

# how w2

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HOW TO MANAGE  
A SOCIAL MEDIA

# Crisis

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO  
GETTING AND MAINTAINING CONTROL  
OF A STICKY SOCIAL MEDIA SITUATION

C o r e y P a d v e e n

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# About the Author

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Corey Padveen is the Director of Global Social Business Strategy at t2 Marketing International. He is a principal strategist for client-centered social business and data initiatives and is a leading authority on the notions of Social Equity – determining the economic value social media adds to your business – and *Responsive Branding* – leveraging digital data in order to develop successful marketing and brand initiatives.

As the author of t2's social business blog, a contributing writer to industry leading publications and a keynote speaker at digital marketing events around the world, Corey regularly shares his knowledge of social business and marketing data with audiences made up of both beginners and industry experts.

# Introduction

## Why does this matter?

When it comes to breaking news and up-to-the-minute stories, social media has become the go-to source for hundreds of millions of people. On these networks, news travels fast and there is usually only a small window in which brands can take hold of a situation before it spirals beyond the control of any one team.

No one likes to think about a crisis, but everyone needs to plan for one. With regards to new media – like social media – there are a few steps that need to be followed in order to effectively control a situation.

While every scenario will differ, the outlined strategy contained in this eBook contains some universal guidelines that every brand can use.

STEP ONE

# Figure Out What Happened

# Figure Out What Happened

What's going on?

In the American political system, use of the word 'coup' to describe civil unrest in another region has some pretty severe consequences. That is why, when something does break out, politicians are very hesitant to use the word.

On a much, much smaller scale, you need to have the same approach to a social media crisis. Words matter. The messaging you craft and the audiences you address can significantly affect the outcome.





## One or two negative reviews on Yelp! or Trip Advisor does not a crisis make.

The first step in developing a strategy for effective crisis management is to outline what constitutes a social media crisis. Then, when something does erupt on your social channels, trace it back to the origin and determine if you need to be in full priority response mode or if this is something that can be handled easily.

STEP TWO

# Assign Priority Steps



# Assign Priority Steps

## Where to start?

There are two categories into which social media situations might fall: Crisis and Problem. What is the difference?

As the names might suggest, the distinction between the two is all about scale. While a problem may be something along the lines of a glitch on your website that is causing issues for some users as they try to navigate, a crisis would involve a significantly larger, more universal situation. Think in terms of Target or Ashley Madison: The inability to access the website or publishing an erroneous price or date for a promotion would fall into the category of a problem that could easily be fixed by publishing a retraction and making a general apology for the error. Data breaches that compromise the security of your customers' data, on the other hand, would fall into the category of a crisis which requires full scale crisis intervention.

At the outset, once you have figured out what has taken place, you need to determine which of these two situations you have on your hands.

Let's start with a problem.

First, you're going to want to assign a degree of severity. On a Low-Medium-High risk scale, a problem would generally fall into the Low or Medium categorization. Something low, like a misprint in your already distributed marketing materials, is not a game-changing issue.

Here, priorities can be assigned to the marketing department (discussed in Step Four) as you (most likely) won't be facing significant backlash from your audience online. It's a question here of determining how best to retract what was shared and send out proper updates, apologizing for the misprint and clearly correcting the error.

Something on the medium level of the scale requires action a little bit quicker. When facing a medium-level problem, like an inappropriate or insensitive piece of content, the priority will be first to retract the content, then issue an apology. At the same time, however, these are problems that can be resolved in a fairly short time frame, and don't require a complete halt to business as usual.

Now, for argument's sake, let's say we're facing a crisis of epic proportions such as a breach of confidential data that affect millions of customers. What you'll need to do is set the order of actions determined by priority: determine which departments will need to be involved, who will craft messaging, and how information will be circulated. If, for example, a crisis has reached major news outlets, maybe a press release or press conference should take precedent before reaching out to your social audience. If you are facing a barrage of criticism on Facebook, you should focus your efforts on quelling the situation there before moving on to less active networks.



When engaging with your audience on a day-to-day basis, you want to give equal attention to your most influential audience members as well as those with very few followers and little social clout. While it might seem like a harsh reality, the same does not hold true for crises. In a social media crisis, not every one of your followers can be treated equally. Of course, over time you are going to want to address all comments (or as many as possible) in order to maintain your brand's integrity. But at the beginning stages, you are going to have to order your individual responses in terms of influence.



The repercussions of a major industry influencer tweeting that they despise your brand are far greater than the repercussions of the negative tweet from a user who created an account simply to spite you. Keep in mind that in the time of a crisis, it is not business as usual.

STEP THREE

# Determine Responses

# Determine Responses

What will you say?

OK –you’ve clearly identified the severity of the crisis. Now it’s time to decide how you are going to respond.

There are two ways to go about responding to the crisis: you can either be on the defense (not in the conventional sense), apologizing to your fans and assuring them that this will never happen again, or on the offense, defending your product and explaining, calmly and with a sound argument, why the crisis does not reflect your overall business.

Let’s look at a few examples.

# Defense

A little while back, Home Depot tweeted an image that was largely seen to be racist and tasteless.

While the brand made it clear that it was a third party that was responsible for sharing the message, they had no choice but to take responsibility for what had happened and assure the public that this did not reflect the values of the brand.

This was a clear example of a crisis. And this probably did some damage to the brand's integrity. But by owning up to the incident, explaining what had taken place and trying to fix it, they were able to diffuse the situation and eventually return to business as usual.

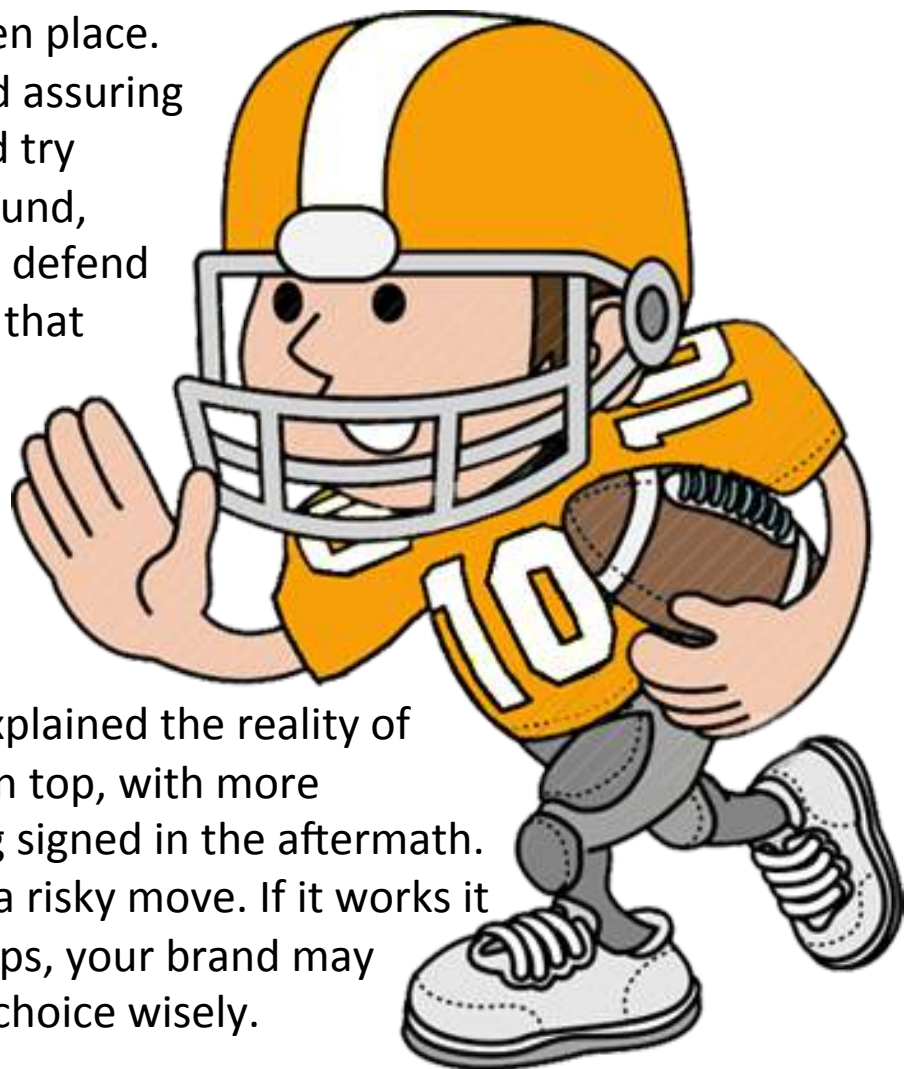


# Offense

Let's preface this by saying that going on the offense in the event of a crisis is a 1-in-100 case. Rarely will your brand succeed by standing by your position, particularly if you are in the wrong. That said, when done correctly and, more importantly, under the right circumstances, it can be an excellent way of quelling a crisis.

During a recent Winter Olympic Games, Under Armour came under fire when the American speed skating team, for whom Under Armour had designed the 'fastest' suits ever made, failed to win or even place. Instead of apologizing and assuring the world that they would try harder on the next go around, Under Armour decided to defend their product and explain that they were not to blame.

Essentially, the brand did not levy the blame elsewhere (as they easily could have) but instead stood by their product, explained the reality of the sport and came out on top, with more long-term contracts being signed in the aftermath. Going on the offensive is a risky move. If it works it is bold and genius. If it flops, your brand may never recover. Make the choice wisely.





STEP FOUR

# Assign Tasks

# Assign Tasks

## Who does what?

You've identified the crisis. You've prioritized your responses. You've determined how to respond. It's time to assign tasks to different teams.



As noted above, a crisis is not business as usual. The executive management team and perhaps legal counsel is involved in investigating and addressing the situation from the top level down. Your PR team is crafting messaging and reaching out to any and all channels, trying to prevent the story from growing any bigger. Your customer service team is on apology duty and your social media team is in engagement mode. And keep in mind that all of this is happening in seconds. You need to assign tasks and roles.



Again, this is a feature that needs to be included in your crisis management strategy. Figure out who approves outgoing messages. Make sure your teams are all working toward a specific goal and not flying by the seat of their pants.

This is where the prioritization is going to be extremely valuable. When there is a prioritized checklist of items that a team is responsible for it becomes much easier to get a handle on a situation.

# Situation Checklist

Order and a clearly outlined direction are at the root of a successful crisis management strategy. While every situation will have unique components that need to be addressed, this checklist should provide you with a good understanding of what needs to be tackled in virtually all high-priority crisis cases. Keep it handy!

- Stop all current content scheduled to go out on social media.
- Pause your marketing automation (emails, live chat, etc.)
- Pause paid campaigns on social media, search, display networks, etc.
- Gather all of the internal agencies involved (communications, legal, executive, etc.).
- Draft your top-level corporate response.
- Identify channels that are in need of immediate attention (presumably based on volume of conversation or level of negativity).
- Implement crisis protocol with your customer service team (as they will likely be fielding the first wave of direct contact from angered customers/social media users).
- Define your individual engagement strategy for both the average user and high-profile influencers.

STEP FIVE

# Take Ownership

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The high road always wins.

Of course, over the entirety of the crisis management process you have been taking ownership of the situation. At no point did you deny that anything had happened or told your unhappy followers that they were being too sensitive. (NOTE: Do not do that.)



But once the highest-rising flames have been extinguished, it's time to get out there, clearly explain what had happened and convey your sincerest apologies.



We've all seen examples of CEOs and VPs posting videos to blogs, YouTube and other social channels humbly explaining a situation and taking responsibility for the "event".

A branded apology is much better than a quote in a news publication. You want people to see that you are taking ownership of a mistake and, more important, learning from it.

STEP SIX

# When You Can't Win



# When You Can't Win

Know when to bow out.

According to Jay Baer, “Never send a third reply. A third reply is an argument, not an answer. On the third reply, you take it offline.” Put simply, you can't please everyone. There are some times when you simply aren't going to give an audience member what he or she wants. You need to know when to walk away.

Arguing over social media doesn't look good. Your brand does not always need to get the last word in. When responding to individuals, send the apology, maybe send a follow up explaining what had happened, but don't start going in circles.

Accept that a crisis means you might lose a fan or two. It's a reality of doing business on a large, public and social scale. However, with a proper strategy in place, you can minimize the impact to your brand and reputation.

AND LASTLY...

# Conclusion

# Conclusion

## What have we learned?

No one likes to think about it, but we need to be prepared. Social media has rendered the crisis an event that requires more preparedness than ever. With the right steps in place, and a proper series of strategies laid out, it can be managed effectively and successfully.

At the end of it all, however, the most important thing is this: your brand should learn from what has happened. A crisis is a great opportunity to see what works and what doesn't. Learn what makes you audience tick and what they dislike. This will help generate brand loyalists down the road and help you deal with crises more effectively in the future.

If you're interested in using our crisis management action plan, you can download the spreadsheet [here](#).



# Contact t2 to Learn More!

Are you interested in transitioning your brand into an effective social business?

Get in touch with t2 today to find out how we can help you develop an effective social business strategy.

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