

Social Media and Disaster Communications Checklist

When disaster strikes, your employees and customers are looking to you for real-time answers. Social media is a great way to communicate your message quickly. But when it comes to using social media to communicate important information, what does a good strategy look like?

The following checklist is a good first step toward helping your organization develop an effective social media and disaster communication strategy.

✓ BEFORE AN EMERGENCY: BUILD YOUR VOICE. EARN TRUST.

- Designate a “social media manager” to manage your account. Make sure your social media manager knows how to communicate properly and professionally. Be certain they have the right judgment to make quick decisions. Your online voice should reflect your organization’s views.

Establish a voice TODAY. No matter the business, everyone can benefit from using social media. Keep your account active and engaging year-round by sharing:

- Company updates, awards and other news
- Industry news and blogs
- Tips and resources related to your industry

Plan ahead. Create a content repository to store anticipated FAQs and ready-to-post resources and links, including information on:

- Local news websites
- Important websites you will need to reference during an emergency (FEMA, Red Cross, weather service organizations, etc.)
- Links to local (non-governmental) entities that offer assistance during a disaster

- Build your network. Follow other local businesses and organizations, but don’t follow everyone that follows you. Only monitor those accounts that are directly valuable to your organization.

Spread the word. Let employees and customers know you’ve gone social.

- Considering hosting a “lunch and learn” to educate employees on your social media communication strategy
- Assist and encourage non-social users to set up accounts and learn the ropes
- Hold a contest to encourage employees to participate

- Work with your communications/PR team to coordinate your social media policy and share this policy with your employees.

- Use an online monitoring tool to help schedule posts, filter messages and keep communication efficient.

- Create an “emergency employee-only” hashtag, i.e., #<companyname>employees. Use this hashtag to relay important information to employees, such as office closures, delays, alternate locations or other updates. Make sure employees are aware of this special hashtag BEFORE an emergency.

- Be sure your social media manager has a backup. Designate one or more team members (depending on your organization’s size) who are well-versed in your social media plan and can assist in the event of a large scale emergency.

- Keep it up. Don’t neglect your account for days or weeks on end. Share tips and resources mentioned above to keep followers engaged.

Social Media and Disaster Communications Checklist (cont.)

✓ DURING AN EMERGENCY: RESPOND EFFECTIVELY

Assess the situation. Understand the emergency and gather all materials you will need, including content repository, web pages and a copy of your communication plan.

Speak up. Let your followers know you are aware of the situation as you assess your next steps. Post a message to your followers such as: “We are working to get you the best information. Stay tuned.”

Join the conversation. Use hashtags to connect your tweets with others talking about the event:

- Identify trending hashtags in the event of weather or regional emergencies
- Use your emergency employee-hashtag to send out employee updates

Monitor keywords, including your organization’s name and emergency-only employee hashtag. Use the search feature on Twitter or set up alert notifications via your online monitoring tool.

Provide accurate, clear and trusted information throughout the event:

- News and updates
- Employee-specific updates using your emergency-only employee hashtag
- Impact of the emergency to your organization, i.e., closures, delays

Refer to your content repository for FAQs and important links.

Listen to local news and radio for real-time updates. Share relevant updates with your followers.

Be timely. Respond to concerns and posts in a timely manner. During an emergency, your employees and customers will listen to anyone talking. Let followers know when you will provide more updates.

Respond to problems. Be calm—your followers are likely to be frantic, panicked and frustrated. When responding:

- Acknowledge the issue. Let them know they are heard and you are there
- Address the issue: Provide helpful resources
- Apologize when necessary and show empathy. Offer to discuss offline if necessary
- Identify and address any rumors or false information related to your organization
- Be cautious of word choice and tone. Stay neutral and keep communications helpful and professional

Contemplate “geotagging” your keyword and hashtag searches for popular hashtags such as #flood, #fire to help identify flood and fire discussions for your specific area.

See more about geotagging at the end of this checklist.

Consider converting links to shortened and trackable URL codes using a free service like www.bitly.com. This will help keep messages under 140 characters and will identify which information your followers find the most useful.

Unless authorized, do not give official statements or handle media inquiries via social media. **Make sure employees are fully aware of this policy.**

Social Media and Disaster Communications Checklist (cont.)

✓ AFTER AN EMERGENCY: FOLLOW UP AND MEASURE

- Continue to communicate. Share relevant information, including:
 - Updates on your organization’s status after the event
 - Closures/hours of service
 - Product availability
 - Alternate office locations
- Measure. Review the data to understand what your audience found useful to help guide social media operations moving forward:
 - If you converted your links to shortened www.bitly.com links, determine which resources your followers found most useful by analyzing click-rate statistics on each link.
 - Identify what information received the most retweets and mentions.
- Look into any concerns you were unable to address during the experience. Apologize for any delay and follow up as needed. It is better to respond late than never at all.
- Recap. Hold a debriefing session after the crisis with other team members to discuss lessons learned and how to improve your social media communication strategy.
- Include employees in the recap process. Send a survey, ask for suggestions.
- Repeat. Keep your social feeds active! Go back to posting regular updates, resources and tips.

Additional Resources

Whether you are a social media pro or just starting out, the world of social communications is constantly evolving. The following list of free resources will help you to plan and prepare as you develop your organization’s social media and disaster communication strategy.

HOW TO	LINK
Set up a Twitter account:	https://Twitter.com/signup
Geotag your Twitter searches:	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3coB42XVtM
Use Hashtags:	https://Twitter.com/hashtags
Create Buttons:	https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/twitter-buttons
Creating trackable bit.ly links:	https://bitly.com/
Stay in the know:	http://socialmediatoday.com/

A Word of Advice

We hope you find this checklist useful. As you develop your social media communications strategy, remember to stick with it. Building an online voice takes time.

Just remember—when disaster strikes, your employees and customers are looking to you for answers. Be there for them by developing your organization’s social media and disaster communication strategy today.