

Tip  
Sheet

# TURN SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE INTO SMART CRISIS PREVENTION



# Recognize Before You Have to Apologize: Social Media for Crisis Management

Crisis management has completely changed in less than a decade. In 2003, a crisis happened when the press got wind of something that hurt your company. It lived in headlines, sound bites and the odd blog or two. It took hours to build and days to control.

Today, a crisis moves at the speed of social media. It lives in Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. And it lives in real-time.

However, social media gives marketing and PR opportunities you didn't have a decade ago: the ability to change the conversation, before you have to deal with a crisis. In 2013, the combination of the right approach and the right social listening and engagement tools can help you diffuse a potential crisis before it hits mainstream media.

You can even turn a crisis into an opportunity and end up with more fans

and loyal customers than before, along with a stronger, more positive brand reputation. How do you do this? The following tips will show you how to plan ahead, and leverage social media tools to stave off any negative chatter before it grows into a crisis.

## TIP 1

### Plan Ahead

Put this under glass and break in case of emergency.

First, identify who will handle specific tasks. Your community manager and social staff will probably do most of the frontline work. However, this plan should involve every department in your organization—because a crisis can affect any level. A series of negative tweets can come after bad customer service. A recall or technical malfunction can get bloggers talking. A controversial statement from an executive can show up on YouTube.

Your social media crisis plan should include:

- Policy detailing what constitutes a social media crisis
- Crisis handling procedure, including:
  - > The crisis communication team members—who is responsible for handling the crisis on the front lines, and who has decision-making authority

- > A decision flow chart with assigned responsibilities

- > The triage protocol, showing what requires escalation, and to whom

- > Documentation and analysis forms, and check list for post-crisis follow-up

- Your organization's social media policy
- Message templates (for brand voice and basic content points only – see Tip 5: Mind Your Message)
- Plans for your website and any “dark sites” or microsites that you may activate to quickly spread messaging or blog responses

Your plan should be readily accessible to each member of your crisis team, and they should be trained in how to follow it. Having this plan in place can save you valuable time once the negative sentiment starts to build. The more prepared you are, the more active you can be. If you're playing catch up or implementing damage control, it might be too late.

TIP  
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## Listen Carefully

Use social media monitoring to stay on top of what people say about you, your brand, your executives and your products. It's important to know that the warning signs of a potential crisis probably won't show up as a spike in the volume of conversation, but as a shift in sentiment.

Use sentiment and text analytics to generate a real-time word cloud so you can see how the terms that people use on social channels change from day to day.

Monday's word cloud could be business as usual. If Tuesday's word cloud suddenly starts showing some negative terms, investigate

immediately. Now is your opportunity to act before a dip in sentiment becomes a crisis.

**Track your competitors, their product names, as well as terms that relate to your industry as a whole.**

Also, be sure to monitor conversations that are not directly about your brand. Track your competitors, their product names, as well as terms that relate to your industry as a whole. If an issue threatens your entire industry, you can position your organization as a leader by acting first.



Word Cloud

# TIP 3

## Target the Influencers Who Will Change the Conversation

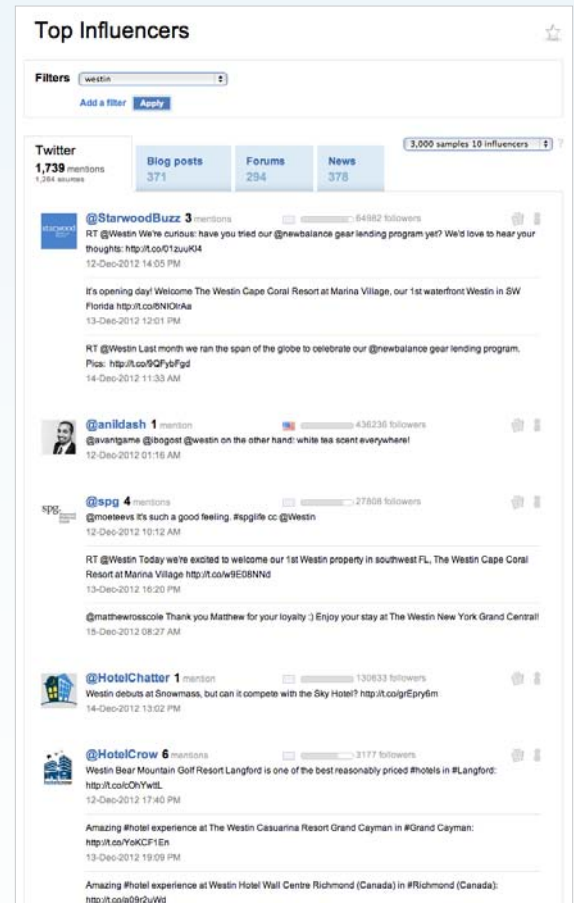
You found a potential problem; now it's time to deal with it and change the conversation. You don't need to reach out to a rolodex full of media contacts. Social media tools will show you exactly who is tweeting and sharing negative things about your company.

**Publically engage the people driving the traffic against you, as well as other, more sympathetic influencers.**

Take a deep dive to find the biggest online influencers and the most popular and retweeted articles.

From there, plan an appropriate response. (Learn more about how to do this in Tip 5: Mind Your Message.) Make sure to apologize for and solve any customer service problems before doing any other damage control. Publically engage the people driving the traffic against you, as well as other, more sympathetic influencers. Strive to develop strong relationships with your key social media influencers, fans and clients, before a crisis occurs, so they are primed to serve as your advocates when the time comes.

Most important, continue to rely on sentiment and text analytics to make sure you're changing the conversation and your efforts pay off.



Sysomos Heartbeat "Top Influencers" Tab

# TIP 4

## React Appropriately

Don't underreact and don't overreact.

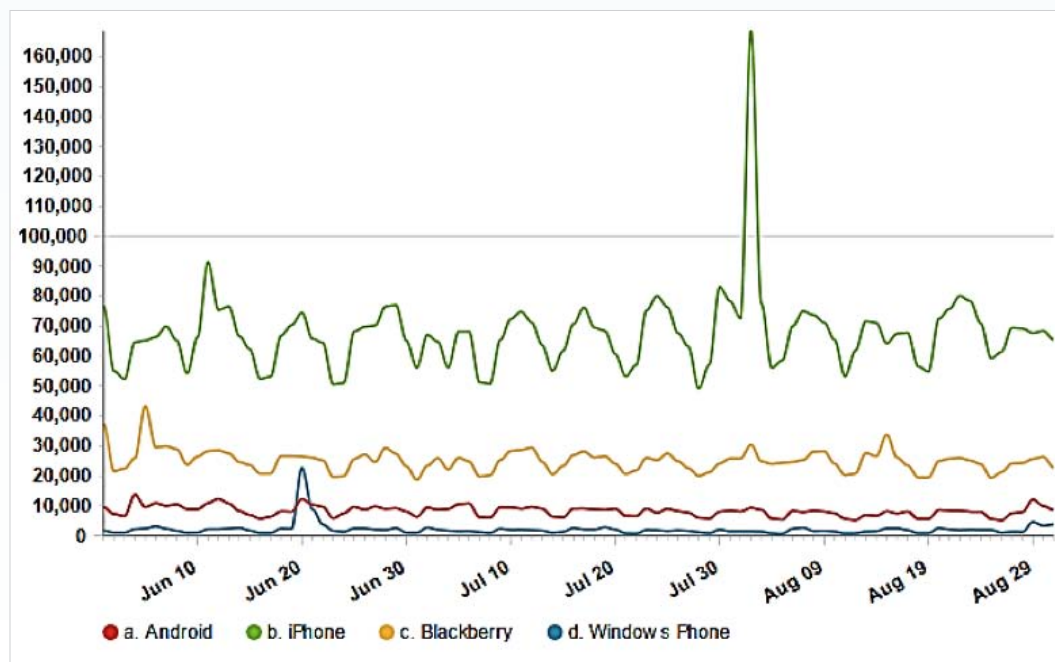
Overreacting can hurt you by driving up the volume of mentions and causing a spike, which brings more attention to your issue than would have occurred organically. If your organization isn't active on social channels prior to this incident, you run the risk of a volume spike.

Watch the volume of social messages as you respond. The goal is to bring your sentiment back to where it was before, without bringing up your total volume.

Keep your volume down, while improving your sentiment, by spending the appropriate

amount of time reaching out to each respective influencer. For example, if Mashable.com and the Huffington Post have both published articles about you, be mindful of the traffic each is generating. Don't spend equal effort reacting to both, if Mashable's article is getting retweeted 5 times more often.

Also, stay on the appropriate medium. If this negative chatter happens on Twitter, respond on Twitter—don't drive up your Facebook mentions by responding to something with no traction in that space.



Spike Analysis

# TIP 5

## Mind Your Message

When planning for a crisis, prepare some message templates to use for responses and posts. Having some pre-prepared statements or boilerplate information will save you a lot of time and can help you keep a consistent message and tone across channels and responders.

Also, keep your tone and messaging appropriate for what you're facing. If you've

been on the receiving end of some satirical comments, don't be afraid to respond with a bit of humor of your own. In more serious situations, keep your message simple, apologetic and genuine when you explain how you're fixing the issue.

If you do your job well, you might generate more positive visibility for your organization than any paid advertising could achieve.

### Case Study: Sir Patrick Stewart Vs. Time Warner Cable

The adage used to say that satisfied customers praise you to 2-3 people, while dissatisfied ones rant to 8-10 people. Twitter has since destroyed that ratio, and it's easy for one person to instantly and repeatedly share his or her dissatisfaction with thousands of others (even hundreds of thousands of others)

In the fall of 2012, Sir Patrick Stewart, the wildly popular star of the Star Trek and X-Men franchises who has more than 220,000 Twitter followers, took to the Twitterstream to complain about his new cable subscription.

Time Warner responded in a reasonable amount of time, but their reply seemed to be one step behind.

The next day, Time Warner publically reached out to Stewart again. Unfortunately for them, he was clearly still frustrated and in no mood for their cute reply.

Their mistake was choosing the wrong tone to address Stewart, while never actually apologizing or attempting to fix his issue. Which resulted in:


**Patrick Stewart** @SirPatStew

13 Sep 12

All I wanted to do was set up a new account with @TWCable\_NYC but 36hrs later I've lost the will to live.


**Time Warner Cable** @TWCableHelp

Follow

@SirPatStew How can we assist you? ^SS

13 Sep 12

Reply Retweet Favorite


**Patrick Stewart** @SirPatStew

13 Sep 12

@TWCableHelp If that question had been asked at any time in the last 36hrs it would have been of value. But now...


**Time Warner Cable** @TWCableHelp

Follow

@SirPatStew I apologize for the frustration. If you change your mind we are here. ^SS

13 Sep 12

Reply Retweet Favorite


**Time Warner Cable** @TWCable\_NYC

14 Sep 12

Our Care & @TWCableHelp teams are fully engaged to make sure @SirPatStew is well tended to. We're Trekkers and will make it so.


**Patrick Stewart** @SirPatStew

Follow

@TWCable\_NYC @TWCableHelp Impertinent, presumptuous. And so..."original".

14 Sep 12

Reply Retweet Favorite


**Patrick Stewart** @SirPatStew

Follow

Thank you @dish for rescuing us from the Faustian @TWCable\_NYC with your prompt and professional service.

20 Sep 12

Reply Retweet Favorite



## Case Study: O2 Deals with Outrage over an Outage

When you're one of England's biggest wireless providers, nothing can create a crisis faster than mass downtime.

When a huge network outage caused thousands of irate O2, GiffGaff and Tesco Mobile customers to take their complaints to Twitter, O2 responded in fine form.

What set them apart is that they replied to customer complaints on an individual basis—even those that were

tasteless and offensive. More important, they were tactful, down-to-earth and apologetic while doing so.

This was obviously a daunting undertaking, given the sheer number of tweets they had to address. At some points they were sending 10 tweets per minute. However, their efforts paid off as they turned a crisis into an opportunity to show their customers (and their competitors' customers) that they care.



# The Bottom Line

The speed and depth of social media means a crisis can explode and spread like wildfire before your eyes. You can watch your brand come under attack and your company's reputation take a beating as negative conversations spread across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in a matter of hours.

Or, you can identify crises as they happen and meet them head-on. You can change the conversation and diffuse an issue right away. The smart and engaged company can actually turn a potential nightmare into an opportunity to shine. Gracefully handling a small issue (before it blows up) can establish your organization as proactive, accessible and in touch with your customers.

## About Sysomos

Sysomos, a Marketwire company, brings business intelligence to social media, providing instant and unlimited access to all social media conversations to quickly see what's happening, why it's happening, and who's driving the conversations.

Through the use of contextual text analytics and data mining technology, Sysomos collects data from blogs, Twitter, social networks, forums, video sites and major news sources.

Our products give you the ability to quickly discover the tone of the conversations and identify sentiment by gender, age and location.

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