



## **The Do's and Don'ts of Using Social Media in Crisis Communication**

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Source: [prnewsonline](#), Jan 11, 2012

Without a doubt, social networks have changed the way we communicate—personally, commercially and from a corporate point of view. The key to using social media effectively as a crisis communication tool is to recognize and accept that this is how people talk to each other in the 21st century. Keep in mind the following when adding social media to your crisis response plan:

### **Do:**

- Accept that social media is a viable, permanent and efficient way to communicate, and embrace it as part of your PR toolkit.
- Commit to a policy for employees' use of social media, and communicate it to everyone.
- Trust your staff to be your allies in crisis situations, and empower them to help spread your message.
- Be prepared, both for managed, controlled messages and unplanned, uncontrolled ones, and have separate strategies for each.
- Get ready to enter into a dialogue with both your employees and your audience. It's what social media is all about and, when handled properly, can turn negative comments into positive ones.
- Be honest in your communications—it really is the best policy and the best aid to recovery.
- Focus on the impression you will leave with your audience and use this to guide your communications.

### **Don't:**

- Attempt to enforce a blanket ban on social networking—generally, it doesn't work. Employees are likely to feel that they aren't trusted and find ways to circumvent regulations. It's better to acknowledge its power as a communications tool, regulate it and use it to benefit the company.
- Talk "at" your audience without listening and responding to them. This will undermine their trust in the company as a whole.
- Try to spin the message. People on social networks (both employees and customers) can spot this very quickly and will spread the word.
- Issue a message externally without making sure your employees know about it first. If you do, you're on your way to another, bigger crisis.

- Allow corporate and personal social media accounts to run off the same app or tool. Inappropriate messages sent from the wrong account can be embarrassing and costly to put right.