prepared to communicate effectively and efficiently to both internal stakeholders (including employees, managers and owners), and external stakeholders (including customers, suppliers and the public).

The traditional approach to organizational communication in times of crisis has involved the use of public information officers (PIOs), media releases and press conferences. In much simpler times before the revolutionary advances of the technological age, this approach enabled an organization facing a crisis situation to deliver its message to stakeholders, often with the assistance of the traditional news media through their limited news broadcast schedules and cycles. While providing essential information regarding what had happened, what was currently

Best Practices: Communicating via Social

While the intended messages that an organization will disseminate during a crisis should be consistent regardless of the communication medium or platform that it utilizes, it is important to recognize that there are certain dynamics of social media and its audience that must be understood in the interest of ensuring successful information dissemination.

The following suggestions will enhance your success in preparing and disseminating information during a crisis:

☐ Understand and commit to fully meeting and, ideally, exceeding stakeholder expectations for information dissemination.

☐ Recognize the need to ensure that accurate, complete, credible, professional and timely information is disseminated throughout a crisis.

☐ Ensure that consistent information is being disseminated through traditional sources, the internet and social media.

☐ Develop a crisis communication strategy that utilizes both traditional sources such as the news media and social media.

☐ Prepare information for dissemination through social media in a format that is suited to this information technology.

☐ Develop social media and email contacts organized by stakeholder categories in advance of a crisis situation.

☐ Practice your communication strategy and crisis plan regularly to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency and that all participants fully understand and are prepared to enact their roles and responsibilities successfully.

happening and what was likely to happen was relatively inefficient in comparison to information dissemination today, this dated approach enabled an organization to craft and disseminate the message sent to stakeholders.

Social Media Has Caused a Paradigm Shift

Successful contemporary organizations utilize social media on a daily basis to advance their business interests through promoting their products, services and organization. Many that initially discovered the untapped power of the internet to enhance their business success now routinely use tools such as Facebook and Twitter to stay in contact and communicate with organizational stakeholders. In good times social media can be a "friend" and powerful information dissemination tool for a contemporary organization.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. During times of crisis, social media can be both a blessing and a curse to an organization seeking to ensure that all relevant stakeholders receive appropriate information that is accurate, complete, credible, professional and timely. While social media provides an information dissemination platform that an organization can effectively and efficiently utilize to communicate with its stakeholders during a crisis, the fact that anyone with access to the internet or social media can package and disseminate information about the nature or scope of a crisis and an organization's actions or inactions can result in the dissemination of information that is inaccurate, confusing or misleading.

It is therefore imperative that an organization skillfully use social media throughout a crisis to ensure that stakeholders receive "righteous" information that meets and, ideally, exceeds their expectations. While this obviously involves the use of social media to

disseminate information, organizations must also monitor social media during a crisis in the interest of identifying information that has been posted by other individuals, groups or organizations (including the news media) that should be addressed by the organization in the interest of ensuring its accuracy. While it would seem that such miscommunication would always result from independent sources desiring to be the first to "report" on crisis events, the desire of the 24/7 news media to break a leading story can also be problematic in this age of instantaneous news coverage and information dissemination.

Navigating the Social Media Superhighway During a Crisis

A proactive crisis plan should incorporate the use of social media in crisis communication. While this should be obvious to any business leader or public relations professional, it is easy to delimit one's focus to information that is prepared and disseminated by the organization and to fail to recognize the importance of monitoring what other sources are reporting through social media about the crisis in general and your organization specifically. It is imperative that personnel be assigned to monitor social media in the interest of revealing information that needs to be corrected and triggering organizational responses.

Preparing and Disseminating Information

The importance of proper research and preparation in advance of communicating with organizational stakeholders is well recognized and respected in the interest of ensuring that all information disseminated by an organization during a crisis is accurate. This often means that the initial information disseminated may have to be fairly general, with more specific information being released

as it becomes available and is verified. The nature, scope and/or duration of some crisis events may necessitate that periodic updates be provided by the organization on a scheduled basis or as the crisis unfolds.

The assignment of qualified personnel to the preparation and dissemination of information is of utmost importance. The sources of information must be knowledgeable representatives of corporate management or designated subject matter experts. The crafting of the message must be done by experienced, skilled public relations professionals. While this is similar to preparing for more traditional information dissemination, such as preparing a media release or conducting a press conference, the uniqueness of social media demands that those crafting the social media message, initiating that message or responding to other social media users have both the in-depth understanding of the organization and its operations, and the nature and impact of the crisis.

These communication professionals must also be skilled in appropriately crafting, sending and responding to social media messages. It is imperative that those responsible for an organization's social media communications have the ability and patience to refrain from hastily issuing messages or responding to information disseminated by others. Failure to exercise this restraint can negatively impact an organization's success in ensuring that organizational stakeholders receive accurate information about all aspects of an evolving crisis situation.

Ensuring That Stakeholders Receive Accurate Information

While an organization must be prepared to implement a communications strategy that ensures that it is disseminating information through the traditional news media, the internet and social media that is accurate,

complete, credible, professional and timely, it must recognize that while it is diligently accomplishing this, numerous others in our contemporary world of instantaneous communication will likely also be communicating about the crisis situation and perhaps its relationship to the organization. While it should be noted that there may be times where others who disseminate such information do so in an accurate and responsible manner, there are many cases where this is far from the case. While it is natural to find fault with the sources of inaccurate, confusing or misleading information that is disseminated by others, including the traditional news media intent on breaking a story, the fact that the recipients of such information are eager to be the first to

know what's happening in their world and to share it with others must also be understood.

The organization involved in the crisis thus has both an interest and responsibility to ensure that accurate information is provided from a credible source in a timely manner. This requires the assignment of one or more public relations professionals who are fully briefed on the situation and the information that their organization has disseminated to continuously monitor both social media and the internet to identify any inaccurate, confusing or misleading information that has been disseminated by others and triggering the necessary actions to issue appropriate corrective information or responses. Given the importance and challenges of both as-

Checklist: Monitoring and Responding to Social Media

While you will want to utilize social media as an effective, time-sensitive tool when communicating to organizational stakeholders during a crisis, it is imperative that an organization conscientiously and continuously monitor all related posts on social media regarding the crisis situation and/or their organization in the interest of discerning disseminated information in need of correction.

The following suggestions will contribute to your success in ensuring that social media posts of others do not result in inaccurate, confusing or misleading information being received by organizational stakeholders:

☐ Recognize that since anyone can create and disseminate information through social media, not all information will be accurate.

☐ Develop a procedure for monitoring and responding to social media posts during a crisis.

☐ Define roles and responsibilities of personnel assigned to monitoring posts, developing responses and posting information.

☐ Assign appropriate personnel to monitor and respond to posts based on communication skills, technical skills, organizational knowledge and crisis management situational awareness and skills.

☐ Implement the organization's social media communication activities in accordance with the overall crisis communication strategy delineated in its crisis plan.

☐ Fully document all relevant internal and external information dissemination during the crisis, as well as the implementation of planned activities under the crisis plan.

☐ Conduct a post-crisis review of the effectiveness and efficiency of all crisis communication activities with an emphasis on ensuring a consistent and accurate organizational message and verifying that organizational stakeholders were provided accurate information by the organization throughout the crisis.

☐ Recognize that crisis communication is an ongoing activity throughout and often beyond a crisis.

pects of this task, separate individuals are often assigned to the tasks of monitoring and addressing social media information.

Your Social Media Crisis Communication Strategy

Your communication strategy is an integral and essential component of your organization's crisis plan. A proactive communication strategy is key to the successful implementation of a comprehensive crisis plan tailored to the various crisis situations that the organization may face. While this article has focused on the role of social media during a crisis, it is important to recognize that both traditional and contemporary information sources must be aligned to ensure that a cohesive and consistent message is disseminated.

There are three phases to successful crisis management from a communications standpoint. The first phase involves embedding an appropriate multi-channel communication strategy into an organization's overall crisis plan. It is important to ensure than this plan properly defines and assigns responsibilities during a crisis, including roles and responsibilities related to information dissemination. The value of rehearsing the plan through exercises should be obvious.

The second phase begins when the crisis occurs and demands immediate attention. The organization has a vested interest in getting ahead of the story and initiating appropriate and responsible information dissemination to all stakeholder groups in a timely manner. The communication strategy delineated in the crisis plan should be followed with all identified personnel performing their specified roles and responsibilities during the crisis. It is also imperative to maintain detailed

records of all crisis management activities, including those involving information dissemination, throughout the duration of the crisis. This documentation should encompass all communication activities, including those involving social media, whether initiated by the organization or other sources.

The last phase involves a review and analysis of the success of all crisis management activities, including those involving information management. This review will often take the form of a post-crisis analysis or critique where all aspects of crisis management are examined. The focus in considering communication effectiveness and efficiency should be on whether the organization was successful in ensuring that organizational stakeholders received accurate, complete, credible, professional and timely information regarding the crisis situation and its impact.

Using the proactive approach advocated in this article, an organization can ensure that its stakeholders receive all pertinent information that they need, expect and deserve. Through such stewardship, those responsible for crisis management can ensure that their organization will recover from the crisis, mitigate the business impact of the crisis and ensure that the organization's reputation is not needlessly tarnished by either the crisis or the manner in which the organization addressed it. ∎

Dr. Robert S. Fleming is a professor of management in the Rowan University Rohrer College of Business and a professor of crisis and emergency management in the University's Disaster and Emergency Management program. fleming@rowan.edu

Questions to Determine Whether New or Established Sites Should Be Used in Crisis

By Stacey L. Knott

The zombie apocalypse has begun and your organization is involved. Or maybe you are in charge of the big charity golf tournament for your company. Question: Do you create new social media sites for those events, or do you use your established sites?

Chances are you have a bevy of co-workers and bosses with their own opinions, but as the social media administrator, what is correct? How do you decide, and how do you explain or defend your choice?

This article includes several important items for consideration, questions to ask and your options when it comes to creating or not creating social media sites.

Consider Carefully

Before running off to create those sites to address the zombie problem or for your special event, you need to carefully consider the situation and the best option for you and your organization. Here a few important strategic items to keep in mind as you go through the decision process.

Time: Although it does not take long to create new social media sites, it does take a few minutes to create your profile with the proper information, profile pictures, et cetera. More importantly, it takes time to manage those sites with content and interaction. If you create sites, you will need to maintain both your established sites and the new ones.

Content: Where will the content come from for these new social media sites? Your organization? Your mission partners? What about content for your established social media sites too? Never underestimate the value of great content, which includes not just the well-written post, but also interesting photos and videos; these take time and thought.

Audience: Will your established site's audiences meet your needs or do you have a different audience for this crisis or event? If creating new sites, where will the audience come from? You will need to decide if you should work to build a whole new audience for new sites or continue communicating with the audience you already have on your established social media sites.

Communication Objectives: Consider if creating or not creating a site fits the event's communication objectives. Is there a communication plan for such a contingency? Look to your established or newly created guidance, which may easily provide the answers to those questions. Remember, even if you have a communication plan to help guide you during the event, you may need to reevaluate that direction and course correct.

Once you begin to consider the strategic and logistical management of your social media sites for your event, you will need to ask yourself the more tactical, in-depth questions. These will also help you decide if you should or should not create new social media sites.

In-Depth Questions

Here are a few tactical questions that dive

a little deeper into the situation. Note: These questions are not all-inclusive; they are simply meant to aid your decision making.

Who is your audience? Is your audience your internal employees and families? Perhaps your audience includes other organizations related to your industry or the event? Does your audience include the general public and the media? Your audience may include people from each of these groups. The smaller and more focused your audience is for your event, the more likely it is that you can use your established social media sites. Hopefully, that small, focused audience is already following or liking your sites. If the audience is large and varied, then mark down your audience as one variable for why you may need to create new sites for the event.

Will the audience be one-time visitors or return multiple times? When your audience visits your sites will they get everything they need in a single visit, or will they possibly return multiple times for information? If the information on the site will only be used once by the audience, more than likely they will not return to your site, and perhaps a new site is not the way to go. On the other hand, maybe your sites will have people returning multiple times for information such as event updates and ongoing activities.

Is this a local, statewide, regional or national event? This question is the geographic location of the event, not the level of interest, which could be much larger. For example, if an event occurs at a military installation, then the social media sites at the installation may be best. But if an event covers a larger area such as a county, state or region, then an existing site may not cover the need, especially if there are multiple organizations involved.

Are we the lead organization for this event? Are we the lead or a subset of this event? When the government responds to an event, there is always a primary organization
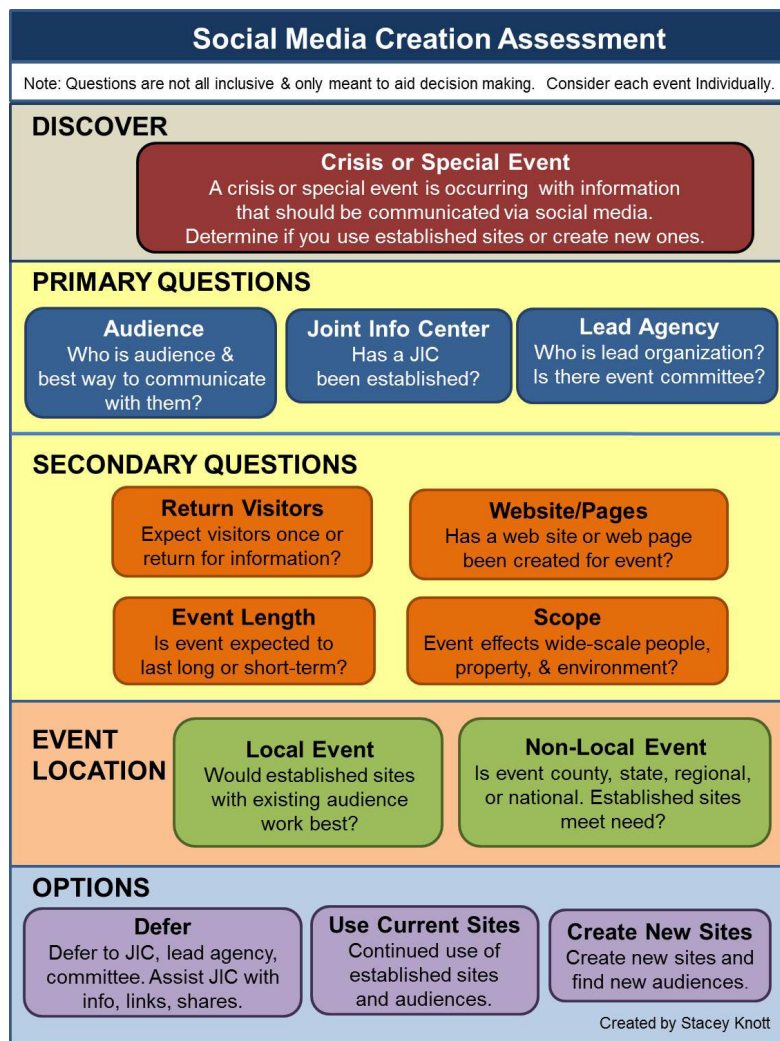
put into the lead role, which coordinates every facet of the response. If you are holding a large event with multiple other organizations, there is possibly a lead organization or perhaps a committee overseeing the event. Consider checking with the lead organization or committee before creating any other sites.

Is there a joint information center (JIC) established for this event? If the event is for a crisis or disaster, the government may establish a JIC to coordinate and streamline communication. If so, social media administrators should consider the JIC the lead for the event, which may already have created sites or be in the process of creating sites. Duplicating sites will not help with communicating for the event and will actually divide the audience. Additionally, a JIC helps portray a cohesive and coordinated response for the event.

Will a separate website or page be created for this event? If an event does not warrant creating an additional website, why does it need its own social media sites? And even if you create a separate web page for this event, you may still not need separate social media sites. Social media is one of the tools in your communication tool kit, and when combined with your other tools, like your website, it can extend your message.

Will this be a long-term event? Although this can be difficult to determine initially, a short-term event may not need a new site, where long-term events do need them. For example, if your company is holding a one-night charity event with your employees, then perhaps a web page on your site with targeted messaging on your established social media sites is exactly right. But if the event is a long-term, ongoing initiative, then new sites may be needed. For example, **NORAD** has separate social media sites for the NORAD Tracks Santa program, which is a large-scale, annual event since 1955.

What is the scope of this event? Does it

Social Media Creation Assessment

Note: Questions are not all inclusive & only meant to aid decision making.   Consider each event Individually.

DISCOVER

Crisis or Special Event
A crisis or special event is occurring with information that should be communicated via social media.
Determine if you use established sites or create new ones.

PRIMARY QUESTIONS

Audience
Who is audience & best way to communicate with them?

Joint Info Center
Has a JIC been established?

Lead Agency
Who is lead organization? Is there event committee?

SECONDARY QUESTIONS

Return Visitors
Expect visitors once or return for information?

Website/Pages
Has a web site or web page been created for event?

Event Length
Is event expected to last long or short-term?

Scope
Event effects wide-scale people, property, & environment?

EVENT LOCATION

Local Event
Would established sites with existing audience work best?

Non-Local Event
Is event county, state, regional, or national. Established sites meet need?

OPTIONS

Defer
Defer to JIC, lead agency, committee. Assist JIC with info, links, shares.

Use Current Sites
Continued use of established sites and audiences.

Create New Sites
Create new sites and find new audiences.

Created by Stacey Knott

Your Options

Defer: So it turns out the zombie apocalypse is huge and neverending, and the government has set up a JIC with a lead agency. Defer to the JIC or lead agency for social media. Or even better, contact the JIC and ask to participate. You can also use your organization's sites to help share the primary agency's messaging with your audiences. Also consider posting a link on your organization's sites back to the event or crisis social media sites to help show your audience the best sources for information.

Use Established Sites: After working through all of these questions, you determine you will use your organization's established social media sites. You worked hard to build your audience and are known for your great posts and interaction on your sites. Additionally, you can use this event to build your audience and reputation even bigger for on your established sites. During the process, remember to measure and evaluate to ensure those sites are meeting your needs or for improvements.

Create New Sites: You have determined you need to create social media sites specifically for the crisis or special event. Ensure you have timely, accurate and good content and interaction. Find your new audience by using all your available resources. On your established sites, share links to your new sites and recommend your audience go there for specific information. If you are the lead for the event or working with other partners, ask them to share the links for the new sites on their organizations' sites. Add the links to the new social media

affect a large group of people, property or the environment? During a crisis, these are usually people's main concerns. For example, during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, people were concerned about the effects of the oil to the water, wildlife and sea life. Fishermen and the tourism industry in the area were concerned about how it would affect their livelihood. Additionally, the spill affected a huge geographic area, since every state along the U.S. Gulf Coast was affected. This was an event with a huge scope for time, audience, geography and more. The JIC for the response created a separate website and social media sites. Your large scope event may need new social media sites created too.

sites to your website, news releases and other products. You may be surprised how quickly you can build your new audience if you use all the opportunities available to you. During the process, remember to measure and evaluate to ensure those sites are meeting your needs or for improvements.

You are now armed with the information to help decide if you do or do not need to create new sites. You also have the information to help explain or defend your decision if needed. Ultimately, every situation is unique and the options and results will vary, but trust your training, trust your communication guidance and trust your instincts. ■

Stacey L. Knott is strategic communication manager and plans officer, North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command Public Affairs. stacey.L.knott.civ@mail.mil.

How to Use Social for a Crisis... Before a Crisis Actually Hits

By Social Shake-Up Editors

For all the good that social media provides, it also, during times of crisis, can be the venue for horror stories about brands. **UnitedAir Lines**, of course, has had no end of trouble by way of video spread on social; even before the Dr. Dao incident, its Thanksgiving was ruined when an unruly passenger's tirade—and the cabin crew's failure to boot him from the aircraft—was captured on video. The result was a serious denting of the brand's reputation, at least on social. While a Nasdaq PR Services-PRNews Pro survey indicates only about 50% of brands have a well-developed crisis plan, and even fewer practice crisis scenarios, communicators say there are steps brands can take on social to prepare for a crisis.

Engage When Others Are Quiet

One of the worst times to start reaching out and building relationships on social media is in the midst of your brand's crisis, says Eric Wohlschlegel, senior director, media & issue management, **American Petroleum Institute** (API). Adds George Atallah, assistant executive director of external affairs, the National Football League Players Association, "having relationships [in place before a crisis] is critical."

One of the keys here is timing. The best time to prepare your communications team and brand on social for a crisis is during lulls in social activity, Wohlschlegel says. At his shop this takes the form of his team reaching out and building relationships while listening to the social discourse, supplying information and commenting. "The key is to engage in the valleys," he says. The API team plots out pivotal events for the year (its own activities as well as key events of other players in its sector) and makes plans to be active on social during the alternate periods. The expectation is that the social conversation will be vibrant during times when key events are occurring and quieter at other times, he says.

George Atallah, Assistant Executive Director, **NFLPA**

Adds Rachel Racoosin, senior digital strategist, **LEVICK**, "Determine [before a crisis strikes] who your [online] allies and adversaries are."

To help here, she recommends finding a listening tool that works best for your brand, noting tools such as Crimson Hexagon, Spredfast, Synthesio, Sysomos, Radian6, talkwalker and Brandwatch.

And make sure the tool you choose includes an alert system that will notify you when keywords you've loaded into the tool are found online.

Short, Sharp, Shareable

Of course it's easy to urge brands to engage in the conversation on social and build allies before a crisis hits, but what are the best ways to do that?

For Wohlschlegel the keys include shaping content to best serve your audience and tailoring it to the specific social platform. To

do so, make certain you know the audience you're aiming to reach, he adds. Provide content that tells your audience who your organization is, how it works and why it matters. API has found "short, sharp and shareable" content works best for its audiences, Wohlschlegel says.

Another tip: "Don't forget about SEO" and running advertising around relevant search terms, he says.

Take a Walk on the Dark Site

Eric Wohlschlegel,
Director,
Media Relations,
API

Racoosin recommends brands prepare "in peacetime" one or a series of so-called dark sites. These are clearinghouses containing messages, facts and FAQs related to potential crisis topics. Such dedicated sites, which are not connected to a brand's main site, are intended to be "a public place where [the brand] can own the narrative," she says.

Adds Atallah of the NFLPA, getting facts in front of the public during a crisis is one of the best ways brands can try to control crises as well as gain a reputation for being a thought leader.

Apologize in Advance

Rachel Racoosin,
Senior Digital Strategist,
LEVICK

Racoosin also urges brands to have pre-written apologies, whose thrust has been approved in advance. Should a crisis hit, communicators can tailor the apologies, get them approved promptly and post them socially.

To facilitate and coordinate the creation and posting of social messages in a crisis, she recommends brands have a designated "messaging chain of command." This is a small team consisting of a leader (who's also the point person), a digital specialist, a lawyer and a C-suite member who can prepare and approve social messages during a crisis.

She also recommends standard best practices for crisis planning, which dovetail with those provided by Ned Barnett in our Nov. 7 edition. Plan in advance for the range of crises that may occur, including those related to weather, operations, regulations, personal scandals etc. Map your strategy and tailor it to each. Create a crisis scoring matrix, which will facilitate triage should crises break simultaneously. ■

CONTACT: Wohlschlegele@api.org George.atallah@nflpa.com RRacoosin@levick.com

Southwest's Communications Chief Shares Her Top 3 Crisis Management Tips

By Social Shake-Up Editors

Nearly half of all organizations make the mistake of not planning for a crisis, thinking it's either superstitious or somewhat futile. After all, you can't foresee all of the nuances and dynamics that may constitute a crisis.

But while each type of situation has its own unique aspects, there are incidents—such as a data breach—that many organizations can and should prepare for in advance, says Linda Rutherford, vice president and chief communications officer with **Southwest Airlines**.

Rutherford should know: Few industries are as prone to potential crises as the airline sector, from disgruntled customers posting on social media to accidents and fatalities.

For organizations just beginning to think about crisis management, the first step is cataloguing all of the potential pitfalls that could be lurking down the road, and then prepare what a response to each would look like, she says. But crisis management is part art and part science, an ever-evolving skill.

"I don't know that there's any organization that handles a crisis perfectly," says Rutherford. "Every time you go through a reputational incident, it's an opportunity to learn."

Rutherford—who addressed the issue in a session titled "When the S—t Hits the Fan: Managing Crises on Social Media," at the Social Shake-Up conference May 22-24, 2017—provided a few lessons learned from the airline industry and beyond in how best to manage a calamity.

Respond in Real Time

In the digital age, there isn't a lot of time to get your arms around an issue before you start grappling with the fallout. But it's absolutely necessary to react as quickly as possible.

"We have watched other organizations be slow to respond to various incidents, or they're slow to put a face and a voice to a situation, so speed is something we've made as one of our cornerstone tenets," Rutherford says.

Southwest has been creative in both putting a face to a situation and managing it quickly. In 2016, the airline experienced a massive technology outage that lasted from July 20-24. The blackout caused thousands of flights to be cancelled as Southwest lost many basic back-end capabilities, such as systems to process customers and schedule flight crews; even its website was down for the count.

So, the organization employed Facebook Live for the first time ever to address the situation, and watched as its audience interacted with the content in a much more favorable way than if it had merely issued a statement.

"Words are great, but if you could do a quick photo that showed an airport and gave information, or if you put a person on Periscope or Facebook Live to give the update, the sentiment scores change quickly," she says. "You can watch the sentiment move to

neutral, or even into positive territory when the user can see somebody talking to them or see an image."

Be Transparent

Tell the truth about what you know and what you don't know about a crisis. It sounds simple, but many organizations don't follow that rule.

For instance, an organization may not understand for hours or days the depth and impact of a cyber-security breach—or why it happened and how it happened—but in the digital age, an organization no longer has the luxury of fully digesting an issue before it responds.

"You may not fully understand what happened, but it's an ongoing conversation, so tell the truth as much as you can and tell it quickly," says Rutherford. "The most important thing is to say what you know when you know it."

Rutherford points to the Tylenol crisis of September/October 1982, when seven people in Chicago died after taking capsules laced with poison, as a textbook example of crisis management.

"Even though the company wasn't sure if they had a manufacturing problem or sabotage, they went for the public good and removed all products from the shelves throughout the entire country," she says. "That's a strong tenet for us: What's the public good here?"

Cover the Waterfront

There are many digital avenues to get a message out, but one mistake many organizations make when planning responses to potential crises is in leaving one or two of those channels behind.

"It can look like a real disconnect if you deal with a crisis on a website but forget to address it on Instagram, so it looks like business as usual there," she says.

Southwest works in advance with its legal partners to have statement templates and creative digital assets ready to go, both internally to its employees and externally to the public, in case of a crisis. Beyond creating dark sites—a dedicated communications platform that serves as a clearinghouse for all messaging and facts—the company learned that logos matter, specifically, the colors of a logo.

When airline **Germanwings** had an accident in 2015, it toned down its logo, a lesson Rutherford took in-house. "We have artwork that has been created for several different types of situations—if there was a significant loss of life, we have options to go monochromatic and options to go black and white," she says.

While that's an extreme example, the lesson is clear: Prepare digital assets for various scenarios in advance so they can be deployed at a moment's notice. ■

How Brands Should Respond to Negative Online Reviews Appropriately

By Mark Lange

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos once compared the immense value of a corporate brand to one's personal reputation. He's right. Senior executives of successful businesses usually are very proud of their company's reputation. They take it personally.

But here's where things get hard: Although reputation rests on a company's values and actions, your customers increasingly define it. After all, it's *their* perceptions that ultimately count—not yours.

Brand reputation is built on the public's critical judgment, pro and con. And that feedback is coming from every direction, posted as comments and star ratings on review websites that have a big influence on potential customers.

As most things are with the internet, online review sites are double-edged swords. Positive ratings slice through advertising and SEO clutter to bring new customers and life to your enterprise. But credible-sounding negative reviews can cut the heart out of your marketing effort before prospective clients have a chance to learn anything about you directly.

How should your team handle negative reviews?

Keep Your Ego in Check

The first step is attitudinal: Get a grip. Fast. Even the most professional service organizations sometimes react poorly to nega-tive feedback. Avoid that trap. It's imperative to make sure your brand responds—correctly, to every review—to avert damage. And paradoxically, value can be created: Negative critiques of your business represent opportunities to improve operations, customer experience and brand reputation, if you address them quickly and directly.

Do Your Homework

To respond to an online criticism effectively your team should start with the facts. Can the customer and his or her history with your business be identified, or is the person anonymous? Could there be a problem with how your company sets expectations through customer communications? Is there a pattern of similar feedback from others that suggests an operational issue? Depending on your business, this sort of simple investigation can prove invaluable if it uncovers systemic problems such as rude personnel, lack of location cleanliness, parking difficulties or subpar product quality. Solve the problem and you can improve operational effectiveness, raise customer satisfaction, drive brand loyalty and accelerate customer advocacy. Talk about a win.

Respond Rapidly and Effectively

The path to an effective resolution is straightforward. Regardless of whether the negative review is true or false, someone from your team should engage the complaining customer in an online conversation to:

- Thank the person for taking time to provide feedback.
- Listen without interrupting while exploring details of the situation.
- Empathize with the person's frustrations or concerns.
- Apologize for not meeting expectations or living up to company standards.
- Suggest connecting offline if necessary to resolve the issue.

Responses must post within 48 hours. Provide templates that support a personal, polite and pleasant engagement. Short and to-the-point responses are best.

Our data show that customers often convert negative reviews to positive ones when teams respond with genuine concern and help reach a resolution. In addition, other visitors to the site will see how conscientiously your business handles customer complaints.

In the case of a fake negative review posted by a competitor, disgruntled former employee or someone who is clearly off-kilter, it's fair to consider stronger measures, though they're not always productive.

For example, if you have strong evidence that a false review is defamatory and/or violates the terms of service of the review site, you could ask the site to remove the offending review. Otherwise, Section 230 of the Federal Communications Decency Act shields online review publishers from being forced to remove unfavorable reviews posted by users except in limited circumstances.

Your best option is to focus on soliciting reviews from all of your customers, including the satisfied silent majority. When you increase your volume of honest reviews, the social web will represent accurately the broad customer satisfaction your company earns daily.

Prospective customers or clients are being presented with star ratings and reviews of your locations all across the internet. Bad reviews represent an important opportunity to generate value. When you engage customers, resolve their issues and make operational improvements, you keep your brand promise—and maintain the kind of reputation that drives business. ■

Mark Lange is Chief Marketing Officer at reputation.com