Preparing for a Communication Crisis

YOUR PLAN

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Introduction

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What are the chances your company is going to have to deal with a marketing or social media crisis?

"69% leaders have experienced at least one corporate crisis from 2014-2019 — with the average number of crises experienced being three." (PWC)

Hopefully, in your case, slim to none. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't plan for it.

"52 percent of marketers and PR pros say preparing the right response is one of their biggest issues in crisis." (Crisp and PR News) That doesn't mean responses need to be prepared on the fly. They can be written, approved, and reviewed on an annual basis to make sure they reflect the changes in the company, industry, and society.

In this booklet, I'll share a matrix to help you determine if the issue is a problem or a crisis. Then, walk you through the precrisis planning steps.

56% of surveyed senior-level executives working in ethics, compliance, risk management, and other fields related to crisis management suggested they were only "somewhat confident" in their crisis management plans.
(Morrison & Foerster and Ethisphere)

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Before the Crisis

I recommend downloading this list to help you to begin developing the process within your team.

That team includes people from the tech team, legal, human resources, c-suite, sales, marketing, and communications.

1. Create a social media policy
2. Secure your accounts
3. Use social listening tools to identify potential issues
4. Define "what is a crisis" for your brand
5. Craft a crisis communication plan
6. Pause all scheduled posts
7. Engage, but don't argue
8. Communicate internally
9. Learn from experience

Social Media Policy

This goes without saying, if your company has more than one person, you need a social media policy. This helps inform everyone who works for your company what may and may not be said about the company, how the brand may be used, brand tone of voice, use of logo, and more.

Within the policy are often several elements, including:

- Copyright
- Privacy policy both internally and externally
- Brand voice guidelines
- Logo use
- Use of brand in social media both for the company and by employees
- Links to escalation emails, names, and contact information

More on this in the Social Media Policy section of the booklet.

Secure Your Accounts

In some cases, employees leave or worse do something stupid or illegal (i.e., share confidential information) on the brand's social media accounts or via email.

In those cases, you want to make sure the accounts are secured and taken offline as quickly as possible if the error puts the company in jeopardy.

Another example would be if the person with access were to quit. How would you access their accounts? Would you even know which accounts the person had access to?

I always recommend to clients to have more than one administrator for any email service provider and social media accounts specifically for this purpose. I also recommend a generic email be used as a super admin (for example info@ or media@ or a Gmail account).

All admin-level access is then documented in the company social media plan and crisis communication plan so you know who has access and what their level is, e.g., admin, contributor, subscriber, editor, etc.

Listening Tools

There are many ways in which brands can monitor what's being said about them online. The easiest thing you can do is create a Google, Bing, or Talkwalker alert, and use social media resources, like Hootsuite, Socialbakers, Sprout Social, or <u>one of these</u>.

Each of these tools will notify you when your brand, high-profile people within the organization, or your products / services are mentioned online.

Why do you need this?
In today's digital media age, anyone can post anything about you, your brand, your company, its product or services whenever they want – whether it's true or false. If you're not listening, a problem could arise that you're not even aware of. This helps you to get in front of a situation before it becomes a crisis.

What is a crisis?

Before you can assess the situation, you must first define what's happening. Is it a crisis? Or, is it a problem? They are very different. Here's how.

A problem is a minor customer service issue that can be resolved using standard service tactics. Your company may solve this with a coupon or discount that's sent to a customer who writes an unhappy comment or post.

A crisis affects larger audiences and requires a special response from your business to prevent escalation.

Keep in mind, if it's a crisis, act fast because:
- More than ¼ of crises spread internationally within just 1 hour.
- On average, it takes companies 21 hours to defend themselves in any kind of meaningful way.

Every company will have a different list of what it considers a crisis. Here are some things you might see on social media channels:
- Unauthorized posts
- Account getting hacked
- Data security breaches

Here are some additional social media examples and remedies to consider.

Conducting your business on Facebook?
- If automating the posting process, hackers can corrupt the automation and send out messages that look like yours.
- Remedy: Monitor the messenger applications often to avoid these intrusions

Weak Passwords, especially for corporate accounts:
- Remedy: Use a combination of numbers, letters, upper and lower cases and change it every 90 days

User Authorization
- Be cautious about how you login to accounts, e.g., use my Google account, etc.
- Also, remove outdated admins
- Remedy: Quarterly, check admin authorization for any changes and avoid logging in with another account, e.g., Facebook, Google, etc.

"Unexpected crises can destroy businesses and reputations. Boards, chief executives and their managers may believe they have a firm grip on the risks they face. They should think again."
- Financial Times

Risk Assessment

Consider and plan for risks before they happen. A thorough examination and documentation of all risks your institution faces and the measures it needs to put in place to help prevent/mitigate them are needed.

Here's how to begin:
- Outline a list of threats / vulnerabilities
- Identify the systems you have in place to address those vulnerabilities,
- Define a measurement of the likelihood that the risk occur
- Display the potential severity of the threat's impact

Also, create a risk matrix that helps you define a problem versus a crisis and how it should be addressed and the actions needed.

Here's an example.

		Severity (What if the risk occurs?)		
Key 1 = lowest 10 = highest	**Negligible** (1-3) Not likely to have a major effect	**Marginal** (4-7) Will most likely be cited as a deficiency, but only requires minimum adjustments	**Critical** (8-10) May lead to several consequences. Immediate action needed.
Likelihood	**Low** (1-3) Risk doesn't present an issue.	Low	Medium ★	Medium
	Medium (4-7) Risk may or may not present an issue, but will at some point.	Low	Medium	High
	High (8-10) Risk will or has already occurred)	Medium	High	High

Action to take for each Risk Ranking	
Low	Make note of the item and move on.
Medium	Spend time brainstorming how the risk can be mitigated (reduced). Make changes as needed.
High	Take immediate action (document revisions to process and any corrective actions taken).

Example

An employee leaks customer information in a Facebook post. It could have been accidental or intentional. It could be from their personal account, or from the brand's account.

Those variables change the scope of the risk, the exploited vulnerability, and the measures required for it to be avoided. When drafting your risk assessment, try to imagine each of these potential variations.

List them all in your risk assessment matrix, along with the controls, the likelihood, and the potential impact on your institution.

Common Social Media Risks

We're all human. And sometimes we make mistakes. Other times, we do things on purpose. Here is a list of common social media risks that you may have to plan for at your company.

What else might you add?

- A leak of company or customer information
- Public relations issues
- Consumer complaints
- Insensitive content
- Accidental posts
- Employee misbehavior
- Negative press
- Poor company performance
- Security compromises
- Platform outages
- Lawsuits
- Copyright infringements
- Platform Terms of Service violation
- Violation of local, state, or federal law

Common Communication Risks and Actions

To help you complete the risk assessment, below are list of common actions companies take in response to a problem or crisis, such as:

- Draft a content creation workflow that involves compliance
- Publish a playbook for all marketing and creative roles that state brand voice and guidelines
- Have all employees read and acknowledge a social media employee policy
- Documented and approved content strategy
- Annual employee training on the most popular social media networks. This should include your organization's policy and
- the potential security threats on each network.
- Restricting web access on work devices
- Device monitoring for work-owned devices
- Digital security training
- Creating a social listening strategy that encompasses any variation of brand mentions
- Drafting a crisis response grid with the compliance team
- Employee prescreening that includes an examination of past social media behavior
- Publishing an employee code of conduct
- Installing anti-virus software on all company-owned machines. An extension of this can be restricting what employees can install on their work machines.
- Content archiving
- Vendor risk assessment

Remedies You Might Use

As things unfold, there are more than a dozen ways to deal with them. That's why the plan is so important. If you have the remedy listed next to the risk, it reduces the time needed to address it. Here are some potential remedies for the common risks.

1. Stay silent
2. Social media manager responds
3. Blocking the offender
4. Removing the offending content
5. Official statement is made
6. Compliance is notified and responds
7. Executive team is notified and responds
8. Blog post or a video is created addressing the issue
9. Creation of a dedicated phone number and/or email address for those impacted
10. A PR firm is consulted
11. Send an email blast to all customers notifying them of the incident
12. Issue a public apology
13. Create a crisis FAQ
14. Create a dedicated customer complaint page, forum, or phone number
15. Take the conversation offline
16. Pause all scheduled content

To make your plan work, you might create a Crisis Response Grid to help people see when and what action / remedy is needed.

Here's a sample.

	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Social Media Team Responds	X	X	X			
Manager Informed		X	X	X		
Manager write response				X		
Post is made		X				
9am - 9pm monitoring			X			
Executive Team notified				X		
Blog is made				X	X	X
Paid post is made			X	X	X	X
24 hour monitoring				X	X	X
Dedicated phone #				X	X	X
PR firm is consulted					X	X
Press Release is made					X	X
Email Blast to Customers					X	
Compliance alerted					X	X
Executive response					X	
Executive + complaince reposne						X

Leaders should be able to pull combinations of preset response "modules" off the shelf.
— Michael Watkins
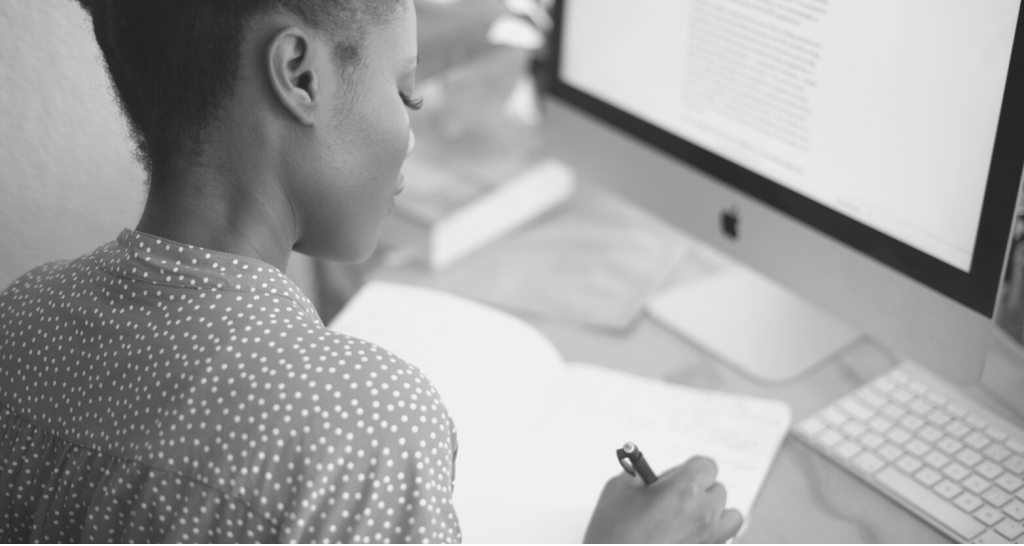
Craft a Crisis Communication Plan

There are four stages to crisis communication, including:

- Identification: crisis (scenarios that would stop your business functioning) or problem (less serious challenges)
- Evaluation:

    - What is being said? What is the seriousness of the issue?
    - Who is saying it? What is the influence or authority of the person who posts it?
    - How often is it being said? Is the issue becoming increasingly visible or fading away?
    - When is it being said? Is the issue having an impact at a significant time (e.g., new site/product launches)?
    - Where is it being said? Is the issue on a public platform (e.g., Twitter) or a private group or closed vertical social network?

- Escalation
- Response

The risk assessment leads you directly into the crisis communication plan. Crisis team members are identified and contact information is shown. Communication is prepared and posted on a cloud-based intranet for easy access. Action plans are put into motion.

Keep in mind, the person/people dealing with the public should avoid arguing. Identify those people and help them to understand their role clearly. Try mock role plays to see how someone would respond.

Here are some other tips:

- Post the initial response on social media if warranted
- Let key staff work on in-depth messaging, e.g., press release, official statement, or letter/video from your CEO
- Engage on social media, but keep it short
- Avoid getting pulled into a conversation on social media or in the media about what happened/went wrong
- Move conversations to private messaging, a phone number, email, or other methods outside of social media or online forums
- Make sure everyone in the organization knows exactly what they should (or should not) say about the crisis on social media.

When Things Go Wrong

Share these tips with your crisis management team to help them during a crisis.

- React quickly: A response time of 12 hours is considered the norm when it comes to questions and concerns on social media.
- Stop automated posts and take control of your account(s)
- Assess and apologize if necessary
- Don't panic
- Determine who can speak for your brand
- Double-check your brand voice
- Set up social listening (Google alerts, TalkWalker, Hootsuite Streams, etc.)

Social Media Policy

What is a social media policy?
- A living document
- Provides guidelines for your organization's social media use
- Covers your brand's official channels
- Outlines how employees use social media, both personally and professionally

Why is it important?
- Maintains your brand identity across channels
- Treats legal and regulatory sensitivities with awareness
- Prevents a security breach
- Avoids a full-blown PR crisis
- Acts fast if a crisis or breach does happen
- Allows you to be upfront with your employees about their own social media responsibilities
- Encourages your employees to own and amplify your brand's message

What should be in it?

It should include the brand's purpose on social media, such as:

1. Document the brand's purpose for being on each social platform.
2. Whether it's recruitment, content amplification, customer advocacy, etc.,
3. The guidelines should explain why the company is on each channel and how employees can mirror that purpose.

Guidelines

Below are some social media policy guidelines you can customize to address your company's needs.

- Create a central folder employees can access for company logos, how-to's, shared FAQs, branded profile headers for social sites, and more.
- Consider creating a list of preferred hashtags and purpose, especially with company hashtags such as Dell's #IWorkForDell or IBM's #ProudIBMer.
- Keep that information in one place to increase the likelihood employees will stay on brand.
- Team roles:

  - Who owns which social accounts?
  - Who covers which responsibilities on a daily, weekly or as-needed basis?
  - Include names and email addresses so employees from other teams know who to contact.

- Security Protocols

  - How often do your account passwords get changed?
  - Who maintains them, and who has access to them?
  - Is your organizational software updated regularly?
  - What about devices?
  - Who should employees talk to if they want to escalate a concern?

- Action Plan for a Security or PR Crisis
    - Include an up-to-date emergency contact list with specific roles, e.g., the social media team, legal & PR experts—all the way up to the C-suite.
    - Prepare guidelines for identifying the scope of the crisis, an internal communication plan, and an approval process for responses will also help you handle it quickly.

- Legal Compliance
    - Copyright isn't a no-brainer, so it's best to explain how to comply with copyright law on social media, especially when using third-party content.
    - Privacy is key. Do all your employees know how to handle customer information, for instance?
    - Confidentiality refers to respecting your organization's internal information. Whether you have your people sign non-disclosure agreements or not, they should be aware of the ramifications of disclosing information on social media that the organization considers private.

- Employees' Personal Accounts
    - Posting hate speech, threats of violence, harassment, or racial epithets on social media may violate the law, or your organization's code of ethics, or both. Regardless, employees should know that they will be held responsible for what they say.
    - Even when the posts in question aren't outright illegal
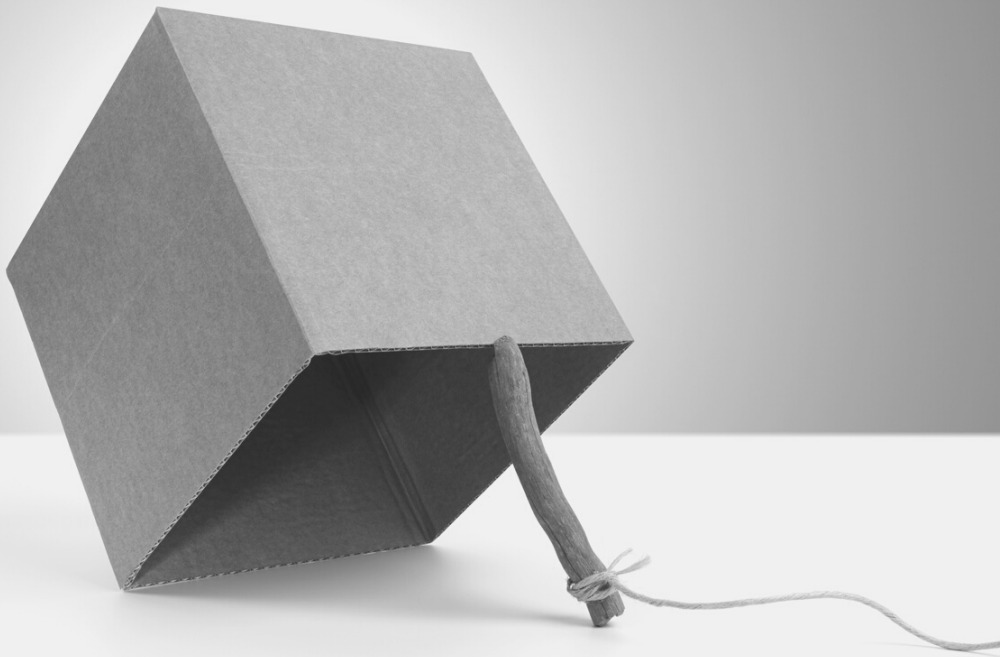
Policy Pitfalls

There are a number of common, social media policy pitfalls you can avoid, including:

- Legal concerns: Make it incredibly clear at the start of all projects what is and is not approved for social sharing.
- While many people differ on the use of "views-are-my-own" disclaimers, large enterprises should discuss whether they want employees to have such a clause on their accounts.
- Unsanctioned brand account usage: When your company spans a wide swath of your country or the globe, employees may take it upon themselves to create localized accounts. Address this by listing all official corporate accounts in your social guidelines and ask team members to use only those for brand-related matters.
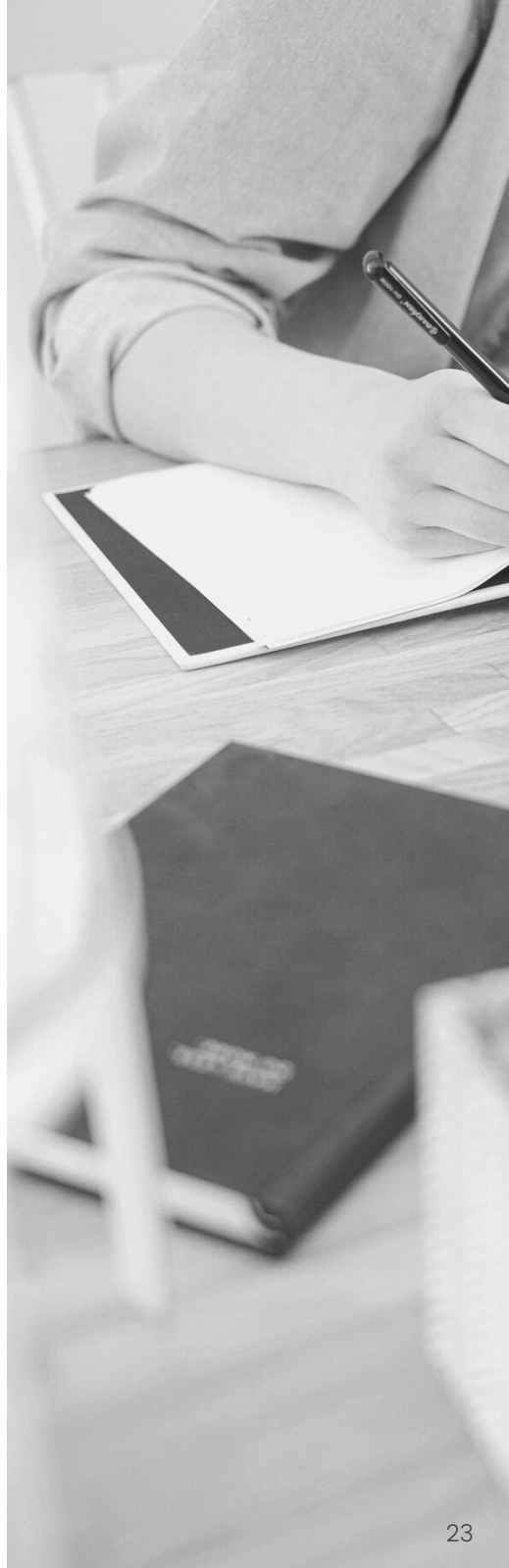
- Consider having a social media request form that allows employees to suggest new accounts or content. This way, their enthusiasm can be better harnessed with a conversation versus an email request to please delete the rogue account.
- Departed employees: As employees move on to different career opportunities, they may forget to update their profiles to note that they are no longer with your company. This could cause confusion when they start posting content about their new companies or when customers search LinkedIn for current staff.
- While you cannot force individuals to change their social account information, at least make the request a part of the exit or off-boarding process.

How to Educate Staff

Now that you have completed a risk assessment, outlined a crisis communication plan, written and shared a social media policy, don't keep it all to yourself. Share the information with your team, all employees, vendors, and contractors who may be assisting with the brand's communication strategy.

How can you do that? Here are some ideas.

- Host lunch-n-learns
- Post social media office hours
- Send social media "amplification" emails
- Create a social media channel within the company
- Send updates to employees & post on the intranet
- Develop training videos

RESOURCES

https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/forensics/global-crisis-survey/pdf/pwc-global-crisis-survey-2019.pdf

https://www.agilitypr.com/pr-news/public-relations/crisis-plan-crisis-nearly-one-in-four-companies-dont-have-an-up-to-date-plan/

https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-crisis-management/

https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-crisis-plan/

https://blog.hubspot.com/service/social-media-crisis-management

http://www.rignite.com/blog/social-media-workflow-crisis-management-response-charts/

http://sbdcrn.blogspot.com/2017/06/social-media-response-flow-chart-for.html

https://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-business/3-ways-to-tell-a-social-media-problem-from-a-crisis/

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x47EcD3d0pA

https://melissaagnes.com/flipping-switch-going-crisis-communications-mode/

https://blog.hubspot.com/service/crisis-communication-plan

http://katieharrington.ie/crisis-communications-holding-statements/

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https://www.kasasa.com/articles/marketing/social-media-risk-assessment

https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-compliance/

https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-security-for-business/

https://cooltechzone.com/social-media-safety

https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business

https://sproutsocial.com/insights/gdpr-and-social-media/

https://www.nlrb.gov/about-nlrb/rights-we-protect/the-law/employees/social-media-0

https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2020/01/write-social-media-guidelines/

https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-policy-for-employees/

https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-security-for-business/

Who is Penheel Marketing?

Penheel Marketing helps CPAs and small business owners to build muscle – marketing muscle.

Opened in 2011, Penheel Marketing is part of your team, working as a virtual marketing officer.

https://Penheel.com

Blogging

We research and write blog content quickly. Our posts include SEO keywords and social media post ideas.

What's on your blogging schedule? ▸

Social Media

Publish content to your social accounts, then nurture leads based on the social engagement.

Let's get social! ▸

Search Engine Optimization

We help you to improve your search ranking by finding and tracking your most effective keywords and more.

How do you rank? ▸

Speaker and Trainer

From small to large groups, keynotes, lectures, one-on-one training, and hands-on workshops.

What topic would you like? ▸

Marketing Analytics

Website analytics, online advertising analytics, and more. See which sources are generating the most leads.

What story is your data telling you? ▸

Website Design

From WordPress to Squarespace, we can help you to make your website pop.

Does your site need a face lift? ▸