

4 Elements of a Successful Social Media Response Plan





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Getting a slice of the action

Up until that point, DiGiorno Pizza's social media efforts were exemplary. The brand dished out irreverence and hilarity with frequent and incisive pop culture references and a consistent tone of voice. They knew how to make a moment on Twitter. They were universally lauded for their creative live-tweeting of the The Sound Of Music Live TV event. They clearly know their audience.

That's what made this blunder so surprising.

To fully understand what went wrong requires some context. And it's precisely this context that could have saved DiGiorno some real embarrassment.

It was September 2014 and a video of NFL running back Ray Rice assaulting his then-fiancée had been released by TMZ. The graphic footage showed Rice punching Janay Palmer in an Atlantic City elevator. Fans were furious and he was fired from the Baltimore Ravens.

The incident sparked a conversation about domestic abuse on social media and thousands of women shared their stories of physical and emotional abuse under the hashtag #WhyIStayed. It was a way of addressing victim-blaming attitudes, and a way to defend Janay Palmer who eventually married Ray Rice, and women like her who stay with their abusers.

The hashtag started trending and DiGiorno jumped on board.

"#WhyIStayed You had pizza."

It was probably one of their lazier efforts, but given the broader context and conversation that they had entered, it was instantly clear that they had screwed up.

The backlash was strong, and this company that normally had the Midas touch on Twitter found themselves on the defensive. They apologized for the tweet but the damage to their brand was already done.



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Are you ready for a social media crisis?

It's important not to wait until the last minute to implement a social media disaster plan.

If an above-average social media team can make such a critical blunder, it means that all brands must be prepared for anything. Trying to prevent a crisis is obviously important, but it's equally important to be able to face disaster when it strikes, and have a plan of action to minimize the damage.

We don't often think about it like this, but social media is another part of your brand's ecosystem; the conversations happening about your company are an attribute of your brand, albeit one slightly out of your direct control. They're dynamic perceptions that drive behavior, and these can help or hinder your business' growth.

Like a brand, these conversations are intangible and powerful. The associations consumers have developed about a brand, and the way they choose to express them, is something that takes years of goodwill and investment to build.

It's important not to wait until the last minute to implement a social media disaster plan. Here are four elements of a social media response plan that will help you be on guard.





1: Accuracy matters

According to FEMA only 39% of Americans have an emergency plan in place for a natural disaster. This is a baffling and remarkable statistic given that 80% of the country is susceptible to deadly inclement weather. Even though these survey respondents know their lives could be at risk in a disaster, few of them know what to do in the event of a hurricane, earthquake, or flood.

And that's literally a matter of life and death: What percentage of businesses do you think are prepared for an social media disaster?

Even professionals can get it wrong. It's not enough to rely on expertise. Nor will every social media disaster be the result of a gross misunderstanding that offends your audience. Sometimes just getting the facts wrong can cost you.



A high volume of social media content—particularly during a crisis—can lead to inaccurate responses by in-house teams trying to keep up with content. And in highly-regulated industries (such as banking, healthcare, or pharma) the mere breach of established regulations on social networks can be costly and detrimental to your reputation.

Progressive and forward-thinking companies understand while a social media disaster isn't necessarily inevitable, they must proceed as if they are. It's crucial to be preemptively vigilant about your social media presence and demand a high level of accuracy in your content.



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2: Real-time response

A local business might have hours of operation but the internet does not. No matter whether they are helpful or harmful, conversations happening about your brand are happening in real time, all the time.

Critical feedback posted on a social network is different from a letter or an email to corporate; social media is not an asynchronous conversation. You might be able to wait until you get to the office to answer an email, but an angry tweet—or a series of them—needs a timely, relevant response as soon as possible.

In 2013, passenger Hassan Syed was so upset with British Airways's customer service, he didn't just post an angry tweet: he promoted it. It was seen by 76,000 users.

But British Airways didn't respond for nearly eight hours. For a company that definitely should know its way around time zones and late hours, a delay that long is inexcusable. When they finally acknowledged his tweet, Syed lashed out with a not-so-rhetorical question:

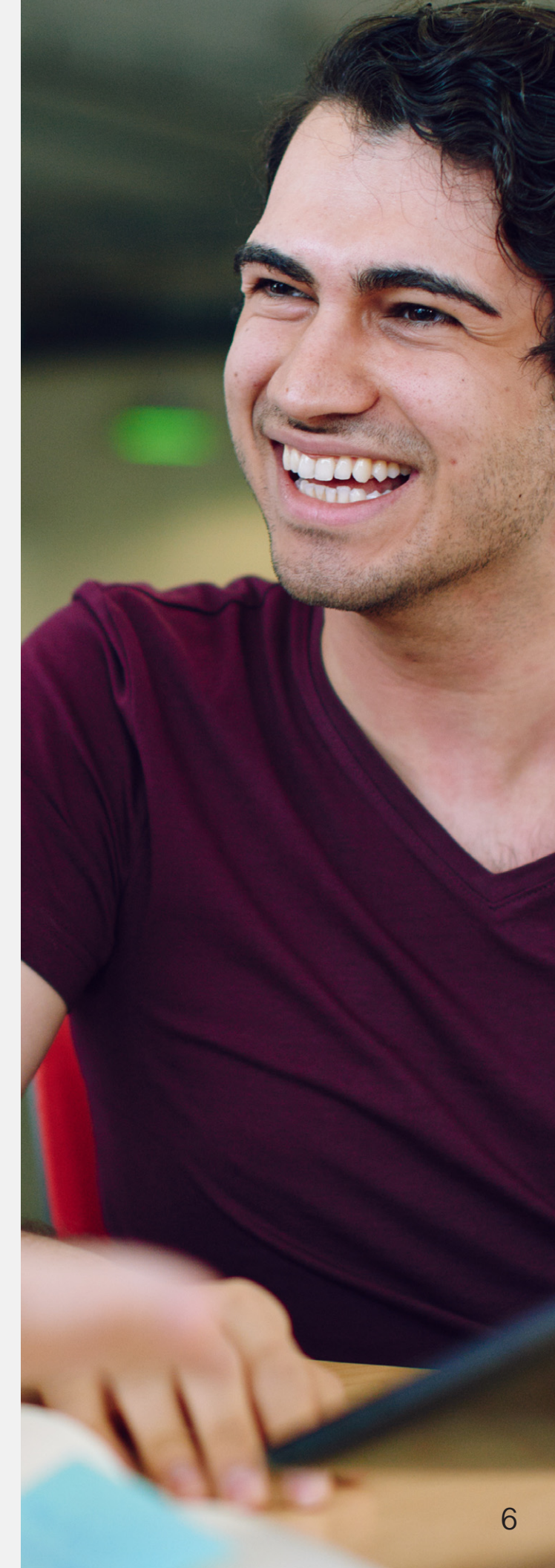
@British_Airways how does a billion dollar company only have 9-5 social media support for a business that operates 24/7?

How would you respond in that situation? It was a wake up call for British Airlines and a lesson to global brands that the internet doesn't "close up shop" at night. Ironically, it required a consumer to spend money on social media before British Airways got the message.



It was seen by

76,000 users





3: Technology cannot replace people

There is plenty of technology for automated social listening, but we'll let you in on a secret: they all have limitations.

Just as real time conversations can't be scheduled by software, the management of authentic conversations can't be mediated by technology alone. After all, the true power of social media is its ability to amplify genuine speech and to connect consumers with the brands they follow and love.

Navigating the pulse of these conversations is a subtle and nuanced process. When things get out of hand it's important for your brand to emphasize, rather than neutralize, the human factor. (Just take a look at Progressive's automated sympathy to see why.)

Social media contains real conversations with real people. Being able to connect with a brand makes it one that people want to interact with online. The ability for people to truly listen to one another is one way a social media crisis could become a social media win.

When DKNY was accused of plagiarizing a photographer's content, they didn't send an automated response. They responded with a human apology, and offered to make a charitable donation in his name.

If that's not convincing, consider that automation has a 30% error rate. Are you willing to have that large of a margin when it comes to your brand's reputation online?

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4: 24/7 coverage

So far, we've learned that a brand's presence on social media needs to be accurate, immediate, and authentic. And if that wasn't enough: a brand needs to be "awake" 24 hours a day.

Social media conversations happen all over the world, in every time zone, at all times. After all, during holidays and weekends is when most audiences are active on social media; if brands want to engage they have to be able to do so at off hours. Just because your employees have gone home for the day, that doesn't mean your brand is closed too.

Sure, a social media crisis might be kind enough to hit between 9–5pm, in the timezone of your national headquarters, when your entire social media team happens to be waiting for something to do. On the other hand, that crisis might be the work of a rogue employee with your social media credentials posting offensive Facebook messages at 3am. They could contain sensitive information about your company in a language that you're not familiar with.

You can't schedule a crisis. When it comes to disaster planning, an around-the-clock coverage mindset is the only way to think about it.

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About ICUC

ICUC is the global leader in Social Media Management.

Our experts provide vigilant protection on every social media channel to enhance and safeguard your brand 24/7/365.

Through Social Moderation, Community Management, Social Listening, and Social Media Customer Service we protect the smallest start-ups to largest global brands, such as Disney, Starbucks, Coca-Cola, and Google.

ICUC is your scalable eyes and ears, preventing small problems from amplifying around the world while building communities that strengthen your brand.

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We Would Love To
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Your Social Media
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