

Adding Social Media Elements and Tools to Crisis Simulations

By Andrew Gilman

Crisis Simulations and Drills are critical to adequate crisis preparation. We advise clients that even the best and carefully crafted Crisis Plans are only worth the paper they are written on *unless the client engages in a drill or simulation to test the words.*

Since social media is an important element in Crisis Response, it's important to incorporate Social Media and the latest technologies into crisis simulations and drills.

Each time we run a simulation, we add more and more social media elements. A recent one for a client was probably the richest in terms of social media elements and taking advantage of new technology. Here's what we did:

1. **Drafting Fact Patterns.** The key to any simulation is crafting a realistic fact pattern. In order to engage the participants, it's important to draft a set of facts that are plausible and also stretch the teams. The fact patterns should reflect the elements of current communications:
 - Twitter postings from those impacted by the events
 - Twitpic photos of the events
 - Bloggers who can post from a laptop in the middle of an incident
 - YouTube videos
2. **Setting up the simulation.** We usually introduce the initial fact patterns with an initial premise, followed by two or three pages of events. It's just as easy to use two or three PowerPoint slides with video embedded into the slide.
3. **Technology.** Flip cams vs. broadcast cameras. Until a couple of years ago, we usually hired camera crews and set up editing suites for rapid filming and turn around of drill

segments. Now, with a flip camera, video production is in a different mode. The pre-recorded segments can easily be shot with a flip cam. During the drill, one or two flip cams at less than \$200 per camera are reasonable substitutes for the high end cameras.

Skype interviews beat out a speaker phone. One of top elements in a drill is to conduct a live interview with role players. Skype makes the interview truly come alive. Just arrange for a team member to be available, set up the video Skype interview and let it play. Sure, with unlimited budgets, it's helpful to have an edit suite and have cuts between shots.

4. Other elements:

- Pre-plan faux web sites, publications, twitter pages. It's very easy to click on a site and draft a web page or create a fake Twitter posting. For example, a recent fact pattern involved events at Ohio State University. In advance, we created pages for the Columbus Dispatch, a local TV station and the Buckeye Booster.
- A lap top and a pen drive are all you need to set up Blogs during the session. Appoint one of the participants to be a blogger and ask the person to write a posting every 5 minutes. Then put these up on the screen or print them out for participants as needed.
- Caveats: As tempting as it is, **DO NOT POST ANY SIMULATION COMPONENTS TO A REAL SOCIAL MEDIA SITE.** It's not worth the risk to have a fake posting up, even for 60 seconds

5. **Budget savings.** Don't get me wrong. There's nothing better than the full scale simulation with camera crews and edit teams, video monitors and extras. However, in today's economy, most clients prefer to put the budget into the preparation, planning and real world

events. Flip cams and other technology aids can reduce the out of pocket costs by up to 80% in a simulation.

6. What hasn't changed with social media.

The best Crisis Simulations have at least two drills during the course of the day. The first drill works well as table top with all participants responding to facts and making decisions. This is the warm-up drill. The warm up has social media elements and also hints at the skills and tools that will be needed in the more involved scenario. One of the lessons that should be incorporated into the first drill and carried on in the second is the need to Monitor the social media space. The decision is how and when to respond to internet postings is one.

7. Provide a list of social media resources.

Following the crisis drill, it's helpful to provide a list of the social media tools that were used in the simulation. We recommend that clients select a social media monitoring service for keeping on top of any crisis.

Crisis drills and simulations are like buying insurance. It's a rare day when an individual wakes up and says, "I want to buy more insurance." Yet in the event of a loss, it's a good idea to have a policy. Similarly, investing in crisis planning and simulations is good insurance.