



## CRISIS MANAGEMENT VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

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### Introduction

Increasing popularity of social media gives businesses a wide spectrum of possibilities to enter into dialog and interaction with consumers, to better understand their needs, to build durable relations with clients and to maintain brand communities. Thanks to social media, content may be transmitted with an unprecedented speed in the so-called viral manner. The consumer has been undergoing change too, expecting now instant answers to all his questions and doubts and more often than ever expressing complaints about a company in the media sphere of the internet. All these factors combine to cause organizations to face new challenges, the overcoming of which requires an appropriate preparation.

The goal of this paper is to present some examples of organizations dealing with crises with the use of social media. Additionally, the paper describes some organizations which failed to tap into the potentialities offered by social networking services and ignored the power of virtual communities. This approach will allow formulating a code of good practices regarding crisis management through social networks so that organizations could be adequately prepared to respond to crisis in a way that not only helps them to avoid failure but will actually strengthen their image

Since the 1982 scandal of cyanide-laced Tylenol much has change, particularly due to the rise of internet economy. Crisis management in this new reality, especially in the sphere of public relations, assumes a new character. With the advent of the Internet and social media, textual, image and video messages spread like wildfire instantly reaching people all over the world. Owing to modern technologies a crisis situation can develop rapidly from one negative piece of information (revealed by anyone) about an organization resulting in its being besieged by an entire community of angry clients. Moreover, in virtual reality it is very difficult to keep information secret or delete potentially damaging information, which poses an even greater challenge for PR specialists.

The purpose of this article is to show how organizations can cope with a crisis situation using their presence in social media. In contrast, the paper also describes some organizations which failed to tap into potentialities offered by social networks and ignored the power of virtual communities. This approach will enable formulating good practices regarding crisis management using social media.

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The research was conducted by the method of active observation, which enabled gaining insights into the ways and rules of the functioning of internet communities from the insider's perspective. Secondary sources were also used for the purposes of the work.

### **The specific character of crisis in social media**

For the sake of the present paper, a definition of crisis must be adopted. According to Coombs, *"crisis is a perception of unforeseeable event which threatens vital expectations of stakeholders and might dramatically affect an organization's performance"*<sup>1</sup>. As can be seen in the further part of the paper, crisis is not always caused by a natural disaster or a human mistake during the production process but may also be triggered by untrue gossip, a misguided advertising campaign offending the feelings of consumers, opinion-forming groups or other organizations, ineffective communication or a service failure.

Moreover, it is important to note that the social media crisis may be triggered not only by online but also by offline activities, which easily penetrate the social media sphere.

A brand crisis escalating in social media has a specific character due to its viral character – at a click of a button a given content may be shared with one's all profile friends. Then this content may be further replicated by each of its addressees. In this way information can spread faster and on a larger scale than ever before. According to Meerman, *"The power and purchasing scale of media are no longer capable of ensuring competitive advantage. What counts now is swift and effective action"*<sup>2</sup>.

Consequently, a brand no longer has the monopoly to talk about itself. Instead, it is increasingly created by clients. As says Ricardo Guimares, founder of Thymus Branding Company in São Paulo, *"Brand value belongs to the market, not to the company. The company is just a tool to create brand value. Understood in this way, brand lives outside rather than inside the company. When I say that managers are not ready for brand management I mean that they are used to managing the closed structure of a company. Brand, however, is an open structure; managers don't know how to manage open structures"*<sup>3</sup>.

On one hand, the rise of social media presents growth opportunities for companies – a consumer happy with the product – an opinion leader, may more easily become a brand ambassador and affect still larger numbers of users, which facilitates organizing advertising campaigns. On the other hand, this very mechanism poses a threat by turning consumers into channels through which negative comments may be disseminated including complaints from dissatisfied users, reaching potential clients who look for product information.

While observing a crisis unfolding in the social media sphere it is possible to identify several groups of users with different roles to play. These are: activists – people disseminating information through blogs, websites such as [www.Wykop.pl](http://www.Wykop.pl) or internet profiles sharing information with their friends, or at a number of other place frequented by people interested in the matter; critics – people who express their

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1 T. W. Coombs, *Ongoing crisis communication-planning, managing and responding*, Sage Publications, London 2007, p. 2, 3.

2 D. Meerman, *Marketing i PR w czasie rzeczywistym, Jak błyskawicznie dotrzeć do rynku i nawiązać kontakt z klientem*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa 2011, p. 27.

3 C. Li, J. Bernoff, *Marketing technologii społecznych. Groundswell czyli jak wykorzystać Web 2.0 w twojej firmie*, MT Business Ltd, 2008, p. 119.

dissatisfaction in connection with the matter but do so only once and then give up the topic; attentive observers – people who want to find out the smallest details of the matter, asking questions, following the situation as it unfolds, often personally involved in the issue; brand defenders – or brand ambassadors, loyal clients but also rational people who do not get carried away with emotions believing that everybody has the right to make a mistake and moderating angry emotions; and competitors who try to use the opportunity to persuade people to use their own services.

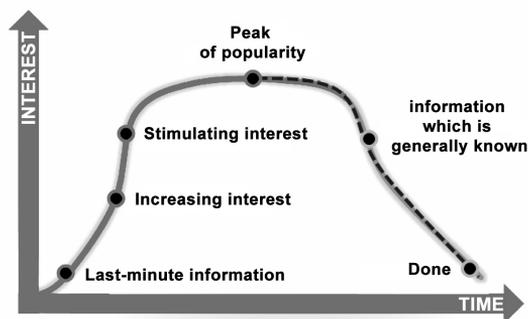
The AdWatch report suggests looking at three phases of crisis<sup>4</sup>:

- Onset of crisis – the moment a crisis situation is noticed and communicated by an internet network users e.g. on a company's blog or a brand profile or Facebook; information suggesting crisis often spreads rapidly in the Internet;
- Crisis mitigation – at this stage discussions in the Internet about the problem are often already quite heated and dynamic. This is why the debates should be joined by the brand representatives as soon as possible. In this phase, a website administrator and other company representatives have an important role to play in undertaking crisis-mitigating activities.
- End of crisis – solving the problem and terminating the discussion about it in the media sphere.

In the opinion of some researchers including the author of the present paper, of importance is also a pre-crisis phase when the company prepares for eventual crisis and closely monitors the social media sphere. According to Smith, instead of wondering whether it will meet a crisis situation a company should rather ask the question when it will meet it<sup>5</sup>. The role of a pre-crisis phase in successful dealing with a crisis is discussed in more detail in the further part of this paper.

The escalation and decline of interest in content appearing in the Internet was presented by Meerman (see the figure below).

Picture 1. A typical distribution of interest in the message.



Source: D. Meerman, *Marketing i PR w czasie rzeczywistym, Jak błyskawicznie dotrzeć do rynku i nawiązać kontakt z klientem*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer Business, Warszawa 2011, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> W. Niżnik, T. Sawicki, M. Krzosek, *Kryzysy w social media, raport opublikowanego w ramach projektu AdWatch.pl realizowanego przy współpracy IRCenter Sp. z o.o. i SoInteractive SA*, 2011, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> D. Smith, *Beyond contingency planning: towards a model of crisis management*, Organization Environment, Sage Publishing, 1990.

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As shown in Pic. 1, a social media crisis usually unfolds rapidly. It starts quickly with the interest in the crisis-triggering event dramatically increasing but lasts for a relatively short time.

This should mobilise companies to intensively monitor opinions regarding their operations appearing in the Internet, and swiftly react to negative posts or reports of unfortunate incidents connected with the company before harmful information spreads in the Internet and leaves a bad impression on other users.

## Case studies

### *Domino's Pizza*

15 April 2009 wasn't the luckiest day in the history of Domino's Pizza. After one of the workers employed in a Domino's pizza restaurant in Conover in North Carolina, U.S., uploaded on the YouTube a video clip made together with other workers of this restaurant, showing one of the pizza house employees put pieces of cheese into his nose and then onto a pizza, Twitter almost exploded with hundreds of thousands of references to this recording causing the material to spread like wildfire. Disgusted customers commented the episode also on other websites, e.g. [www.Consumerist.com](http://www.Consumerist.com). Undoubtedly, this incident jeopardized customers' trust in the company and its brand image.

Several days after the video material had appeared in the net, the company CEO Patrick Doyle made a public statement which was placed on YouTube under the title 'Disgusting Domino's Pizza – Responds'<sup>6</sup>. In his statement, Doyle apologises for the sorry event and goes on to thank the members of internet networking communities for bringing the incident to his attention repeating several times that the persons guilty of the misdemeanor had been already held responsible. At the same time Doyle emphasizes the importance of winning back customers' trust in the company. The statement went down well with the users, who commented that "now Domino's is likely to be the safest restaurant in town with managers watching their staff like hawks"<sup>7</sup>.

The lesson learned from Patrick Doyle is that the best strategy in face of crisis is to apologise and take full responsibility for the event rather than use the avoidance strategy and pretend everything's ok. It is important to assure the community that appropriate steps have been taken in order to prevent similar situations from happening again and reiterate how much clients and their trust is valued by the company. In fact, Doyle even thanked the users for letting him know of the incident.

### *Mattel*

The case of Mattel provides the best evidence of the importance of communication based on mutual understanding and commitment. In the autumn 2007 this toy company had to face a worldwide recall action of its products because they had proved to be dangerous for children. Despite this situation, the company recorded a 6% sales increase that year. How was it possible?

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Doyle's statement: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZXUXn8RJeA>, 16 Sep 2012.

<sup>7</sup> A. Mac, *E-przyjaciele. Zobacz co media społecznościowe mogą zrobić dla Twojej Firmy*, One Press, Gliwice 2011, p. 37- 41.

Mattel, long before the news of its toys posing a health hazard broke out, had created The Playground Community, a closed internet community bringing together 500 mothers with members of this group serving as an advisory body to the company. When it turned out that the toys were posing a threat to children the company immediately disclosed this fact to the public and was in touch with the community on an everyday basis cooperating with the mothers on developing an easy-to-use product return procedure.

The way Mattel responded to the crisis situation was appreciated by the consumers and the company's marketing agency Communispace was honoured with the Forrester Groundswell Award, which acknowledges companies who actively listen to their clients and answer their voices and build good customer relations<sup>8</sup>.

### *Play*

Play is another example of a company being able to successfully overcome a crisis situation. Play found itself in trouble following its advertising campaign encouraging clients to buy a Play's phone-card by saying it can be disposed of the way an unwanted dog is left at an animal shelter. The ad was shown on [www.demotywatory.pl](http://www.demotywatory.pl), featuring Play's logo encircled by caged dogs. This triggered a barrage of criticism leveled against encouraging people to leave dogs at animal shelters, including a protest from SOS dla Zwierząt, an organization fighting to change social attitudes in this respect. This foundation even formed a group on Facebook protesting against Play's campaign. Within a short time, Play was forced to apologise to all offended by its campaign and withdraw the ad. At the same time however Play managed to turn its faux pas into an image enhancing tactic by promising support for two organizations helping homeless animals, Straż dla Zwierząt and Viva.

### *Comcast*

The worst thing a company can do in reaction to incriminating information appearing in the Internet is to refuse to offer any comments and pretend nothing has happened. This exactly was the mistake made by Comcas, an internet services providing company. Consumers reacted with outrage at a video film<sup>9</sup>, viewed 1.3 million times, which showed Comcas's customer service rep deep asleep. He came to a client's home to exchange a modem and fell asleep on the sofa after trying in vain for an hour to call his company's customer service. After the film was posted on YouTube, it triggered an avalanche of angry comments not only about this particular incident but in general about poor customer service offered by Comcast. Many other clips about Comcast's services were soon posted in the Internet by dissatisfied users. The original film was simply the final straw coming on top of a long series of other disappointments suffered by the company's clients. Comcast never took an official stand on the incident, which led to its losing many existing clients while the video lives on to frighten off the potential ones<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> Video showing a Comcast's employee asleep, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvVp7b5gzqU>, (20 Sep 2012).

<sup>10</sup> After some time though the company drew conclusions from the incident and opened an account on Twitter (@comcastcares), which partly took over customer care responsibilities.

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### *Taco Bell Restaurant*

A crisis situation similar to that which occurred at Domino's took place at KFC, after a short mobile phone-made film had appeared in the Internet showing rats in one of KFC/Taco Bell restaurants in Manhattan<sup>11</sup>. Over just a couple of days a several minute long material was viewed by multiple KFC clients and thanks to viral marketing the whole world found out about the incident. Unfortunately, the company responded with a standard style press release informing that this was an isolated incident and that the restaurant would remain closed until it was disinfected. This was not an appropriate reaction. In general, press releases are not effective in response to information disseminated in the form of a film. The right thing for the company to do would be to post its own film on YouTube, (as Domino's did) – so that it could reach out to all interested people – those who saw the original film.

### *Kryptonite*

A similar approach was adopted by Kryptonite when in August 2004 information appeared in the Internet that its bicycle lock (priced at \$50) advertised as "the toughest bicycle security in moderate to high crime areas" was opened with a BIC pen. The incident was heatedly debated in the Internet. Instantly, many other films were posted on YouTube showing other users open Kryptonite locks in the same way. Angry clients accused the company of deceitful advertising and made scornful comments that a BIC pen was harder to break than locks sold by Kryptonite. After the company continued to be silent about the incident, the story even hit the New York Times pages<sup>12</sup>. At this stage, Kryptonite informed clients that all faulty locks would be exchanged. The product recall operation cost 15 million dollars but the company was on many occasions accused in the Internet of not delivering on its promise<sup>13</sup>.

This case should serve as a warning for companies who forget that today's consumer uses the Internet as the basic source of product information prior to making a purchase. Blogs, discussion forums and other virtual communities are becoming increasingly powerful as opinion forming agents. This is why all internet content referring to a company should be continuously monitored. For this purpose, a range of free and time-effective tools are available allowing swift response to a crisis situation.

### *Motrin*

Crisis does not have to be caused by product contamination or disclosing damaging information. It may as well have its source in a misguided marketing campaign which hurts consumers' feelings or is otherwise misinterpreted by its audience.

This happened in the case of the pharmaceutical company Motrin. In 2008 this company ran an advertising campaign which included an internet ad entitled We feel your pain<sup>14</sup>.

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11 Related video posted on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=su0U37w2tws> (10 Sep 2012).

12 Related article in *The New York Times*: [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/17/nyregion/17lock.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/17/nyregion/17lock.html?_r=1) (19 Sep 2012).

13 Related article: <http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2004/10/18/felled-bic-pens-and-law-suits-kryptonite-isnt-so-mighty-after-all> (30.09.2012).

14 Video promoting Motrin: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XO6SITUBA38> (11 Sep 2012).

But instead of winning users' appreciation and present the company as sympathising with their ailments, the commercial backfired dramatically. For young mothers the message communicated by the ad was clear: mothers who use baby carriers do so because they want to be trendy while the medication advertised can help alleviate stress they might feel when trying to demonstrate that they are good mothers. Only several hours after the ad was placed in the Internet highly emotional posts appeared on Twitter and young mothers' blogs in which women threatened they would stop buying products of the company which offends their feelings. Over the weekend the internet bristled with comments of women angry at the company and wondering whether it made sense to buy products of the firm which "condemns our children". The company reacted to the crisis on Monday but according to clients that was much too late. In consequence, the company lost in the eyes of shocked clients<sup>15</sup>.

The Motrin case helps to formulate at least one conclusion: in social media time works against a company in crisis as each minute brings another series of negative comments about the brand, new posts on blogs and even more outraged consumers. Companies should thus respond to the accusations leveled against them as soon as possible before one spark sets the whole wood on fire.

#### *McDonald's*

Another excellent example of a social media marketing campaign slipping out of the company's control is an initiative of McDonald's. In an attempt to create its image as a company caring about high quality of products offered McDonald's posted on Twitter a link to a website where a farmer talks about how he makes sure of the high quality of produce supplied by him to McDonald's restaurants. This theme was marked by the campaign organizers with the hashtag #MeetTheFarmers. This part of the campaign was successful and aroused consumers' interest but soon afterwards the company made a mistake by creating another hashtag, which in addition was promoted by appearing on top of the search engine as #McDStories – "Meet some of the hard-working people dedicated to providing McDs with quality food every day" featuring among others a potato provider saying: "When you make something with pride people can taste it".

The #McDStories feature was intended to tell interesting stories from the life of the restaurant and positive experiences connected with it. Soon however users started to use this hashtag to tell less glamorous stories about unpleasant experiences related to the brand. Within just two hours there appeared numerous tweets about unhygienic practices observed at McDonald's such as finding a finger nail in the burger or hospitalization incidents after a meal at the restaurant. Once the McDonald's marketers realised that the advertising campaign was not only ineffective but even counterproductive they quickly halted #McDStories but this did not stop users from continuing to post under this hashtag various stories embarrassing for the brand.

<sup>15</sup> The problem is due to the fact that access to social networking sites is not time limited and clients may visit these sites at any time during the day or at night while company employees do so only during working hours. For example, when a company announced a competition and some technical problems appeared, users became frustrated over the fact that the company did not respond immediately. Users perceive a problem as occurring "here and now" and tend to forget that company reps do not work non-stop.

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A similar situation occurred at Orange, which in October 2011 asked its fans on Facebook "how have you been surprised by Orange?". Needless to say, positive comments were expected. But the question brought over 1 600 answers describing negative experiences and criticizing exorbitant phone bills, poor quality of connections, etc. The network administrator tried to enter into dialog with the users and after 6 hours the company thanked for all comments and promised to analyse them in order to improve service quality. The company also promised to do their best to be able to surprise their clients in a positive way.

### *Orange*

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### *British Petroleum*

British Petroleum (BP) faced a serious crisis following the largest in history oil spill incident. As a result of the disaster 11 BP employees were killed and a dozen or so were injured. The oil continued to spill into the ocean for several months before the emergency was finally controlled, leading to widespread public outcry. The company tried to maintain communication via the Internet providing news updates on its profiles including information about the scale of the spill and progress in rescue action. But was it enough?

BP focused on one-sided communication – by leaving the users' posts unanswered and not quoting their previous comments the company failed to show its involvement in the problem. BP did nothing beyond saying what it had to say. Moreover, instead of trying to answer critical tweets, the company made efforts to block the profiles of users who posted them. Such behaviour will never be tolerated by any online community, whose very raison d'être is interaction and multidirectional communication. It is a company's responsibility to convince community members how important they are for the company and how much their trust is valued.

In reaction to this incident and BP's response to it many voices could be heard calling for boycotting BP's products and services. The crisis was further exacerbated by the failure to stop the spillage and attempts to push the responsibility on to others as well as by the BP CEO Tony Hayward, who said that the size of the spillage was negligible compared to the size of the ocean. These words were bound to further antagonize angry environmentalists. A company has to respect the views of ordinary people even if they differ from the opinions held by its management.

Although BP already at that time had its corporate website on Facebook<sup>16</sup>, a Twitter account and a channel on YouTube, it couldn't use these tools to fight the crisis. These websites have many followers watching

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<sup>16</sup> BP's corporate website on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BPAmerica?sk=wall>.

the company's actions on social networking sites but they should be regarded as the company's opponents rather than fans, observing the company's operations but hardly willing to speak in defence of it.

When the oil spilled BP didn't have a strong fan base, which hampered its actions in social media. BP's story should remind companies of the importance of building good client and community relations before a crisis strikes. Clients are more willing to forget misdemeanor of a company to which they are loyal and feel important rather than a company which did not show a human face and was uncommitted to the welfare of the community.

### *Adidas*

Adidas faced a crisis situation over painting black a wall in the Warsaw Służewiec, which had previously functioned as an independent gallery of graffiti works, in the intention of posting its ad on it. Outraged by the brand's attitude, the graffiti artists together with their fans swiftly organized a twenty-five thousand member strong group on Facebook protesting against Adidas, boycotting its products and organizing an action to repaint Adidas's ad once it appeared in Służewiec. Over the course of several days the scared company apologised to the graffiti artists and returned them the wall but this reaction was generally considered as coming too late.

### *Orange*

A similar situation happened at Orange when to mark the merger of Orange and Telekomunikacja Polska the Novotel hotel and the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science were wrapped with the orange ad saying "More for you at Orange". An irritated resident of Warsaw posted the photos of the buildings with the Orange ads at [www.Wykop.pl](http://www.Wykop.pl) calling on other users to show their disapproval on the Orange fan website on Facebook<sup>17</sup>. In consequence, many users did indeed show their discontent with some of them threatening to stop using the company's services. Unfortunately, the corporation responded with a measured, considered statement, which evidently showed no sympathy for the problem of polluting urban environment with gigantic ads.

### *Frisco.pl*

In May 2012, the internet food retailer Frisco.pl decided to upgrade its website in order, as it assured its costumers, to streamline the shopping process. But the refreshed website did not live up to clients' expectations, who expressed their dissatisfaction with losing their shopping lists, delays in processing orders, long time needed to add products to the basket, a less attractive product offer and having to wind the side to the left to see the full list of products. Discontent clients threatened to do shopping elsewhere and complained about poor customer service accusing Frisco of testing the new website on its clients disregarding their interests. Again, a plethora of negative posts (including on Frisco's website on Facebook) remained unanswered by the company, which ineptly tried to divert the attention of angry

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<sup>17</sup> Orange's corporate website on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/orangepolska>.

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users away from the criticism by an article on food and the quality of sperm, which obviously failed to bring any effect<sup>18</sup>.

### *Allegro*

Another example of a badly managed crisis is Allegro – in September 2011 the service went down. Obviously, angry users began commenting this fact on Allegro's fanpage on Facebook<sup>19</sup>. The company reps reacted several hours later, which is very late for the social media sphere, by informing the users that the problem was being looked into. By acting late, the company allowed too many critical posts, which could have been avoided by reacting promptly. Still, it should be noted that as a result of the incident Allegro ultimately gained more fans as in order to post a comment on the company's fansite on Facebook you had to like it first.

### **Recommendations for business**

Companies should not underestimate the power of social media in inflating a crisis situation. Based on the examples given as well as on many other crisis situations in social media a number of conclusions can be reached.

Today's consumer expects instant access to the latest news. Silence on the part of the company is treated as an insult. This is why it is extremely important for an organization to communicate with its clients not only when things are going well but also in times of crisis, when in fact this communication should be twice as intense as normally. An organization cannot afford to take time to respond to a situation since in the virtual reality each minute means hundreds or thousands of visits to websites containing damaging information and its dissemination in the Internet.

Of vital importance is a systematic and continuous provision of information to users regarding the up-to-date situation and steps taken by the company to resolve the problem, even as early as at the stage of organizing meetings, searching information and participating in the discussion. Users must know that the problem is being looked into (the worst a company can do is to keep silent) and that the company is taking all necessary measures to deal with it out of respect for its clients. This sort of communication will reduce consumer insecurity.

Long before a crisis situation occurs, an organization should form a brand community and build positive relationships with its clients and admirers. In answering clients' questions an organization should in the first place show concern. An organization needs to make sure it is transparent and accessible; it should take clients' opinions for facts and show concern for their fears, try to avoid public confrontations and strengthen existing relationships. An organization should be accessible to consumers and treat their needs as a priority. Pre-crisis planning will thus include using on a regular basis a software for "listening" to what is going on in social media. An organization should employ special personnel responsible for mo

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<sup>18</sup> Frisco's profile on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/FRISCOPL/141767962518913>.

<sup>19</sup> Allegro's fanpage on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/allegro>.

monitoring the Internet, determine monitoring frequency and develop a code of conduct in case a potential threat is identified (at least by defining a crisis situation) including specifying who should be notified of a crisis situation and what steps should be taken (who is responsible for taking them). A brand should be present everywhere its consumers are present as it is impossible to predict on which social networking site or forum potentially damaging information may appear. Hence an organization should be ready to react also in the spheres where no active marketing is run. Also, it is worth specifying which people in the organization should be notified in the case of different scenarios.

The best weapon in dealing with damaging information is honesty, truthfulness, ability to admit blame, humility and readiness to accept responsibility for the situation. The worst is the avoidance strategy, denial and pretending nothing has happened.

Blocking or removing negative posts is simply unacceptable. A company should enable users to express their opinions freely while it listens and draws conclusions. By doing so an organization is going to earn consumers' respect as they are bound to notice that the company is working to change the situation rather than pushes the blame on to someone else.

Internet communities are not interested in listening to a standard PR person who unemotionally gives measured, considered answers to selected questions and presents company's official position. Users want to feel that it is them, their wellbeing and safety that matter most to a company. A company will live up to this expectation by participating in discussions and by being present on blogs, forums and in chat rooms where its clients meet. This approach brings positive results as can be seen from the examples of organizations which managed a crisis successfully as well as those which made mistakes and lost hosts of loyal clients by ignoring their needs.

It is recommendable that a company develop a social media oriented crisis management strategy. A good solution may be to create a team dedicated to continuous monitoring of the situation in the Internet. Its members should be specially trained and act according to earlier defined rules of conduct in the social media sphere including in particular reacting to negative comments.

J. Baer suggests 8 steps in crisis management in social media<sup>20</sup>:

- confirming that there is a crisis situation;
- referring to the event via the same communication channels in which the crisis has been unfolding;
- apologising and showing concern in relation to the incident and consumers' feelings;
- creating the FAQ list in order to systematize knowledge about the situation;
- making room for dialog and discussion about the crisis;
- taking the crisis offline if necessary;
- keeping all company employees informed of the development of the situation so that they could offer reliable information about the crisis, even if it is not their direct responsibility;
- formulating the lessons learnt.

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20 J. Baer, A. Nashid, *The Now Revolution. 7 shifts to make your business faster, smarter and more social*, Wiley 2011.

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The company's confirming that it is aware of the crisis situation and is going to take the necessary steps to resolve it as soon as possible will help quell the excitement and will show users that their complaints have been heard. Consider the following communications: "We are aware of the situation and have taken measures to analyse it. We will let you know as soon as we have gained a better understanding of the situation. We would like to thank you for your patience and understanding". A response to a crisis must appear via the same media where the crisis unfolds. If negative comments were posted on the brand profile on Facebook, it is not a good idea to respond with a video on YouTube (unless the same video is posted also on the wall on Facebook). Only afterwards can other communications channels be used.

The FAQ is useful in so far as it systematizes important information about the crisis, which helps put a limit on consumers' asking the same questions. The FAQ should contain the confirmation of the company being aware of the crisis, details on how the crisis originated, possibly including films and photos, information on how the company found out about the situation, who was informed by whom and in what manner, what specific steps have been taken to prevent the situation from occurring again in the future and last but not least contact data to company reps dealing with the matter. Also, the company should enable a subscription of the crisis FAQ.

It is important to remember that if an organization does not offer users special room for exchanging opinions on the situation, the discussion will transfer to other places remaining outside the organization's control. Keeping all crisis-related conversations in one place makes easier their monitoring and also gives those consumers who remained loyal to the company a chance to speak in its defence.

Companies can learn important lessons from a crisis situation. To facilitate formulating lessons learnt, it is beneficial to document each crisis element and analyse a number of factors including traffic volume on the company website, search data, a communications channel in which the crisis occurred, internal communication effectiveness, whether the company's reaction brought the desired results and which (if any) consumers spoke out in defence of the organization.

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