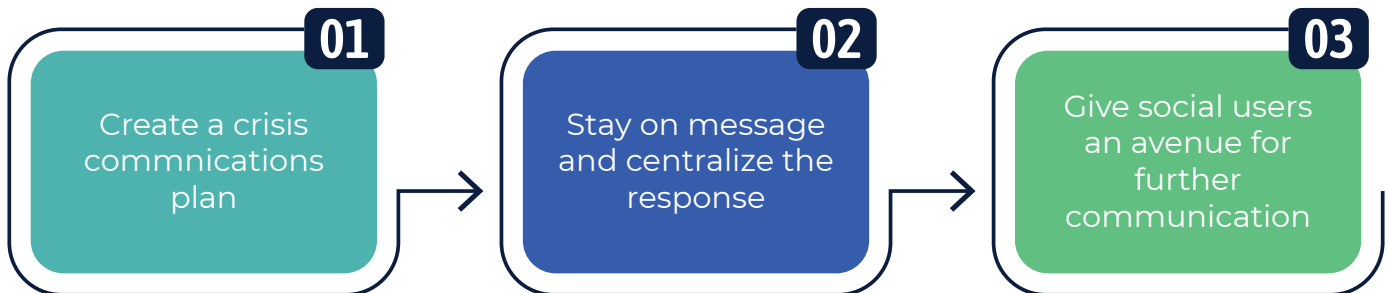


SOCIAL MEDIA CRISIS

COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL



OVERVIEW

No organization is immune to crisis. A leadership scandal, such as embezzlement or misconduct allegations might hit the news. Your organization could suffer a massive data breach or be accused of mishandling customer information. A product could harm customers and need to be recalled.

Events of this kind can cause serious damage to consumer confidence, stock value, and brand reputation. Clear and consistent messaging must be conveyed immediately by media-trained professionals, both within your organization and your PR agency. In addition to addressing traditional media sources, social media can and should be among a company's first lines of defense to address the issue quickly, truthfully, and succinctly. This will help your organization drive the narrative and minimize the fallout.

To communicate effectively during a crisis, you will need a crisis communications plan. **Force4 Technology Communications** has created a Crisis Communications Protocol to address the strategic and tactical guidelines, and this document emphasizes the role of social media when dealing with a crisis.

Elements of a Strong Social Media Crisis Plan

Create a Plan

If you haven't already, create a crisis management plan. It should define the roles and responsibilities for all the members of the crisis management team. Include up-to-date contact information for critical employees to ensure that you can contact the right people in a time of crisis. Include a communication plan for internal updates - it's important to keep employees in the loop, as well.

Approval Process

Determine an approval process for all social media posts that go out at this time. Include a copy of your company's social media policy. Determine the chain of the command that will enable a crisis management team member to communicate quickly and in alignment with the appropriate messaging.

Practice

Run a simulation periodically so that when a crisis does hit, everyone knows their role.

What Qualifies?

Define what a crisis means for your organization. Decide which kinds of events will kick your plan into action, as not every piece of bad news or negative headline should be characterized as a crisis.

Keep an Ear Open

Monitor the social media landscape and listen for mentions of your company name, product mentions, the names of senior executives or any keywords related to your industry.

Fast Response Time

Work quickly to use the real-time nature of social media to your advantage. Release a simple, clear message from the company's official social channels acknowledging the issue and informing people that more information is forthcoming. Silence almost always implies culpability, so a rapid response will help contain negative sentiment about the issue and reduce the likelihood of it going viral.

Acknowledge

Listen to the social sentiment and acknowledge individuals without opening up a dialogue. Keep the responses short and stay on message.

Provide Contact Info

Provide a dedicated phone number or email address that individuals can use. In an crisis, you will receive a lot of angry or upset posts from customers, consumers and other stakeholders. Give them the opportunity for further communication if they need it. This demonstrates transparency and creates trust, both of which are scarce today and highly valued.

Stay On Top of It

Keep internal communications flowing so that all employees are kept up to date with the latest information. Remind them that they should not comment via their own social handles unless otherwise instructed.

Once the crisis is under control, a best practice is to evaluate how the situation was dealt with and, at the same time, gauge the impact it may have had on your brand in terms of, for instance, the number of followers you may have lost or negative sentiment scores. It is also a good idea to look into which of your posts performed well, as this insight will be useful if a similar situation arises in the future.

Build your social media safety net

A crisis situation can spring up at any moment, and your organization must be prepared with a comprehensive crisis communications plan. In a world where one ill-conceived tweet can send stock prices into a tailspin or launch a boycott, you must use the power of social media to fight fire with fire. Make sure you have the above elements in place so that you can effectively manage whatever comes your way.

For a complimentary guide to help you create a general internal media engagement protocol, along with a specific protocol for crisis management, [click here](#)