**Social media crisis management**

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

**1. Create a social media policy**

Some of the worst social media situations start with an employee posting something inappropriate. Fortunately, these are also some of the easiest crises to avoid.

The policy should provide clear guidelines for appropriate use, outline expectations for organisational accounts, and explain how employees can talk about your the business on their personal channels.

**2. Define what counts as a crisis**

People are going to say rude things about you online. That’s a fact, not a crisis.

But if enough people are saying the same negative things about you on social, all at the same time, that might be a crisis—or a potential crisis waiting to explode. What really identifies a social media crisis is a major negative change in the online conversation about your brand.

For negative comments to count as a crisis, there also needs to be potential long-term damage to your brand. Even if a large number of people are posting negatively, it may be best to respond through customer service channels.

**3. Craft a crisis communication plan**

A company-wide social media crisis communication plan allows you to respond quickly to any potential issue. Instead of debating how to handle things, or waiting for senior managers to weigh in, you can take action and prevent things from getting out of control.

Acting fast is important. More than a quarter of crises [spread internationally within just one hour](https://hootsuite.com/webinars/how-to-manage-social-media-in-pr-crisis). But it takes companies an average of 21 hours to defend themselves in any kind of meaningful way. That’s nearly a full day for the crisis to make the rounds on the web with no meaningful intervention from your team.

Your plan should describe the exact steps everyone will take on social media during a crisis—from top executives to the most junior employees. Include a list of who needs to be alerted at each stage of a potential social media crisis.

Your social media crisis communication plan should include:

* Guidelines for identifying the type and magnitude of a crisis.
* Roles and responsibilities for every department.
* A communication plan for internal updates.
* Up-to-date contact information for critical employees.
* Approval processes for messaging posted on social media.
* Any pre-approved external messages, images, or information.
* A link to your social media policy.

No matter how well you prepare, the nature of a crisis means you won’t be able to resolve everything with just one or two social media posts. But people expect to hear from you, and it’s important for you to acknowledge the problem right away. Even during holidays, you need to be able to respond quickly in case of an emergency.

A couple of humble and informative posts buy you the time to put the rest of your social media crisis communication plan into action. Simply acknowledge that there’s a problem and let people know that more information is coming soon.

**4. Stop all scheduled posts**

A pre-scheduled post that goes out in a social media crisis situation can make your brand look ignorant and insensitive. In a worst-case scenario, a scheduled tweet during a crisis could completely derail your crisis management plan. It’s critical for all communication to be planned, consistent, and appropriate in tone. A scheduled post will be none of those things.

Shut down all scheduled posts as soon as you activate your social media crisis communication plan.

**5. Engage—but don’t argue**

Once you’ve posted that initial response, it’s time to get key staff working on more in-depth messaging. That might mean a press release, an official statement, or a letter or video from your CEO

But since we’re talking about social media, simply issuing statements won’t cut it. You’re going to have to engage with people who may be saying very negative things about you online.

Keep it short. Avoid getting pulled into a long discussion of what went wrong. Instead, try to move the conversation to a more personal channel, like private messaging. You could also offer a phone number, email address, or other means of communicating outside of social media.

Some people will simply keep arguing with you until you stop responding. When it’s clear you’re not making progress, acknowledge the concerns and frustrations, but stop taking the bait. Getting pulled into a fight online will not improve the situation. During a social media crisis, people are watching, so you’ve simply got to take the high road.

**6. Communicate internally**

Communicating internally is a crucial part of your crisis management response. This keeps everyone on the same page and helps to prevent misinformation and the spread of rumors.

Make sure everyone in the organization knows exactly what they should (or should not) say about the crisis on social media.

**7. Learn from the experience**

Once you make it through your first social media crisis, take the time to debrief and examine what happened. Keep a detailed record of everything you did, and how well it worked.