

# 29

## Where? New Media Tools

The possibilities are endless.\*

—Kris Olson (*Innovis Health*, 2010)

### OVERVIEW

The unprecedented shift in media consumption habits and the exponential growth of social media have put pressure on communicators to reach their audiences in new yet cost-effective ways.

And in a crisis, you need to be where your audiences and key influencers are. Increasingly, they are online, and that is where people congregate in a crisis. Studies show that Internet usage increases in the aftermath of a crisis. You cannot ignore the big, sometimes downright scary World Wide Web or the myriad of new communication platforms. Facebook and Twitter simply connect very large clusters of people like never before.

Domino's found out the hard way when they ignored the new media space for the best part of two days. They were operating in the so-called dark ages—doing lots of things right, but not telling anyone in the Social-MediaLand. As a result, they were forced to confront a social media maelstrom after two employees posted some embarrassing footage. The

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\* Kris Olson (Vice President of Marketing, Quality, and Physicians, *Innovis Health*, Fargo, North Dakota), interview with author, March 12, 2010.

YouTube video went viral with more than a million hits before it was pulled.

In an interview with Amy Jacques for the *Public Relations Strategist*, Tim McIntyre, vice president of communications at Domino's Pizza, admitted that their Web response could have been faster. He likened what happened to them to needing a hose: "We've learned that you might not need the fire hose to put out the candle, but in the social media realm, you might want to have a garden hose handy."

McIntyre advises you to do as much as you can as fast as you can to quickly address the multiple sides of an issue.

While some have been left standing, there is no doubt that social media are useful in a crisis. Take the April 2010 Icelandic volcano eruption. Without social media, the airlines would have floundered completely after the eruption that forced the shutdown of airports across Europe and the United Kingdom, stranding hundreds of thousands of passengers trying to get to and from those destinations. Call centers could not handle the volume, and more and more airlines turned to social media as their primary crisis communication tool.

Treat social media as your friend. Respect its power. It is the place for dialogue and for conversations, not for one-way directives. Use it strategically and wisely and consider how you can engage the power of the people in helping you manage your crisis. Clearly, social media has a big role to play in issues management, but it will be necessary to at least monitor if not engage in Stage Two.

And most importantly, think about how you can get social media up and running, used regularly, and tested *before* a crisis hits. You want to be certain that everything works to expectations, and that you have an established presence with an established audience! You need to establish *trust* and transparency before the crisis hits, just as you need to with the old media.

In this chapter, we will look at the main social media tools (Table 29.1), plus the language and culture you need to adopt, and finally, how to get started so you are well equipped to manage the media in a crisis.

\* Amy Jacques, "Domino's Delivers during Crisis: The Company's Step-by-Step Response after a Vulgar Video Goes Viral," *Public Relations Strategist*, [www.prsa.org](http://www.prsa.org), August 17, 2009.

**Table 29.1** Social Media Tools

Blogs	Short for Web log, a type of Web site that is updated frequently; written in a conversational tone and contains regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material
Podcasts	Web-based audio and/or video content made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player
Social Networking Sites (Facebook, MySpace)	Online communities that allow users to connect, interact, and exchange information with those who share interests and/or activities
Microblogs (Twitter, Plurk)	Form of blogging that allows users to write brief text updates (usually 140 characters), and to publish them so that their network can view and comment on them
Mobile Text Messaging	Short text messages exchanged between mobile devices
Wikis	Collaborative Web page or collection of Web pages that allow all users to contribute or modify content
Widgets	Piece of self-contained code (a small application) that can be embedded into a Web site or program to perform a specific function
Social Bookmarking (Delicious, Digg, etc.)	Sites in which a virtual community exchanges links to content and stores links for future use
RSS Feeds	Short for Real Simple Syndication; a file that contains frequently updated information (such as news headlines or blog posts) that can be subscribed to using programs called feed readers or aggregators
Image/Video Sharing Sites (Flickr, YouTube, etc.)	User-generated sites that allow people to upload pictures or videos, and then view and comment on the uploaded content of others
Virtual Worlds (Second Life, Whyville, etc.)	A computer-based, simulated environment in which users interact with each other via avatars, virtual representations of themselves
Internet Forums	Also called message boards; online discussion sites in which users can discuss issues, exchange information, and share views
Mobile Web Sites	Web sites geared for mobile devices

Source: Booz Allen Hamilton, "Goodbye Sources, Messages, Channels and Receivers: Hello Network," White Paper from *American Public Health Association Expert Round Table on Social Media and Risk Communication during Times of Crisis*, [www.boozallen.com/consulting-services/services\\_article/42420696](http://www.boozallen.com/consulting-services/services_article/42420696), March 2009. (Reprinted with permission.)

## WEB MESSAGES: CONTENT BRUTAL AND TO THE POINT

It is vital to get the first couple of words right in the wired world. Gerry McGovern, founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Customer Carewords and New Thinking, said the following on his blog, citing a study by Jakob Nielsen: "The first two words have a huge impact on whether or not people will click on a link."

Nielsen's study, which tested links from Web sites of companies like AT&T, Intel, Dell, and UK Directgov, confirms the findings of a 2004 eye-tracking study from the Poynter Institute that most people only read on if they are "grabbed" by the first couple of words. Sounds like good newspaper headline writing to me.

Here is their advice:

- Use plain English.
- Use specific, clear words.
- Use common, compelling words.
- Start with the point; state the conclusion up front.
- Use action-oriented words.
- Lead with the need.
- Focus on what your customers care about.<sup>†</sup>

And be careful with your language—tone as well as the actual words. You cannot take it back. Trying to get something out of SocialMediaLand is, to quote Kris Olson, "a little like trying to get pee out of a swimming pool."<sup>‡</sup> Virtually impossible.

Links and headings should be no more than eight words.

Apply the *so what, who cares* rule. Be brutal and have someone with little or no knowledge of your organization read the copy before you post it, share it, and say it.

## TWITTER

Twitter is a microblog, something akin to a breaking news service, even if that news is sometimes way too personal.

\* Posted by Gerry McGovern, "Writing Killer Web Headings and Links," New Thinking Blog, <http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/nt/2009/nt-2009-04-13-web-headings-links.htm>, April 13, 2009.

† Jakob Nielsen, "First 2 Words: A Signal for the Scanning Eye," Nielsen Gorman Group (Fremont, California), 2009.

‡ Kris Olson (Vice President of Marketing, Quality, and Physicians, Innovis Health, Fargo, North Dakota), interview with author, March 12, 2010.

Here is one way of thinking about Twitter: It is a bit like a street party—There are people who are only interested in hanging out with their own group as opposed to the whole street party. You need to attend the party and listen to see what conversations are worth joining.

According to Distinguished Professor S. Shyam Sundar,\* founder and codirector of Pennsylvania State University's Media Effects Research Laboratory, where he studies the psychology of communication technology, Twitter is predominantly a push mechanism. Using Twitter, you push out information, push links, and push to other, more detailed information like your Web site, emergency services, your blog, or your YouTube TV Channel.

The other big advantage to using Twitter in a crisis is that you can make almost instantaneous updates to dispel rumors, correct misinformation, and reach people very quickly with timely, potentially life-saving information.

Like other media, there are rules of engagement. Here are some basic ones:

- *Be sincere*—Transparency is vital, be as human as you can be.
- *Empathize*—Remember, no one can hear the tone of your voice or see your body language, so your words are your weapon.
- *Be culturally sensitive*—Be aware of the cultural norms of the communities you are dealing with and remember that Twitter is global.
- *Never argue*—If someone has a gripe, let them have a gripe. Seriously, who wants to engage with a company if they perceive you are only interested in arguing? If you argue publicly there are really only two outcomes:
  - You look like a fool.
  - They look like a fool (that will only make the situation worse for you), so take the conversation offline.
- *Provide links to more information*—Push people to more detailed information.
- *Provide context*—Remember that most people can't see what you are responding to.
- *Use proper grammar*—Use proper capitalization. Typing in lower case does not save characters, it is just lazy. If you cannot say it in 140 or 120 characters, reevaluate whether you should be posting it on Twitter in the first place. Use numerals, not words, for all numbers.

\* S. Shyam Sundar (Codirector, Media Effects Research Laboratory, Penn State University), interview with author, April 13, 2009.

- *Update early and often*—Just like with the old media there is a need to update regularly on Twitter and this medium is absolutely ideal for that. With Twitter, you can update almost immediately. [Link for more detail.](#)

For the record, there were 27.3 *million* tweets on Twitter per day in November 2009, and 57 *percent* of Twitter's user base is located in the United States. In Australia, Twitter's audience levels grew by more than 400 percent in 2009 and nearly one quarter of online Australians (23 percent) read tweets.

If for no other reason, you can use Twitter for more effective media relations.

### Media Relations

You can use Twitter to determine who and how to respond to the traditional media in a crisis. For Innovis Health in Fargo, North Dakota, Twitter was a godsend during the 2009 floods. They used Twitter and the more traditional blogs to get out vital information to the community. They were operational; unlike their competitor, they had not shut their doors. The traditional media were isolated and could not get to Innovis, so Innovis became the media. They got the messages and images out there, and within minutes 1,500 media outlets around America were following them, and most importantly, getting the message out that Innovis was open for business.

Similarly, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) uses the microblog to direct its followers (more than 12,000 at the time of writing) to specific information in a timely manner in emergencies and disasters. The agency sees Twitter like an instant messaging service and uses it to support efforts of local and state emergency responders.

Once you know who is following you and, more importantly, what is being said about you, you can make an informed decision about what resources to put where. You can customize a more specific, targeted response to address individual concerns. You can address where the most heat is coming from or you can reach out personally to a specific journalist or media outlet.

In a crisis, remember keywords and # hash tags, for example, #Haiti. You need to think and agree in advance of what is the one word you are going to use in a crisis, and make sure that this is agreed by the Crisis Management Team and anyone tweeting within your stakeholder group. Hash tags are important because they improve searchability. You can track and monitor comments and the levels of engagement more effectively.



For example, Innovis Health agreed in advance with everyone in their emergency community what the # would be when preparing for floods in March 2010. Excellent planning.

### Protect Your Brand

A word of warning—protect your brand. Just like in the early days of the Internet, there are squatters on Twitter who take over big brand names. They register the names on Twitter, for example, and sit there or, worse, make comments. Coca Cola and CNN found out the hard way. Even if you do not have a Twitter feed, check if your company's name is available on Twitter. If available, grab it. The last thing you want is for someone to hijack your company's name and send erroneous updates to it. Then you will have a crisis.

BP faced this challenge during the oil spill disaster. An imposter launched @bpglobalpr which even used BP's green and yellow logo, defaced with blackened oil. At the time of writing BP had not asked Twitter to take the site down, and Twitter apparently will not do that unless it is asked. The situation is a timely reminder for companies, particularly the big brand names and even more so for those who have very active detractors, of what might occur with their own names in a Twitter context. The lesson? Think about what to do to preserve your corporate identities intact—in good times and bad. And have this in your policy guidelines, particularly for the social media team monitoring the use of the company logo.

### Hash Tags (#)

Another important tool for you to use in a crisis, to maximize your message, or to search for content that is abusive or fouling your brand in some way is the hash tag (#).

A hash tag is a way to categorize content in your tweets to better find information. To set one up you simply type the # sign followed by pertinent words, a phrase, or an abbreviation. For example, #RedCross, #Haiti, #Icelandic.

During the Nestlé "Kat Fight with Greenpeace" there were several hash tag references on Twitter, including #kitkat, #nestle, #Orangutan, and #greenpeace, mostly negative comments about Nestle. Needless to say there were a bevy of #tags when news surfaced of Tiger Woods' sordid affairs: #tiger woods #joslyn james #email #celeb #golf #affair #cheat.

Hash tags are very valuable for coordinating efforts to raise money for disaster victims, as well as an effective way to help coordinate response and rescue in a natural disaster, or regularly and quickly update information. For example, #tags were used to good effect during the 2009 Atlanta

flash floods—#atlflood—with updates on flash floods, road closures, and power outages.

They may never have taken off if it were not for Nate Ritter, self-proclaimed Web chef, consultant, and knowledge broker living in San Diego, tweeting during the San Diego forest fire in 2007. His efforts, according to Chris Messina, written in his FactoryCity Blog, were the first dedicated use of a hash tag to help coordinate a response to a natural disaster.

Be careful not to overdo the #tag communication. To be effective they need to be simple and memorable. As Messina says, "Successful structures should aim for minimum cognitive burden." Consider your audience and their familiarity with the issue being tweeted about if you want your #tag understood and, most importantly for rescue efforts, to be retweeted.

## FACEBOOK

If Twitter is like a street party, then Facebook is more like a barbeque, a family reunion, or a Christmas get-together. You see the same people as you circle the room or go back and forth to the buffet, and they represent all ages and stages of life—just like Facebook.

These people are your friends, your family; you have *chosen* to connect with them and involve them in your life. And you do not pull out the Amway catalog the minute they walk in the door, if ever! Your real friends, those you have engaged will want to know what has happened to you in a crisis. The same applies if you are a *big* brand and have a public scrap, like Nestlé did with Greenpeace. Fans, both pro and con, will galvanize. Opinions will be expressed.

Make no mistake, Facebook is powerful. It has morphed from the "Internet's phone book"<sup>\*</sup> to the go-to place for information, if not breaking news. Within minutes, if not seconds, after a crisis event, you will find thousands of posts on Facebook.

Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, US Airways flight 1549, the Victorian bushfires, the earthquake in Haiti, and the Icelandic volcano eruption all have one thing in common. Each event spurred dozens if not hundreds of Facebook groups often within hours, if not minutes, of the actual event occurring. For example, followers set up Facebook groups during the

<sup>\*</sup> Posted by Chris Messina, "Designing Hashtags for Emergency Response," FactoryCity Blog, <http://factoryjoe.com/blog/2010/01/18/designing-hashtags-for-emergency-response/>, January 18, 2010.

<sup>†</sup> Posted by Matthew Kaskavitch, "Facebook Use in Crisis Management, Techization Blog, <http://techization.com/facebook-use-in-crisis-management/>, October 26, 2009.



Virginia Tech tragedy within 15 minutes of the news breaking. A Fort Hood group, "Remember Those from the Fort Hood Mass Shooting," was still very active with more than 46,000 fans at the time of writing.

KLM published a video message from the CEO and president and added a Q & A tab to their Facebook page to reach their stranded passengers during the Icelandic volcano eruption that grounded hundreds of flights and thousands of people in April 2010.

What makes Facebook work is the open platform that enables its massive user base—500 million and counting at an average age of 38 and a whopping 67 percent of all social media users\*—to share and exchange information at light speed. Facebook is the world's dominant social network, and it is the top search term at Google, Bing, and Yahoo. Time will tell whether the protests about and inquiries into its privacy issues will topple the giant, though I strongly doubt it.

And in a crisis, Facebook is where people gather to share thoughts, feelings, and emotions. They post pictures and videos, and stream their collective consciousness of the crisis, forming a powerful, virtual news channel.

Distinguished Professor Sundar (Penn State University) says that Facebook is a pull mechanism (information designed to pull you into buying or doing something).<sup>†</sup> And it is certainly proving its pull strength in a crisis.

Using Facebook on a regular basis will allow it to be used during a crisis to:

- Dispel rumors.
- Post pictures and videos.
- Speak to your "fans"—your staff, your customers.
- Mobilize your "friends" into action.
- Create a "safe" place for people to share feelings, thoughts, and emotions.

As a social media expert, commentator, and blogger, Shel Holtz says that before you launch into Facebook, you need to have a solid strategy.<sup>‡</sup> And

\* The Nielsen Company, "Led by Facebook, Twitter, Global Time Spent on Social Media Sites up 82% Year over Year," Nielsen Wire Blog, <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire>, January 22, 2010.

† S. Shyam Sundar (Codirector, Media Effects Research Laboratory, Penn State University), interview with author, April 13, 2009.

‡ Posted by Shel Holtz, "Six Questions to Ask before Launching a Facebook Fan Page," A Shel of My Former Self Blog, [http://blog.holtz.com/index.php/weblog/comments/six\\_questions\\_to\\_ask\\_before\\_launching\\_a\\_facebook\\_fan\\_page/](http://blog.holtz.com/index.php/weblog/comments/six_questions_to_ask_before_launching_a_facebook_fan_page/), March 23, 2010.

even if you already have a Facebook presence, you would be well advised to take on this advice:

- What are your goals and who exactly are you trying to reach?
- What will you do if critics see your page as an opportunity to express even more hostile feelings?
- Who will manage your page? As Holtz says, you need to keep the page updated. If you leave an open space unattended for a while, what happens? Weeds grow, it is vandalized, or squatters take over.\* The same happens in SocialMediaLand.
- Who will monitor the page? Companies look clueless when nothing is posted, or no one responds to fans' questions and comments. It is a must in a crisis and needs to be done with sensitivity and, hopefully, experience.
- How quickly will you respond when a crisis strikes? Exactly who will respond? For example, General Motors enlisted their environmental chief when they were "attacked" by environmental activists.

### Facebook Dark Groups

With *New Scientist* research showing that social networking sites like Facebook spread warnings and information more efficiently than traditional communication channels, organizations are looking to use Facebook in their crisis management plans.

University of Wisconsin–Stout, is one such organization. With the assistance of Information and Communication Technologies student Matthew Kaskavitch, the university is using Facebook to create dark groups.

Like dark Web sites, dark groups are visible only to the creator and a handful of people responsible for the crisis planning efforts. They are pre-loaded with crisis plans and messages. Once the crisis occurs, you simply go live. Kaskavitch says to invite the first 10 to 15 people to follow, become a fan. The group, he says, "will grow exponentially"† with little administration.

Kaskavitch, who is also the university's Student Life Services Web Programmer and New Media consultant, says that in crisis management, you need to consider a few things before using Facebook as a platform:

\* Posted by Shel Holtz, "Six Questions to Ask before Launching a Facebook Fan Page," A Shel of My Former Self Blog, [http://blog.holtz.com/index.php/weblog/comments/six\\_questions\\_to\\_ask\\_before\\_launching\\_a\\_facebook\\_fan\\_page/](http://blog.holtz.com/index.php/weblog/comments/six_questions_to_ask_before_launching_a_facebook_fan_page/), March 23, 2010.

† Matthew Kaskovitch (University of Wisconsin–Stout, Student Life Services Web Programmer and New Media Consultant), interview with author, February 24, 2010.

- Will you include photos and videos in the group? If so, will only administrators be allowed to upload media or will everyone be allowed to contribute?
- Do you want to enable the "wall" to allow open conversation?
- Do you want the discussion board enabled?
- Who will manage it in the event of a crisis?"

Another key consideration is whether you lock down a group in a crisis. Is that wise? What impression will that create?

Kaskavitch says no! "Locking down the group and making it a billboard inside a walled garden is not effective."<sup>†</sup>

Kaskavitch, who has consulted and researched widely on Facebook and general social media crisis strategies within the university system, says you have to be willing to open up and let information flow across the channel in an unfiltered manner. "The speed at which it can go back and forth across this medium could be incredibly useful during an emergency. You want your message to get out, and you should want feedback from your receiving audience as well."<sup>‡</sup>

Creating dark groups will not, of course, stop other groups from forming, but having an official channel allows you to:

- Direct message all members of your group instantly.
- Control the message and information presented within the group.
- Censor information (only if absolutely necessary).

Like with everything else in crisis planning, you need to think ahead of time how you will use the channel. As Kaskavitch points out, there is a constraint with creating groups ahead of time. You need to name the dark group when you set it up, and you cannot change it later on. Also, you will not be able to put actual situation-specific information in the group name.

I am a big fan of dark sites in general and the concept of a dark group is sound. Kaskavitch suggests, and I agree, that setting up your communication in a Word document is more practical. You may lose precious time—up to 20 minutes—in setup time. But you will have a situation-specific name that can be easily identified by your key audiences. That is important.

\* Matthew Kaskovitch (University of Wisconsin-Stout, Student Life Services Web Programmer and New Media Consultant), interview with author, February 24, 2010.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

### Facebook: The Future

Is there no end to the Facebook capability in a crisis? Perhaps not. Futurist Brian Solis certainly sees the social media darling as a key focus for communicators.\*

Solis, globally recognized as one of most prominent thought leaders and published authors in new media, says Facebook—with twice as many registered users as Twitter—will be the main way to communicate with audiences.

There is also talk that it will become the #1 spot for people to get their news. It has a massive user base. Stalwarts of news like *The Wall Street Journal* are already publishing content to the popular networking site, and Facebook itself is actively encouraging users to set up news lists. *They want to be your news source.*

If this is not enough to convince you, Facebook is the most used network for professional purposes; the social media powerhouse is the number one choice for research for mainstream media. According to a survey of 1,400 journalists, nearly 40% use Facebook once a week or more frequently to research stories. Facebook is also the social network that journalists join—an overwhelming 90% surveyed reporting membership.† They will find you. Why Facebook? All the information is conveniently in one place.

Huffington Post, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, not to mention countless blogs, are but some outlets linking content to Facebook.

Web strategists say that Facebook fan page brand-jacking is the new form of tree hugging. Expect more of this in the future, not less.

Is Facebook part of your crisis media strategy? If not, then hop to it. You are missing out on a vital news channel. At the very least, make sure you have your company name registered, or someone will take it and deface it!

### Univision: An Alternative to Facebook—Useful for the U.S. Army

Sometimes the culture and goals of the organization, in addition to the type of crisis, determine different choices. For example, the U.S. Army undertook an initiative in 2007 to reach the Hispanic community. They

\* Brian Solis, *Ragan Third Annual Social Media for Communicators Conference*, Coca-Cola Company World HQ, (Atlanta, Georgia), February 23, 2010.

† "2010 Journalist Survey on Media Relations Practices," *Bulldog Reporter*, TEKGROUP International, October 2010.

used Univision, a Spanish-language television network in the United States and Puerto Rico, rather than the ever-popular Facebook. This choice was driven partly because of the language capability and partly because Univision offers a moderating service that checks user updates for appropriateness before posting them to its site.

### Video and YouTube

The growing use of video-sharing sites means that video communication must play an integral part of an organization's crisis communication plan.

Video is hot! Internet users continue to watch more and more videos online. Year to year figures (March 2009 to March 2010) show that video views jumped a whopping 80 percent! The average online viewer watched a staggering 173.3 videos in that month (March) alone. And by 2014, Cisco Systems predicts that a staggering 91% of Internet networking consumer traffic will be online video.\*

YouTube leads the way. The total number of videos served on YouTube in one day is a staggering 1 billion.<sup>†</sup> Twenty hours of video is uploaded EVERY minute,<sup>‡</sup> and more than 12 billion videos are viewed each month in the United States.<sup>§</sup>

With these numbers, you can safely become your own broadcaster and take control of your message. Anyone can post content. Toyota did during its massive global recall in 2010. Domino's did. JetBlue did.

United Airlines felt the power of YouTube when Canadian singer-songwriter Dave Carroll posted a "United Breaks Guitars" music video to the site.<sup>¶</sup> The song quickly became a page of Internet history. The video went viral and has been viewed more than 5.5 million times and has prompted more than 22,000 comments, many from people telling their own horror stories about airport baggage handling in general and United Airlines in particular.

To be successful and effective with Internet video, you need to be timely and relevant—just like traditional TV news. But unlike TV news and current affairs, you do not need to be as slick nor as professional. It is often more about speed than glamour.

\* Cisco Systems, "Cisco Predicts Online Video to Be 91% of Global Consumer Traffic by 2014," Press Release, <http://www.hardware.com/news/voip/cisco-predicts-online-video-to-be-91-of-global-consumer-traffic-by-2014/>, August 2010.

† "Internet in Numbers," Royal Pingdom, <http://royal.pingdom.com>, January 22, 2010.

‡ "YouTube Fact Sheet," YouTube, [www.youtube.com/t/fact\\_sheet](http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet), December 15, 2010.

§ "Internet in Numbers," Royal Pingdom, <http://royal.pingdom.com>, January 22, 2010.

¶ Dave Carroll, Dave Carroll Music, <http://www.davecarrollmusic.com/ubg/story/>, July 6, 2009.



Kaskavitch explains. His video of the student against the infamous Westboro Baptist Church counterprotest in April 2008, taken with a simple six-megapixel Canon camera, was a hit on YouTube with nearly 50,000 views within hours of posting.\* Why? Timeliness and relevance.

With the eye of a TV news journalist, he made sure he got all the right angles to tell the story. Kaskavitch "put the lens where it needed to go,"† capturing newsworthy and compelling shots such as undercover cops arresting students. He edited the footage and aired it within 35 minutes of the protest being shut down. While it may not have been of the highest quality, it did the job and (at the time of writing) had more than 100,000 views.

Video offers a real-time human response that you can control. You can show the "whites of your eyes," which is so very important in a crisis to achieve credibility. You can demonstrate empathy and compassion, which is hard to achieve in formal, written statements.

You do need to have a credible video response and an established promotion channel as part of your response plan. But just like every other communication channel, particularly in the social media world, you need to have an established presence *before* a crisis hits to be viable.

According to Douglas Simon, president and CEO of DS Simon Productions, a broadcast public relations (PR) firm, organizations need to already have "an established video channel that *informs—or entertains—* your key audiences so that you have built an audience and goodwill before a crisis hits."‡ He says that "having an online Web presence will increase the speed of distribution and reach of your crisis response."§

Simon says there are three key components to successful online videos:

1. *Content creation*—You need a spokesperson who is comfortable in front of a camera. Be professional but not overdone. Authenticity is key.
2. *Promotion plan*—Syndicate to YouTube and other key sites, make sure that the content can be easily shared and posted to sites like

\* Matthew Kaskovitch (University of Wisconsin-Stout, Student Life Services Web Programmer and New Media Consultant), interview with author, February 24, 2010.

† Ibid.

‡ Douglas Simon (Simon Productions), "Fast Forward: Using Web Video to Respond in a Crisis," *Public Relations Tactics*, [http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/tactics/articles/view/8149/101/fast\\_forward\\_using\\_web\\_video\\_to\\_respond\\_in\\_a\\_crisi?utm\\_campaign=PRSAsearch&utm\\_source=PRSAWebsite&utm\\_medium=SSearch&utm\\_term=Douglas%20Simon%20July%207%2C%202009](http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/tactics/articles/view/8149/101/fast_forward_using_web_video_to_respond_in_a_crisi?utm_campaign=PRSAsearch&utm_source=PRSAWebsite&utm_medium=SSearch&utm_term=Douglas%20Simon%20July%207%2C%202009), July 7, 2009.

§ Ibid.



Facebook and Twitter, and aim for coverage on sites like Digg and StumbleUpon. As Simon says, you need your allies in a crisis, so remember to make the content available to trusted business-to-friend (B2F) networks.

3. *Measurement*—You can measure the hits to your video on your Web site, on YouTube, or through a Google search. However, if the crisis is very big, you will need a more detailed measurement to see the impact on the brand.\*

I would add the following:

1. Take a leaf out of TV news—Go for the angles that will be relevant to the audience.
2. Keep it short—Nothing over four minutes, ideally TV news length, around one-and-a-half minutes.
3. Include a “talking head.”
4. Make sure you are telling the human side of the story with compelling visuals.
5. Link the content and make sure you have the right tags.

Video is not the panacea to solving your crisis, but it is a tremendously useful tool in helping to disseminate a powerful visual message. Many people prefer to learn from watching footage rather than from reading something.

A simple video recorded on a Flip camera may be all that it takes to put the issue into perspective. I recommend that every communication department, indeed everyone who is in business today, needs to have a Flip camera. They are a very valuable crisis management tool—right up there with the mobile phone.

Always use the mantra “What is the overall impression I want to create given situation X.” This will help you decide exactly how you will create your content, the look and the feel, and who will be your talking head.

Determining the appropriate person for different situations and determining the shooting location will be very important. And it might not be the corporate video studio.

\* Douglas Simon (Simon Productions), “Fast Forward: Using Web Video to Respond in a Crisis,” *Public Relations Tactics*, [http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/tactics/articles/view/8149/101/fast\\_forward\\_using\\_web\\_video\\_to\\_respond\\_in\\_a\\_crisi?utm\\_campaign=PRSAsearch&utm\\_source=PRSAWebsite&utm\\_medium=SSearch&utm\\_term=Douglas%20Simon%20July%207%2C%202009](http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/tactics/articles/view/8149/101/fast_forward_using_web_video_to_respond_in_a_crisi?utm_campaign=PRSAsearch&utm_source=PRSAWebsite&utm_medium=SSearch&utm_term=Douglas%20Simon%20July%207%2C%202009), July 7, 2009.