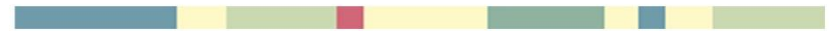
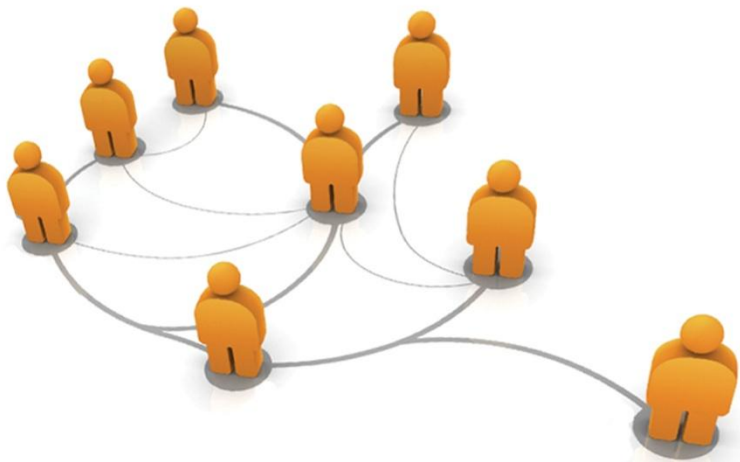


white paper

when social media bites back



A guide to how to manage a social media crisis

eModeration and Carrot Communications

Preparing for a social media crisis

The best way to manage a social media crisis is to avoid it in the first place. You can only do this if you can spot the issues before they get to breaking point. The beauty of social media is its visibility: it is possible to monitor what people are saying about you in real-time. Some companies (like PepsiCo's Gatorade) have gone as far as to set up a "mission control room" to monitor real time tweets, blogs and sentiment to allow them to engage with consumers in real time.

For most companies, this isn't practical. But the fact is that, to avoid a crisis, you need to see it coming, and the best way to do that is to listen to what people are saying about you. Imagine you're a multinational retailer, and a human rights charity has just discovered that one of your factories in China is using child labour to make cheap T-shirts. (You know nothing about this, and you have an ethical trading policy in place.) The charity is organising a demonstration outside your flagship stores in every major city where you have a shop. It's all being organised via a purpose-built Facebook page, and excitement is building.

If you don't know about the Facebook Page, chances are that the first you'll know about it is when a national TV journalist puts a microphone under your nose and asks you what your view is on child labour used in the manufacturing of cheap clothes and is filming customers being blocked from going into your shop.

But if you were monitoring the social media mentions, you could investigate whether the claim was true; publicly fire the offending supplier (and thank the charity for bringing it to your attention); call for a review of your entire manufacturing supply chain in the Far East; review your ethics policy; and answer questions honestly over Facebook, Twitter, your own website, and other communities.

**Early warning systems:
spotting an issue before it
becomes a crisis**

The difficulty with monitoring everything that's being said about you on social media is that if you're not careful, you can get bogged down in data, and be no closer to really understanding what's going on in the market.

Only by interpreting the data on social media, understanding which sites are influential, and translating what is 'real' information from what is just background chatter, can you create an effective 'early warning system' to alert you to an impending crisis or issue. (This is in much the same way that the security services have to interpret whether a conversation about an attack in an online community is just people having a laugh, or whether it poses a serious threat.)

And don't forget to monitor your own channels. **Vodafone reacted** quickly when an employee posted a rogue tweet on the corporate Twitter feed, apologising swiftly and publicly.

@WiggoWiggo We weren't hacked. A severe breach of rules by staff in our building, dealing with that internally. We're very sorry

about 3 hours ago from web in reply to WiggoWiggo

Reply Retweet



Know what you're looking for in social media monitoring

Used properly, monitoring social media can give you a real warning that an issue is about to break, and help you avoid the issue becoming a crisis.

Not all crises can be avoided completely. But good preparation and having the tools in place to handle a crisis when it hits can be the difference between a crisis and a disaster.

Often, a social media crisis will look very like a 'real world' crisis.

A crisis will start in the real world, and play out over social media even after the immediate effects of the crisis have been stalled. The most serious examples are matters of life and death, where the most important thing to do is the fix the problem. Johnson & Johnson was **praised** for its fast handling of the recall of 30 million bottles of Tylenol that had been contaminated with cyanide. The incident was extremely serious – seven people died – and Johnson & Johnson worked quickly to introduce new safety processes to ensure it wouldn't happen again. The brand weathered the crisis.

Of course, safety must be the first priority for a brand. Failure to act quickly can have wide-reaching consequences. Whether it is Greenpeace's organised campaign against Nestlé – where Greenpeace broadcast real-world demonstrations outside Nestlé's headquarters over YouTube and Facebook (the campaign ended with Nestle **reviewing its sourcing** policy, and other brands **including Burger King** following suit); or a case of bullying on a social network where some very real danger is faced; or an issue where a brand's product has been found to be unsafe and the resulting photos of the damage they've caused posted online - the threats to the organisations and people in the worst case situations will be very much real.

THE PALM OIL CONNECTION

A RECIPE FOR FOREST DESTRUCTION

▶ Play



**How do you define a crisis?
Distinguish real-world driven
from purely social media**

There are some, often less serious, 'pure' social media issues that brands may face, such as rogue tweeters (as with the Vodafone example above; badly behaved users in communities who need to be dealt with; brandjacking (such as the **PETA campaign** against Donna Karen on Facebook); disgruntled ex-employees (such as the ex-employee at **Asda Fulwood**, a Walmart company, who went on the rampage in the store: the brand responded quickly and effectively); and people badmouthing products on forums.

When it's best to walk away

Understand the importance of the issue at hand. If it's a matter of, for example, safety or abuse, then of course you must act immediately. But what if the issue isn't this serious? It's very easy to create your own firestorm by jumping in to a social media community and escalating an issue that, if left alone, would fade out by itself. Check the facts before you jump in. If a customer has complained about a product, check whether that complaint is right before you start recalling the product. Do **what's right** for your customers and your brand. Don't over-react. Not every issue you encounter is a crisis in the making. Be too defensive and you could make the situation much worse.

Know what a crisis might look like

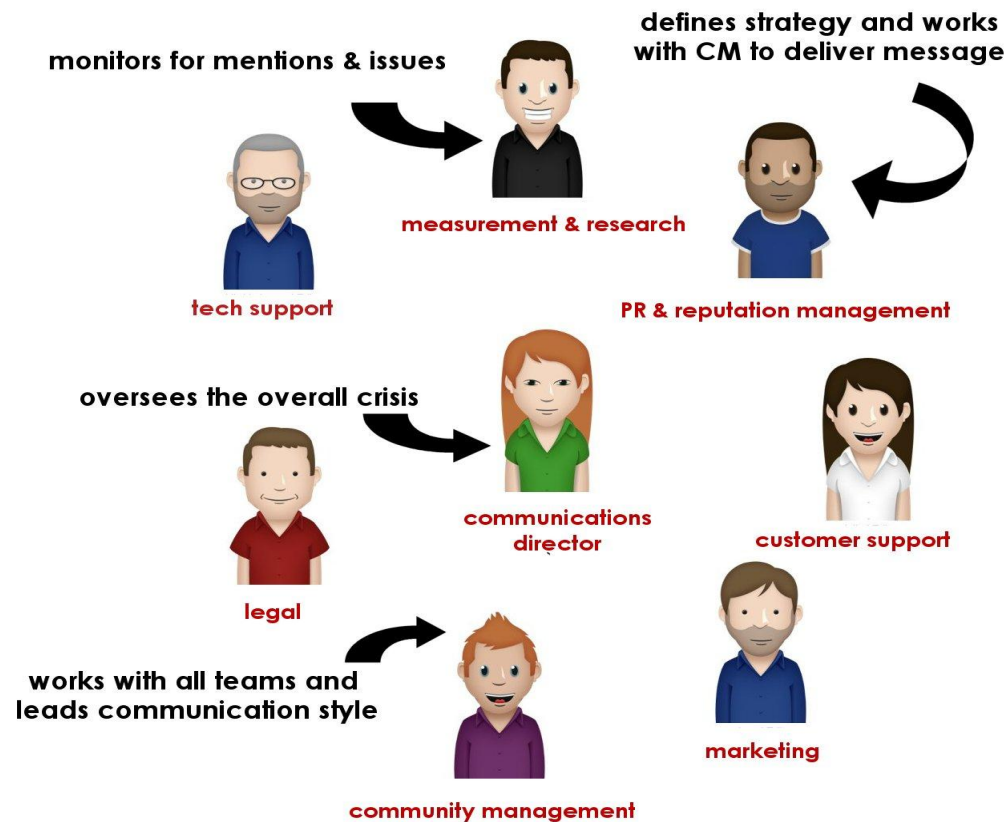
Every brand should define what its crises might look like, and prepare to manage them if the worst should happen. Much of the work in managing a crisis is actually done before the issue hits. Have a detailed crisis plan in place, including who you can phone at 3am if a crisis breaks; have lists of mobile numbers and office keyholders; access to lists of press contacts; emergency staffing plans (even call centre arrangements set up if appropriate); and pre-prepared statements where possible. Bring all your agencies in on this from the start – PR, social media, monitoring, search marketing, advertising and sales. You don't want to be briefing them on handling a crisis when the news has broken. This will save valuable time.

Every brand should define what its crises might look like, and prepare to manage them if the worst should happen



Preparing a crisis team

Your crisis team should include anyone that you're likely to need during the crisis. Usually, it will look like this:



Most big brands will have a crisis management programme or policy in place. But social media must be an intrinsic part of this plan, not a 'bolt-on' afterthought. Ensure that social media is integrated with all your existing plans, and that the crisis team includes social media crisis handlers (such as trained community managers and social media communicators).

Your crisis team should include all people you are likely to need. Make sure it includes social media communicators

Avatars courtesy of philliecasablanca

Managing (and monitoring) your reputation.

This is an incredibly important point. If you do nothing to manage your reputation during the good times, then you'll have no goodwill to carry you through the bad times. If you have spent time building a positive reputation, then people who trust you are more likely to support you. Reputation management is not something that can be done hurriedly while you're over a barrel. Make your reputation management a priority, and make sure you have some goodwill in the bank.

If you had a bad reputation before the crisis, you'll certainly have one afterwards

Don't assume you can control social media.

Some of the biggest brands in the world have assumed they can control social media by imposing censorship on it. It's simply not possible – in the way that trying to stop people talking in the pub isn't possible. In legal terms, you may be able to persuade YouTube or Facebook to remove content that breaches copyright laws, for example, but the reality is that all this will do is antagonise your followers, and make you look heavy-handed. It certainly won't win you any of that goodwill to carry you through the crisis. And even if you do, as [Greenpeace demonstrated](#), consumers will just be even more determined to carry on the conversation over another channel.

The truth is that in these days of Twitter, mobile phone video uploads and consumers tapping into their online networks, **word of mouth spreads like wildfire**. [The US Airways Hudson river landing](#) is a great example of a real crisis that unfolded over social media, with the first pictures of the rescue operation being taken on a mobile phone and uploaded to Twitpic.

But you can control what your employees post on social media. Have a clear social media policy in place, which includes the repercussions of breaking the policy if they bring the company into disrepute. (Of course, if your employees are loyal to you, this will be a lot easier to manage. Disgruntled employees won't be nearly so co-operative).

Be in the conversation

If the crisis does hit, being prepared will be the difference between handling it successfully and losing control.

We often hear brands say: “but getting involved on social media is fraught with difficulties. Something will go wrong, and we can’t control our corporate message in an open community.” But your customers are talking about you regardless of whether or not you’re proactively using social media to talk to them. And if truth be told, they were always talking about you in social spaces – it’s just that those social spaces used to be the pub, or the playground, or in their homes. Now, social media is added into that mix: and you can choose to listen and respond; or ignore them.

But if you’re not already in the conversation when an issue hits, you don’t have a voice in social media with which to talk to your consumers. Be prepared: have a Twitter feed, a Facebook page, be involved on blogs and forums, and ideally, have your own online community so you can talk directly to those consumers with whom you have the strongest relationships – those that engage with you regularly and whose loyalty can help you through a crisis.

**Prepare yourself by
creating conversations with
your customers across the
channels before a crisis hits**



Communicating through a crisis

Understand what can be solved by clear communication, and what can't. If a brand is abusing human rights in China, no amount of positive PR will help. **Be prepared to take some serious business decisions.** For this reason, involve your most senior people early on – it'll get those decisions made more quickly. Primark avoided a serious issue when it was alerted (by the BBC) to one of its manufacturers in India using child labour. It acted quickly to sack the contractor, and enforce its ethical policies across the world.

Once you've agreed any action that needs to be taken, agree your public response, and – importantly – the tone of voice you'll use within your communities. Make sure it's consistent across all your audiences and channels. What you say on Twitter will probably reach the same people as your press statement, or your customer service announcement. Your emailed statements will be posted by interested parties onto Facebook. These channels can't be split into silos any more.

Remember: the devil's in the detail. During a crisis, every move you make will be scrutinised.

Involve all your communications channels, including – importantly – search. A widely covered issue will show up on a Google search for a disproportionately long time after the event – make sure you involve your search agency in your communications plan, so that you can take positive action to neutralise negative coverage on search engines.

**This is not a time to hand your
Twitter account to an intern**

The temptation, in a crisis, is to hand over your social media accounts to a corporate communicator. It may surprise you that we don't necessarily think this is the best course of action (unless of course they're already running your accounts). Of course, your message through the crisis should be consistent, and your PR team will have a key role to play in safeguarding your reputation and answering queries from the media and public. **But your voice on your social channels should stay true and authentic throughout the crisis,** and your community managers should already be engrained enough into your business to be authorised to make quick decisions and take action where necessary to restore

trust.

There are very practical considerations, too. Have a list of who you can call on in an emergency, in whatever time zone you need them. Agree in advance what constitutes a serious issue and needs a clearly defined escalation path (including to the police or relevant authority in the case of criminal activity or abuse). Make sure you know the password to your blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts – it sounds obvious, but the best laid plans fall apart if the only person who has access to your social media accounts is on holiday with no mobile phone reception.

Throughout the crisis, monitor how it is playing out over social media, and keep in close touch with your monitoring team. If something changes, be prepared to respond quickly, and make sure all the parties involved in the crisis team are informed and up to date.

Make sure your tone of voice is appropriate to the issue you're addressing. Nestlé got into hot water for being **pretty punchy** with the people on its Facebook page during the Palm Oil / Greenpeace issue. Antagonising the people that can make your life harder isn't a great idea.

If you are completely prepared, you can hit the ground running and limit the damage

Rehearse

Finally, rehearse a crisis to see how well your processes and plan stand up under pressure. This could be a full-scale simulation exercise or a regular review of procedures: but we recommend as full a rehearsal as is practical. You don't want to find the hole in the plan when a real crisis hits.

Learn and improve

However well you handled it, it's likely that there will still be areas for improvement. After your simulated or real social media crisis, take the time to analyse what went well or where the gaps are, and implement the necessary changes.

Social media action plan

Preparing for a crisis

1. Monitor what's being said about you in all channels, and listen for anything that might spark a crisis
2. Do the groundwork before the crisis breaks. Have some goodwill 'banked'
3. Define what a crisis looks like, and plan for every eventuality
4. Have a social media policy in place for all employees and agencies
5. Build your crisis team to include senior decision makers through the business
6. Involve your agencies in the crisis plan
7. Include search as an important part of the communications mix
8. Be clear about what can and what can't be solved by PR
9. Involve your employees in the process – you don't want them breaking the crisis for you.
10. Be in the social media space already (and be able to access your accounts)
11. Rehearse: hold as full a simulation as you can

Managing the crisis

1. Be prepared to take business action if necessary. Communications can't solve a business issue.
2. Remember: you can't control social media. No matter what your lawyers tell you. But you can control how you respond in social media
3. Agree your response and communicate it consistently
4. Authorise your community managers to act on your behalf
5. Don't create your own firestorm. Don't address an issue in a community where no-one knew there was an issue to start with
6. Keep crisis team contact numbers accessible and updated at all times
7. Involve all your third party vendors (legal team, community management team, moderators, all your marketing and media agencies)
8. Have a pre-defined escalation path for serious incidents (and use it)
9. Keep in close contact with your monitoring team
10. Keep the tone of voice appropriate to the issue; and keep it true to your company values

Learning from your experience

1. Hold a post-mortem of how the crisis was handled
2. Share the results internally
3. Be honest about what you could do better next time, and adapt your crisis plans accordingly.



carrot

If you'd like to contribute to the social media crisis discussion, join us on our blog: <http://www.bunkerbriefing.com>, where we'll address issues around crisis planning, crisis avoidance and crisis management.



eModeration

Founded in 2002, eModeration Limited is an international, specialist user-generated content moderation company. It provides multilingual community management and content moderation to clients in the entertainment and digital publishing industry and major corporate clients hosting online communities and consumer-driven ad campaigns.

eModeration's team of moderators and staff are the key to eModeration's success and excellent client list. eModeration draws on the expertise of carefully recruited and trained moderators located mainly in the US and Europe with specialist editorial and community moderation skills, which are matched uniquely to the client. The company can moderate 24/7 and provides cover for over 50 languages. All its moderators are managed online from eModeration's headquarters in London, United Kingdom.

eModeration won the 'Best Service Provider at the 2010 Reputation Online Effectiveness Awards.

<http://www.emoderation.com>
tamara.littleton@emoderation.com
T: +44 (0) 20 3178 5050

Carrot Communications

Carrot is a social communications and PR agency working with brands to engage audiences through digital media channels. We work with fast-growth companies, often (but not exclusively) with a digital offering.

We believe that great business relationships start with interesting conversations.

We develop social content – including news, opinions, white papers, research, case studies and product or service information – that gets people talking about you, supports your business objectives, and helps position you at the top of your game. We then communicate that content to your customers, prospects and stakeholders, both directly (for example, through newsletters, web copy, company blogs, Twitter, social media and industry events) and indirectly (through online and offline media, third-party blogs, industry influencers and analysts).

<http://www.carrotcomms.co.uk>
kate.hartley@carrotcomms.co.uk
+44 (0)020 3178 5048