**Responding on Social Media**

It is important to communicate via social media to ensure your supporters feel informed, to prevent naysayers from taking over your social media channels, and to correct misinformation.

Conversations on social media can move quickly, so it is important to prioritize which channels to respond on first, and which types of conversations warrant a response.

*Proactive vs. Reactive*

In a crisis situation, a general rule of thumb is to reactively respond to comments, tweets or posts about the crisis when asked on social media channels. The goal is to not stray from your typical social media voice during a crisis. Continue to post positive content proactively as you would normally, but be mindful of the content.

*When to Respond: Threat Assessment*

Owned social media channels, such as your Facebook page and Twitter account, are the top priority in terms of responding on social media. Once all messages have been appropriately distributed on your channels and a schedule is in place for monitoring and responding, then resources can be allocated to respond on non-owned channels.

In general, the following checklist will help you assess when to respond and how to respond.

1. Is the comment neutral? If yes, leave it alone or engage the person. If it makes sense, respond with a question asking their thoughts on what they posted. This can move a relationship from passive to positive.
2. Is the comment positive? If yes, acknowledge your fan. Say thank you, Like, retweet, or reaffirm the comment by referencing the relevant values or mission reflected in their comment. Make a note that this person is a fan.
3. Is the comment negative? If the comment is negative, only respond to the following types of posts to focus your efforts:
   * Legitimate complaints: Acknowledge the situation and apologize if necessary. Explain the position or reason if possible. Rectify the situation if you can.
   * Substantive criticism: Acknowledge the situation and apologize if necessary. Explain the position or reason if possible.
   * Correcting an erroneous fact: Correct the facts with cited sources if possible. Be positive rather than defensive.
4. Certain posts may be considered baseless rants by someone who is posting an opinion but clearly not interested in engaging in a conversation. Do not waste time and effort responding to these posts. Instead, monitor the community’s reaction to their post. On Facebook, you can use your rules of engagement to mark baseless, ranting posts as spam or hide the “ranters” post on your page.

*Prepare for Social Media Responses*

Use the following checklist to ensure you are prepared to respond on social media during a crisis:

1. Set up a social media monitoring program.
2. Identify and assemble your social media crisis team. Have additional people on standby to assist if conversation volume grows significantly.
3. Determine your social response capability based on resources.
4. Train crisis team(s) on acceptable social voice in a crisis.
5. Train crisis team(s) on key messages.
6. Define roles and responsibilities for all of the various tasks.
7. Decide if/when you will pause proactive content strategies when a crisis hits.
8. Ensure your rules of engagement are up-to-date and clearly posted.
9. Create your own hashtag for your Twitter responses.
10. Anticipate questions and accusations from media and community, and draft social-friendly responses.

Overall Objectives

The following are objectives to keep in mind related to social media when you are in the midst of a crisis situation:

1. Stay in the conversation.
2. Be seen as responsive and thoughtful, but firm when correcting erroneous facts.
3. Prioritize answering questions posed to you and proactively correcting misinformation over general messaging responses.
4. Be the information source. Consistently point people to your website when applicable.
5. Keep business-as-usual in proactive content, and have discussions in comments.
6. Avoid sounding defensive.
7. Stick to your key messages.