

Managing social media in a crisis

 By [Ashleigh Burton](#)

16 Aug 2021

Social media has undoubtedly redefined our communication landscape - it has changed the way information is transmitted and consumed.



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Social media is a critical lever of crisis communication management in the digital age. The world's online population is more educated and more vocal than its offline counterpart. As such, it is highly likely that news of a corporate crisis will first break online.

What has Covid-19 taught us?

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn made it possible for companies to communicate key information about developments regarding the Covid-19 virus to masses of people all over the world across time zones within seconds.

- Number of minutes spent by readers on news sites has increased by 46% in the same period last year
- When it comes to social, people expect an answer within an hour, hence the need for full-time attention to social media responses.
- It's important to ensure that the people managing your social media accounts are professionally trained or coached on the correct and professional use of social media.

Responding to an external crisis

This is undeniably a moment for businesses to show that their values and mission statements mean something tangible, rather than simply adding to trending hashtags or using grand words to garnish a brand with superficial meaning.



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Here are a few ways to include empathy into your response to an external crisis:

- Build communities, not customers. To power growth and drive advocacy, brands need to manage diverse communities that weigh in at every level. This means building products, serving experiences, and telling stories that are co-created with a brand's community.
- Help make your audience's lives easier where you can.
- Look after your staff.
- Do not exploit the crisis. We've seen inauthentic brand announcements, partnerships and campaigns happen for Pride Month and #BlackLivesMatter. Staying true to your brand mission will ensure you avoid this.

Lessons we can take from previous social media crises

As a brand, it is important to act fast and respond appropriately. There is always something to learn when you see another company experience an online reputation management crisis.

- Understand and admit the problem. This is the essential part - understand what the real problem is before offering an apology.
- Think of the emotions that need to be addressed and consider your words carefully. When you are ready to apologize, do it right. Speak from your heart and do not make a statement that sounds like a press release.
- Communicate with your audience. Explain what happened and how you plan to fix the problem. Social media audiences love to offer advice. Some of it might be useful.
- Social media cannot work in isolation. Communication internally is key.



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Building your social media crisis team

- The strategists: responsible for taking leadership of the social media crisis plan. They are often much closer to your brand goals and can help by ensuring the team stays on target.
- The analysts: during a crisis, the analysts should be constantly monitoring social media and other online channels for crisis-related keywords, company mentions, and comments that need to be responded to. They should also be responsible for documenting everything!
- The content specialists: as the creative thinkers and writers of the team, this group is responsible for owning the messaging that's published across all channels.

Thought-starters for your content

- Create content that can be shared and endorsed by friends and connections.
- Be proactive about building a reputation “bank” that can be drawn down upon during difficult times.
- Build real engagement with your communities and advocates so that there are multiple, credible voices speaking across channels when issues do arise.
- Recognize that the content you create around sensitive issues (optimized for search) can help to counterbalance negative content from detractors.

What is reputation management?

Social media reputation management is the process of tracking, monitoring and ultimately eliminating negative social media material about your brand to improve your name or standing. If done properly, social media reputation management builds your credibility to customers, which strengthens their trust in your brand. The fact is that whether organizations choose to participate or not, consumers will talk about them online, particularly when the news is bad. A more pragmatic approach is to be a part of the conversation and stay in control of messaging and reputation.



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There is such a wealth of social media monitoring tools available today that it's almost bordering on neglect not to use one. You can use social media monitoring tools:

- To manage your reputation
- To manage owned social media channels
- To engage in relevant conversations (marketing)
- To capture/respond to queries/complaints (customer service/product feedback)
- To monitor industry trends, competitor analysis etc. (e.g. topics of conversation, sentiment etc.)

In this age of connectivity and the always-on digital world, reputation has never been more vulnerable. In a matter of 15 minutes or fewer, a company can go from riding high to an all-time low. Today, speed, agility, and a solid plan in response to an incident or crisis are everything.

ABOUT ASHLEIGH BURTON

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