

## **Common Steps to Adopting the Use of Social Media in Emergency Management**

### **Focus first on the outcome you wish to achieve**

Establish the outcome that you wish to achieve: With whom are you communicating and why? What is the communication about? What is the intent of the message or what are you looking to know?

### **Be prepared to adapt how you engage your audience**

Be prepared to adapt how you engage your audience through social media as you and your audience explore applications and their limitations. Create an emphasis on making your tools and communication accessible through mobile means.

### **Choose a few tools and develop them well\***

Many new users to social media start with one platform, become comfortable with the communication and its relationship to existing operations, and then slowly start to use other social media platforms, naturally picking them up, learning, and then expanding. This includes integration between social media platforms and organizational websites and the use of multimedia sites which are a natural progression with links to multi-media.

### **Create a trial account before creating an official one**

While still operating out in the open, creating a trial account allows you to gain familiarity first before broadly rolling out your official presence. This will give you the opportunity to make some mistakes, operating under the radar, without having them publicized broadly at the start.

### **Establish a support structure**

Develop a support structure, including human resources who will manage the accounts with guidelines (policies and procedures when necessary), and training in their use at all levels. Be creative in using current staff to enhance what you want to do and cross train staff on the different platforms used.

Use subject matter experts to help with data collection\*

Social media management and measurement can be complicated and using subject matter experts who understand the field can help make use out of the wealth of data available.

### **Develop a mentorship and demonstrations from experienced users**

Wading into the language of social media may be like reading to a foreign language. It can help to have those who are familiar with those platforms explain the terms and ways they are used so that all staff can communicate effectively. Pairing staff who understand the platforms with those less familiar is a good way of bridging the knowledge gap.

### **Establish news feeds (RSS)**

Establishing a news feed or using RSS (Really Simple Syndication) allows an organization to publish new content on a website, blog, or other news and syndicate this to subscribers. The feed is a summarized text of the original web page along with metadata, such as date, ownership, title, and description. News feeds make it easier for people to subscribe to your web pages without having to go and visit.

### **Leverage partners and volunteers**

Partner agencies and volunteers, whether under the umbrella of an organization or independent, should be taken into consideration. Establishing connections formal and informal where you can coordinate your messages or activities before, during, and after an emergency helps to communicate with one voice. Using trained volunteers, be they collocated or remote, can help increase your capacity to manage social media communication, in particular during a crisis when social networks are lit up with posts.

### **Make people available to answer questions**

Remember that social media is a conversation and not just a broadcasting channel. Make sure that you have staff who can monitor your social media sites on a steady basis using an aggregating tool or other regular update, and reply to questions or correct misinformation when it appears.

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**Trust the public, the community's most wired citizens**

Encourage participation and public feedback to encourage ongoing investments in social media use. Social media communities are surprisingly self-correcting when users are out of line or feed incorrect information, although they do require some level of involvement by an organization. However, engaging with the public and allowing them to actively communicate with your organization can bring about a greater relationship of mutual trust.

**Develop a strategy**

- Form a social media committee to support its use.
- Set goals: identify the audience explain what benefits will be derived from social media use and how risks will be mitigated.
- Develop simple metrics of evaluating the benefits, some qualitative and some quantitative.
- Define an "online persona" or "character" for your online presence, this may or may not be the same as your offline presence.
- Establish practical and transparent reporting and analysis processes, and track progress to measure program success.
- Set expectations, including some room for mistakes.
- Ensure legal language is included where needed. Make sure that promises are kept.
- Integrate social media into organization's business: website, operations, exercises, and plans; continuously improve on its use in after action reviews and improvement plans.

\* Tinker, T. & Vaughan, E. (2010) Risk and Crisis Communications: Best Practices for Government Agencies and Non-Profit Organizations. Washington, DC: Booz Allen Hamilton. Available online at <http://www.boozallen.com/media/file/Risk-and-Crisis-Communications-Guide.pdf>, accessed October 8, 2011.

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