



Succeed with Social Media

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Crisis Response Plan Basics

Social media is the way of the world. Well over one billion people worldwide use at least one form of social media on a daily basis, and that number keeps increasing. Most businesses have followed suit, realising that social media is a useful way to build a brand and reach customers where they are—online.

It's easy to interact with customers via social media if your company has a positive image. But what if one of your employees posts a customer's private information on Twitter or uploads a video to YouTube of another employee behaving inappropriately in the break room? You could be dealing with a social media nightmare. Without a proper crisis response plan in place, your countless hours spent increasing brand awareness and goodwill could evaporate. Use the following tips to help create a crisis response plan for your business.

Be prepared

The key to proper crisis management is being ready before it happens. Form a social media crisis response team comprised of employees from all departments. Discuss threats to your social media presence, such as a rogue employee posting negative content or a customer having a negative experience with one of your employees or with your product in general. Have procedures mapped out in advance, including:

- How you'll decide your response (who will craft it and who must approve)
- How you'll communicate your response (you may have a number of options depending on the scenario)
- Who will be responsible for various tasks
- Which internal departments will need information about the issue
- How you'll manage any additional press

With potential threats identified, a crisis response flowchart can help everyone on the team stay on the same page when dealing with a specific type of crisis. The flowchart lets employees know what they can respond to themselves and how they should respond, what might need to be run up the ladder for a more formal corporate response and what can be left for a non-employee to respond to. A sample flow chart is provided at the end of this document.

The flowchart asks basic YES or NO questions to determine the proper action to take. Benefits of the flowchart include:

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A social media crisis response plan is essential for businesses of all sizes.
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- **Ease of implementation.** The flowchart should indicate exactly who is in charge of what if a crisis arises in order to get a response out as soon as possible.
- **Consistency.** If all employees are following the same plan, your message will have a clear, unified voice.
- **Speed.** Instead of losing time discussing how to respond, the flowchart offers a clear way to handle the issue quickly. In addition, set up Google® Alerts or a similar service to keep track of what people are saying about your brand in real-time. You can receive an email whenever your specified terms are found online, helping you find positive and negative mentions you may have missed. If you are on Twitter®, regularly conduct a search for your company name to find tweets that mention you, even if they don't use your @username or a hashtag. This way, you can be on top of a crisis before it turns unpleasant.

Act quickly

Twenty-four hours in social media time is an eternity. Time is of the essence, and your customers will expect a quick response should you face a social media crisis.

Realise that social media never sleeps—it lives on well after normal business hours. Several members of your crisis response team should keep their eyes on your social media outlets after business hours in case something comes up. Taking too long to respond shows your customers that you're either not listening or you don't care, which can lead to more incidents. The longer you wait to respond to issues, the more time people have to tell their friends and spread negative sentiment towards your company. You may also want to discuss a new marketing or PR campaign to bring positive attention to your company following a negative situation.

Using the right medium to respond to a crisis can be a useful line of defence. If the crisis begins as a negative video posted on YouTube, post a video in response. If it begins with a negative comment on your Facebook page, respond there first. If you can contain the problem to one media source, you have a much better chance of limiting the damage.

Tone matters

Perhaps a useful way to engage your customers is to incorporate a little humour into your social media messages. However, this might not be the best course of action when dealing with a crisis. If done correctly, your tone can ease customers' minds and help boost the company back into a positive light.

No matter how angry a customer is with your company or its products, do not reply with anger. If a person is intentionally attacking your company, invite him or her to contact you directly to deal with the issue. If the comment is full of derogatory language or attacks specific employees, delete the comment. However, if the comment is vague and doesn't attack anyone in particular (for instance, 'your company stinks'), deleting it may encourage others to post similar things.

Other tone-related tips include the following:

- Always be polite and thank customers for their input.
- Politely correct customers posting inaccurate information, even if it is on another site that you don't directly control.
- Be authentic. If you are making an apology, don't copy and paste the same bland jargon to every comment—customers will see that as being lazy and careless.
- Humour isn't always warranted, but it can have a powerful impact to turn your image around. Your customers will realise that people sometimes make

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A crisis response plan can help minimise damage to your brand.

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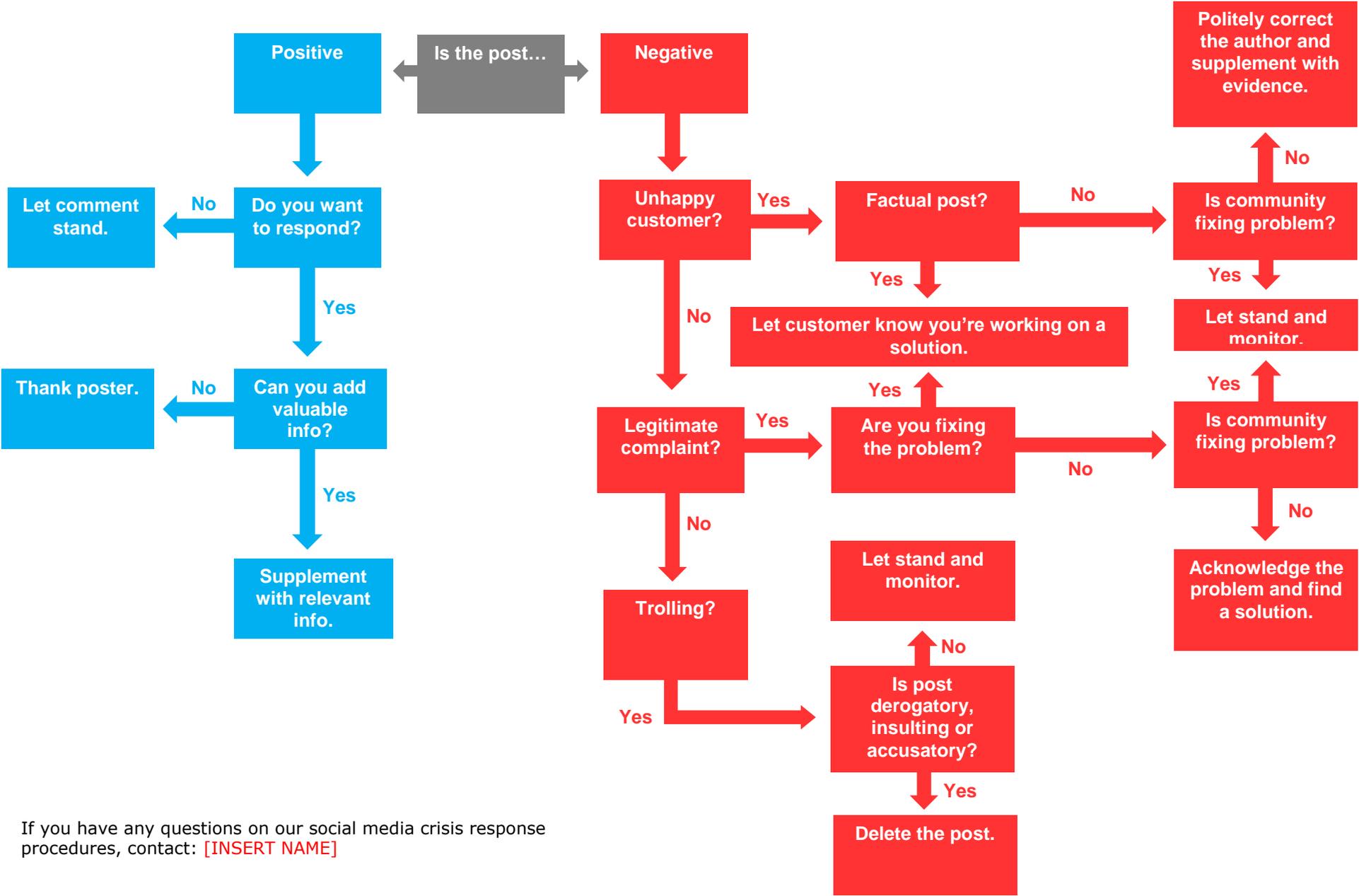
mistakes, and a humorous message about how you plan to fix the problem can go a long way.

Follow through

As you roll out your message, determine whether it is reaching the appropriate people and/or having the desired results. Don't be afraid to tweak your strategy during your response, if prudent.

Just because you have a crisis response plan in place doesn't mean you'll be experts when the time comes to execute it. Have quarterly "fire drills" to keep the plan fresh in employees' minds. The better your employees know the plan, the more quickly you can respond. If a crisis occurs, let customers know you're taking steps to correct the issue and share your plan. They will appreciate the honesty and you should be in the good graces of your customers again in no time.

Crisis Response Flowchart



If you have any questions on our social media crisis response procedures, contact: [INSERT NAME]