



Digital Marketing Strategies with **Niklas Myhr, Ph.D.**

Special Report Part I of III:

How to Manage a Social Media Crisis

By Niklas Myhr, Ph.D. | TheSocialMediaProfessor.com

Social media can be a powerful tool by which you can invite your community to engage with you and your brand. It should be noted, though, that there are no guarantees in terms of where communications may be headed and in some cases, it can turn out to be a complete PR disaster such as with the [Twitter chat with hashtag #AskJameis](#) on Twitter with Jameis Winston, Florida State University's quarterback with a controversial past which resulted in numerous critical tweets, many with a rather morbid "humorous" twist. As I have not personally followed the past of Mr. Winston, I am not going to comment upon the specifics of his past and whether he deserves this criticism or not. Instead, I will focus on what organizations can do to avoid facing a backlash from their social media initiatives such as on Twitter like Florida State did. These kinds of reactions, also known as "Twitterjacking," can happen to not only sports franchises but also to big global brands such as [McDonald's which experienced a major backlash](#) in 2012 to their invitation to state their own #McDStories on Twitter.

The thing that many brands fail to recognize is that there are some tactics that can be employed to minimize the risks of your social media initiatives turning against you. In this report, I will focus on some such tactics.

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Using a VIP List to prevent and help manage a backlash

One tactic that can be employed to manage or even avoid a social media backlash is to engage a VIP list composed of your most loyal fans or clients in one or several of the following ways:

1. **Build a VIP email list** composed of your most engaged evangelists or supporters. This group could be recruited by studying previous engagement on your various social media platforms or online communities and while you could reward such individuals with some special deals, in many cases, the simple recognition of their efforts by designating VIP labels or the like is sufficient motivation for them at least in the beginning. Depending on your industry, the VIP list could consist of users, fans, customers, followers, etc.

2. **Test your campaign idea with your VIP email list** before taking it public. This could be done for example by asking the VIPs to provide ratings of specific social media campaign options that you are considering. If you sense that there is a high likelihood of an initiative such as a Twitter chat with your quarterback evoking negative brand associations, perhaps you should hold off with the particular idea for the time being. This is not a waterproof method, however, and it should be recognized that by turning to your strongest fans, you are not asking a representative sample of mainstream fans/followers on social media. Still, your biggest fans are also likely to be aware of the word on the street regarding your brand, perhaps even more closely than you are.

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3. **Ask your VIP/Gold members/evangelists for input** regarding what campaign options that they suggest that you go for. By not presenting them with complete campaign details but rather involving your biggest fans and evangelists in the new campaign design and creation process, they will feel a stronger sense of ownership of the process and are then more likely to keep helping you spread good word-of-mouth regarding your brand. This could be done in phases so that you involve your VIPs both at the beginning, middle, and end of your campaign creating process.

4. **Invite your VIP list to be active once the initiative is launched.** This is critical for the campaign to get off to a good start. By alerting and reminding your VIPs about when it will happen and getting them on board in the conversations could help balance any possible negative backlashes that you may be facing. Perhaps you could even invite some of your VIPs to serve as moderators during a Twitter chat, for example, so that you have more voices ready to respond to or comment on upcoming issues. Even if they would not be official spokespeople of your brand, they could help provide a sense that there is someone listening to possible complaints and concern about the brand which you may otherwise not have time for if there are thousands of tweets posted during an hour.

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This was the first part of three of the Special Report “How to Manage a Social Media Crisis.” The next part will arrive shortly. In the meantime, please feel free to share any challenges you are facing on social media that you would like to learn more about by sending an email to info@thesocialmediaprofessor.com

Thank you!

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Special Report

How to Manage a Social Media Crisis

Part II of III: Fast Discovery of a Social Media Crisis

By Niklas Myhr, Ph.D. | www.TheSocialMediaProfessor.com

The first part of this three-part series primarily focused on some ways in which you can avoid or prevent a social media crisis to occur in the first place. This second part will offer some practical tips regarding how you through social media monitoring can quickly discover that a social media crisis is going on in the unfortunate event that you are faced with this situation.

The first step to managing an ongoing social media crisis is to simply ensure that you become aware of it as soon as possible. This does not necessarily mean that you also should act immediately in some way. However, at least knowing about an ongoing crisis at an early stage gives you the option to respond quickly which could be helpful in some situations but more about that possible action items later in Part III of this series.

To ensure that you quickly learn about an ongoing crisis on social media requires that you establish a listening or monitoring process. Parts of this process can be automated, parts of it requires human judgment calls:

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Automated Social Media Monitoring

To lessen the burden for your staff to scan the web for mentions, there are numerous social media listening or monitoring tools available ranging from the free to the more expensive ones. If you are just starting out your monitoring process, at least set up some free tools to sense what is going on out there and become aware of it rather quickly.

The low-hanging fruit in this area is Google Alerts that can be easily set up at <https://www.google.com/alerts>. Even though it is a free tool, it is powerful and you can set it up to notify you by email “as-it-happens,” “at most once a day,” or “at most once a week.” For a smaller brand that doesn’t receive a lot of mentions online, it is recommended that you choose to be alerted “as-it-happens” to be able to respond quickly.

Only if you get more alerts than you can process, should you consider muting the alert flow to daily or weekly updates and consider upgrading to a more sophisticated corporate monitoring tool that is capable of indicating patterns of ongoing conversations about your brand.

Human Social Media Monitoring

Even when you have automated social media monitoring tools set up, brands still need to have a staffing plan in place so that a human being can monitor online conversations and determine whether further action is required. To constantly monitor social streams can seem costly and inconvenient to some but it does represent an investment

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that you need to make if you are serious about not only growing, but also protecting your reputation.

Keep in mind that your reputation very well could represent the main asset that you do possess and in this regard, a social media monitoring investment can be seen as a necessary insurance just like businesses buy other types of insurance policies. That being said, the investment in human social media monitoring does not necessarily have to be extremely burdensome or costly.

It is recommended that you ensure that someone you trust, either someone in your own staff or at an agency you contract, is monitoring conversations about your brand basically as close to 24/7/365 as you can. At its simplest, this could mean that the person responsible for the monitoring reviews the incoming alerts about mentions of your brand on social media platforms and on the Internet.

Ideally, this person would also be sufficiently trained to be able to determine whether a flow of online mentions is a cause for concern or whether it is something more innocent that can be left alone without any response. For this person to make a more educated determination, it is a good idea for him or her to make at least a cursory analysis of why people are starting to mention you online more than at the usual level.

For this purpose, a free yet powerful tool that can be used to zoom in more specifically on conversations on different social media platforms is Social Mention at www.socialmention.com. Not only will it highlight on what platforms the most activity is taking place as it relates to your brand, but it will also highlight the degree to which

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mentions tend to be positive or negative in a so-called sentiment analysis.

Another tool that could be useful is Hootsuite at www.hootsuite.com allowing you to monitor multiple social networks in one dashboard. This tool also includes a free version with some useful functionality in this regard.

By reviewing posts that are being made, oftentimes it becomes clear what stirred up the conversation. However, each brand has to determine what their sore spots are in terms of brand reputation elements. For example, a company may state that a specific mention with a negative sentiment regarding a new product launch or the specific mention of the CEO of the company should trigger an higher-level alert while run of the mill complaints about one of your mature products may not be such a critical event.

This was the second part of three of the Special Report “How to Manage a Social Media Crisis.” The next part will arrive shortly. In the meantime, please feel free to share any challenges you are facing on social media that you would like to learn more about by sending an email to info@thesocialmediaprofessor.com

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Special Report

How to Manage a Social Media Crisis

Part III of III: How to Respond to a Social Media Crisis

By Niklas Myhr, Ph.D. | www.TheSocialMediaProfessor.com

The first part of this three-part series primarily focused on some ways in which you can avoid or prevent a social media crisis to occur in the first place. The second part offered some practical tips regarding how you through social media monitoring can quickly discover that a social media crisis is going on. This third and final part of the report will list a number of possible crisis response alternatives that you could have at your disposal in the unfortunate event that you are faced with this situation.

Please note that some of these strategies may make very little sense in your particular situation and in other cases, they don't make sense when used in combination. Regardless, here are the options you could consider for responding to a social media crisis:

1. ***Do nothing.*** The idea here is that you shall not try to rebuild your house *during* a hurricane but instead you should take shelter and reemerge only after the storm has passed. Some believe it is best to avoid feeding the “beast” while it is having its meal. Let the most aggressive “trolls” or complainers finish

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their rants and move onto some other subject of frustration. If you instead show up and make your presence known in the conversation, some who are really upset could get the fuel they need to keep going perhaps indefinitely. Another rationale for this strategy is that you may give more attention to a troll than they really deserve. For example, if you respond with a post that goes out to all your followers it may reach thousands even when the “troll” who was upset only had few.

2. ***Declare innocence.*** Saying that you innocent could be the way to go if you truly are confident that you had nothing to do with the problem at hand. It could be dangerous territory, though, if you are not really sure and later may have to backpedal. Also, if you begin pointing fingers at partners and suppliers of yours, it could begin to look as if you are trying to skirt your responsibilities. Keep in mind that to a larger extent than before, companies are now expected to also ascertain that they are collaborating with the right partners and in this regard, their failures could also be seen as your failures.
3. ***Acknowledge the situation.*** By at least acknowledging that you have been made aware of an ongoing issue could reduce the amount of frustration among those who were simply trying to get your attention with their online postings. Some people may also decide to spare you from their most aggressive rants if they discover that there is a real human being behind the sometimes relatively anonymous brand that they are upset with.
4. ***Investigate the cause of the problem.*** It should go without saying but quickly determining what is going on is a critical aspect of a crisis response so that you at least can entertain the option to respond in some way while being informed to the largest extent possible. This does not necessarily mean that you

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also *should* act immediately in some way. However, at least knowing about an ongoing crisis at an early stage gives you the *option* to respond quickly which could be helpful. To investigate the cause of a crisis that is erupting on social media companies can use their more or less advanced social media listening or monitoring services.

5. ***Fix the problem.*** If you can aggressively try to find at least short-term fixes to your problems, this could result in huge savings both in terms of your brand equity but also with respect to costs within your supply chain. Apple, for example, has an “early field failure analysis” (EFFA) unit in place to quickly discover and correct problems when newly released products are being returned. This can result in millions in savings if they can not only fix the immediate problems of returned products but also be able to report these detected problems up the supply chain to stop the bleeding as soon as possible. Also, and perhaps most importantly, they can minimize the risk of their product becoming a punching bag for late night TV host mockery.
6. ***Correct factual misinformation/misunderstandings.*** Even if you have not ruled out the possibility that you are completely innocent regarding the problems experienced, it may still make sense for you to go out and correct misinformation and ill-informed rumors floating around the Internet if you sense that the conversation is vastly more negative in tone than it would need to be.
7. ***Express your empathy to those affected by the situation.*** By posting your empathy with victims of a crisis, you can show that you care and feel bad about the situation. This does not necessarily have to be the same thing as admitting any guilt in

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terms of being the cause of the situation. However, it should be noted that people could remain skeptical toward you if they believe you are only stating these sentiments as a PR move and not because you are truly affected emotionally and able to declare this in an authentic manner.

8. ***Take responsibility.*** When you sense that you indeed are at fault, admitting guilt and apologizing is obviously an option to consider. There could be legal concerns that make some executives nervous about this alternative but from a branding perspective, it could be the best option at hand and that may salvage what could be salvaged of your brand reputation so you should at least consider it.
9. ***Communicate corrective plans and actions.*** By opening up and sharing what you are doing and how you are addressing the crisis could be a way to show that you are doing more than is perhaps visible otherwise. That is, even if you do not yet have any fixes or resolutions to the problem, you can explain how you are prioritizing your investigations and organization to come up with both a short-term and a long-term fix so that similar situations can be avoided in the future.
10. ***Engage your community.*** If you have grown a loyal following before the crisis because you have treated them well, those advocates could also help you come through a social media crisis relatively unscathed. Not only is it possible that they will come out in your defense during a crisis without being prompted to do so, but you could also find that they will respond positively if you contact them during a crisis to help you out. You could engage your community in a variety of ways. For example, they can be looking for causes or solutions to a problem. They could also serve as moderators of various

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customer forums so that you ensure that most of the platforms where people are talking about you have someone on your side as part of the conversation. By getting these types of responsibilities, some brand advocates may even sense an even higher degree of loyalty toward the brand if they felt part of the process. It should be emphasized, though, that your loyal brand advocates may desert you if you only contact them when you need it the most.

This was the third and final part of three-part Special Report “How to Manage a Social Media Crisis.” Hopefully, you found it valuable and please let me know if you come to think of different or additional ways to respond to a social media crisis. Please also feel free to share any challenges you are facing on social media that you would like to learn more by simply replying to this email.

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