

Taking the crisis out of social media communications

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

3 Aug 2017

A social media crisis is the worst nightmare for many companies, but often happens with the click of a button. Don't panic, though - rather take a deep breath and read up on Mike Stopforth's tips to take the 'cry' out of crisis.

In the final section of his social media training workshop as part of Red & Yellow School's Executive Education programme, Mike Stopforth got into a pain point for many businesses - the basics of crisis communications, particularly related to social media.



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Stopforth listed the following main crisis communications triggers:

1. **Marketing** - an error or misjudgment in your messaging
2. **Business** - a problem with your product, service and platforms
3. **Employee** - social media actions taken by a member of staff

You also need to consider the indirect or direct impact of the crisis on your business. When the crisis communications are triggered by an external or industry event like a defamatory report, you need to determine the truth of the claim, the credibility of the source and the nature of the response you'll give, which is actually the most critical aspect - and remember to consider all of this before responding. Is it worth a response? If so, keep cool and calm and remember that sentiment is another important aspect to consider, especially in your reporting - this can be manually determined or automated.

If there isn't a compelling commercial impact that you can see, wait on your response a little longer or you may make things worse, as the worst thing you can do is to rush to respond and, in doing so, simply offer an excuse or scapegoat.



Plan ahead to avoid this situation, at all costs! Image: Alphaspire © – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

Unfortunately, there is no cookie-cutter formula to overlay when faced with a social media crisis and nuance is often where this goes wrong. That's why the best strategy is to make sure you understand the context of what has happened before you respond, and avoid a knee-jerk response like deleting the comment in question or responding emotionally. Also remember that social media crises do tend to pass quickly and that the social media community self-regulates itself at times, so could jump to your rescue before you get there.

That said, social media warriors tend to be fickle as slacktivism is inherent.



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The crowd is not always wise, as the crowd-sourced name for Boaty McBoatface has proven.



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At the heart of it, consumers' level of anger and intensity of ire is always related to the gap between your brand's promise or customers' expectation and the resultant delivery or lack thereof. Stopforth says preparing a risk profile and assessing what could possibly go wrong with any brand communication is the best way to skip a crisis in the first place. It's true that marketers don't like to think of risk or what's wrong with our companies' brand promises as we're conditioned to polish and shine the good points, so while difficult to do, it's important to take an introspective view and conduct a vulnerability audit to save your brand potential pain down the line.

Introducing influencer marketing - build your brand's B-List

Next, Stopforth reminded us that before the social web, brands had two audiences - the celebrity or high-ranking journalists they'd approach through endorsements or PR engagement and 'everyone else' or 'the market', approached through classic advertising. We also had living standard measure or LSM groups, where the population was clumped into sections that owned similar household goods, so were assumed to have similar means and aspirations. Social media then came along and broke that gap, creating a continuum around influence. Now, anyone with an internet connection can create a circle of

influence around themselves and there are cascading degrees of influencer impact and credibility without a true way to measure the scale and substance of someone's influence. While social media reach may seem the obvious answer, it's problematic as it can be bought. Influence, by definition, must change behaviour in a more tangible way than simply creating desire, swaying opinion and shaping perception - it must result in sales, so be careful.

“ Brands will pay £75,000 for celebrity influencer endorsements despite confusion over fees <https://t.co/ty7L0yGuaf>
[pic.twitter.com/cjMfPKy/WA](https://t.co/ty7L0yGuaf)— The Drum (@TheDrum) [August 3, 2017](#) ”

Stopforth added that influence comes from shared value, so a social media post can seem inauthentic if the influencer is suddenly harping on about something they've not been passionate about before - do your research and find the influencers and even micro-influencers who fit your brand values. Going for this 'B-list' of people who would associate with your brand anyway makes for a more seamless fit and better marketing ROI at the end of the day - that's what it's all about.

[Click here](#) to view Stopforth's MyBiz profile, [here](#) for Red & Yellow School's press office and [here](#) to access Cerebra's free downloads.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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