

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY

This document sets out how social media is impacting business from the business continuity perspective.

It argues that business continuity managers must recognise this issue as a new discipline which needs to be understood and managed within a business and not dismissed as passing teenage fad. Failure to do so, could damage the reputation of the business and may lead to financial losses. On the positive side, social media has the potential to be harnessed to support business continuity practice.

Executive Summary

The use of social media is becoming an increasingly fundamental part of our daily lives, as individuals and groups have the means to share their thoughts and opinions with speed and ease.

For today's organisation, social media presents both a fantastic opportunity to engage with employees and customers and a significant threat, especially concerning potential reputational damage.

Social media is both an important issue to and enabler of business continuity management (BCM).

By developing and defining guidelines, workflows and processes, organisations can develop a social media approach to dovetail with their business continuity planning processes.

As well as conducting activity in the event of an incident, organisations should ensure ongoing social media activity is undertaken. This will help provide early identification of potential reputation damaging issues and subsequently help the organisation take the best possible course of action.

This whitepaper discusses the importance of social media, how it can work with traditional business continuity processes and illustrates this through a number of typical business continuity challenges that most organisations face.

What is social media and why is it important?

Whilst the phrase 'social media' is referred to with increasing frequency, it's useful to consider exactly what is meant by this term. There are many definitions, but it can be helpful to think of it as all of the activities, platforms and practices that enable users to create, recommend, filter and share knowledge, opinions and content.

Therefore rather than just thinking of social media as sites such as Twitter or LinkedIn, it addresses the broader means by which individuals and groups can now rapidly share their thoughts online and engage with each other around whatever topic they wish (e.g. how much more reliable company X is compared with company Y.)

With the growth of mobile social media applications, users can read or post their opinions almost wherever and whenever they choose in real time – over a third of Facebook's 500 million users actively access the service via a mobile device.¹

Social media isn't just impacting on individuals' daily lives, but every type of organisation from the independent coffee shop to the international corporation – enabling them to engage with stakeholders in new ways.

Social media should therefore be considered as something that's relevant to (and impacts upon) all parts of an organisation, and not simply viewed as a new technology for the IT department to manage, or communications channel for the PR team to exploit.

However, in addition to helping multiple business functions, social media also increases the pressure for transparency; Nestle experienced a significant backlash when trying to censor an online video posted by Greenpeace about their use of palm oil, which received over 1.5 million views.²

It's also important to consider that many of the organisation's employees, partners, suppliers and investors will be active in social media themselves and each will be impacted by the messages they see.

How advances in technology are creating new business continuity challenges

The speed at which new technologies are emerging and being embraced by an ever increasing tech-savvy population is both contributing to existing and creating new, business continuity challenges for today's organisations.

Within this, social media technologies (e.g. blogs, forums and social networks such as LinkedIn) are one factor contributing to the rapidly changing environment. They are providing individuals and groups with a platform from which they can exert far greater influence over an organisation and its employees than ever before.

Organisations need to be able to provide unambiguous advice on how an employee, uncertain about protocol, should react to a tricky question they've received from a pressure group on Twitter. It also has to be clear on what impact a scathing review of the organisation by the industry's most influential blogger may have on potential investors and or share price.

Whilst the need to manage crisis communications and operate reputation management has always existed, technology is amplifying the impact – as experienced by BP during the recent oil crisis with the creation of a spoof BP Public relations Twitter feed amassing over 180,000 followers.³

How social media can dovetail with BCM

Social media supports activity across multiple business functions

There are many ways in which social media can support BCM across different business functions.

This could involve using social media monitoring tools to support horizon scanning activity within the PR team and where required, flag or escalate issues to the relevant risk department. Creating tailored workflows for the organisation ensures clarity of the process, roles and responsibilities that teams and individuals are expected to undertake. The immediate nature of social media can empower organisations to make more informed decisions, by quickly identifying exactly what's being discussed, by whom and which discussions are causing the biggest issues – an approach that is being employed by First Direct.⁴

It could also support the human resources team to provide a better level of pastoral care to employees in the midst of an incident by enabling them to quickly raise and debate an issue from a remote location via a mobile application where face-to-face communications are not feasible.

Social media tools such as Yammer⁵ are transforming how organisations are able to communicate and share experiences on a global perspective – improving business processes and procedures with richer feedback and insight from the employees. SunGard for example uses Yammer to help capture opinions from over 10,000 employees across the global organisation on a range of different subjects.

A key role of every organisation's Business Continuity Management function is to facilitate awareness across the organisation (particularly for the human resources, public relations and risk management teams) of the influence and opportunity of social media, and that this is recognised and addressed in their business continuity strategies and plans.

Social media supports different stages of the BCM lifecycle

Understanding the Organisation

Similar to the BCM process (outlined in the BS25999 standard⁶) the initial step of developing a social media strategy involves understanding the organisation's needs. This will typically involve an initial audit of the key organisational challenges and a review of the organisation's existing presence in social media places.⁷ With this in place, it is possible to think about social media supporting business continuity solutions across a number of different stages.

Determining social media strategies

The preparation and development stage of social media business continuity planning consists of setting in place policies and procedures and conducting scenario planning not only to ensure the organisation is optimised to respond to a specific incident, but also organised to conduct ongoing preventative activity in a business-as-usual capacity.

Developing and implementing a BCM and social media response

Preventative activities focus on reducing the chance of business continuity ‘reputation’ incidents occurring in the first place, and where they do, minimising the impact. To achieve this, the organisation should establish a presence in social media places and engage in relevant online conversations as a business-as-usual activity. By building up these links or ‘social capital’⁸, the organisation has a far greater chance of recognising and diffusing an emerging issue by calling on the relationships it has developed. This approach is far superior to the alternative where the organisation delivers a knee jerk response out of context and without the appropriate planning or support network in place.

In terms of implementing a response when an incident does occur, this will of course rely on the quality of preparation and planning that has been conducted in advance of the incident – as with any business continuity activity.

Within the organisation, this might include enabling team members who are geographically dispersed to communicate more effectively – an approach following by Nokia through their ‘Social Media Communications team’ which helps support 125,000 employees worldwide.

From an external perspective the organisation may look to monitor the changing sentiment of users commenting online about an incident, to help inform crisis communication decision making. By failing to understand the situation properly, GAP clothing accentuated the negative press around their new logo design, by looking to crowd-source a new design, rather than leave the design alone, as public opinion favoured.⁹

Exercising, maintenance and review

Social media will also support the business continuity management lifecycle in helping review performance following an incident, to support future enhancements. Within the organisation employees may be encouraged to feedback on their experiences, perhaps around how useful the information was they had access to during an incident. Social media monitoring tools can also capture rich, qualitative feedback on customers’ experiences during an incident (which they may have chosen not to raise formally¹⁰) to help understand the success of the existing business continuity approach.

A common thread through each stage of the development lifecycle is the impact that social media can have on the organisation’s decision making to support BCM. The early identification of an issue through a social media monitoring programme both

provides the organisation with more time to consider their response, and ensures it is made in a timely manner. While the content of Toyota’s response to their product recall incident was good, they failed to get their message to the market as rapidly as they could have done – leaving the door open for the story to build.¹¹

The next section will consider the impact of these key decision points through a number of business continuity challenges and illustrative case studies.



Illustrations of social media helping to meet business continuity challenges

Having outlined the relevance of social media to supporting traditional business continuity solutions, and the different stages at which it should be considered, the following section illustrates six key business continuity challenges.

These six challenges have been selected from a more comprehensive list to demonstrate a range of social media solutions across the BCM lifecycle.

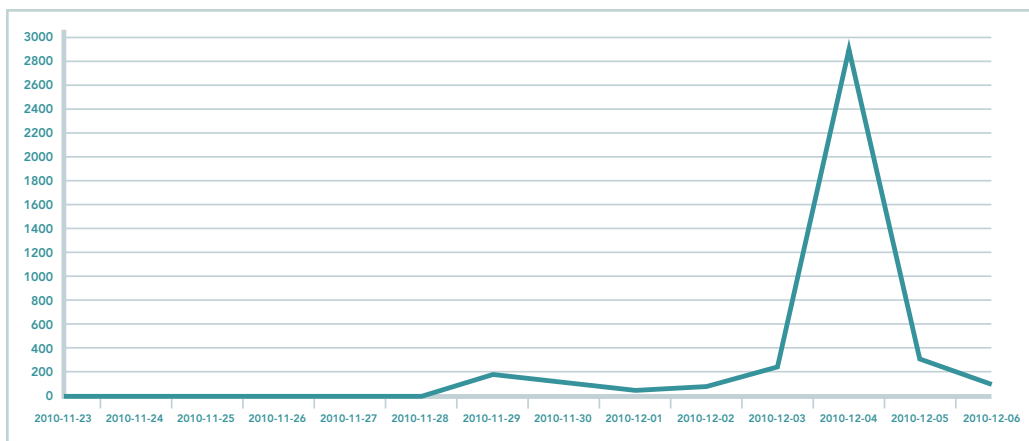
Each will use example case studies to illustrate how social media can support business continuity solutions and the benefits it provides.

I need to monitor and escalate any potential incidents or pressure group activity which might impact my organisation

Effective horizon scanning dictates that organisations need to look beyond themselves to identify potential political, environmental, technological or social incidents which may impact operations. Additionally, they may need to be aware of relevant special interest or pressure groups that may have a positive or negative interest in their operation.

An effective social media monitoring programme can complement traditional horizon scanning methods to flag any potential incidents or online pressure group activity. Using online social media monitoring tools to scan for specific search terms can provide insight into what people are saying about an organisation, its competitors and relevant news across the social web.

Figure 1: Social media monitoring tool illustrates the volume of conversation before, during and after the protest which caused Topshop to close their Oxford Street store in December 2010 (Source: Sentiment Metrics)

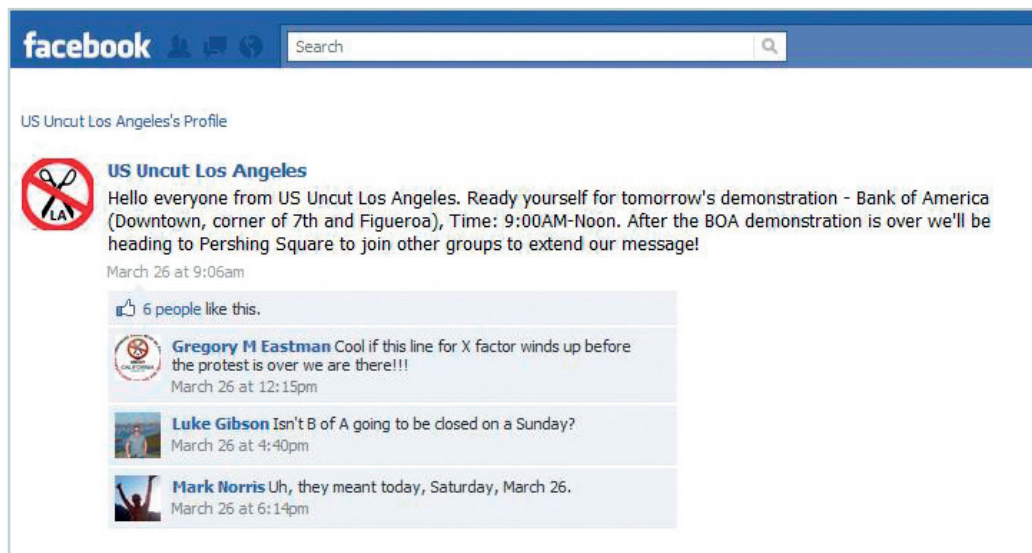


Influencer identification uses citation analysis to flag particular individuals online (such as an avid pressure group blogger) and locations (such as a Facebook page) which will have the most significant impact on an organisation and its stakeholders and customers. Monitoring locations and active users may help alert organisations to particular interest groups or potential pressure group activity online.

Alongside a social media monitoring programme, organisations should ensure that incident management plans contain the relevant trigger points, escalation routes and responsibility definitions to deal with social media issues. Each of these elements is addressed and defined through the development of social media workflows, as mentioned above. This can be done by collaborating across departments to establish when to escalate an incident, who is responsible for responding to incidents, and when to take immediate action. For example, where pressure group activity has been flagged, this may involve an employee from the affected PR department entering into a transparent, constructive conversation with the group itself before any damaging management activity takes place. In parallel to this, the organisation's incident management team and risk teams may need to be made aware that these online conversations are taking place.

In March 2011 protest group US Uncut staged protests at fifty Bank of America branches across the United States, using social media to organise attendees. The organisation could have identified the groundswell of negative comments in advance had a suitable monitoring programme been established. US Uncut used social media to determine protest locations and at this point, an established workflow may have led to Bank of America preparing for large numbers of protesters at specific branches. Eventually, protesters targeted 50 branches, disrupting business and leading to widespread negative coverage.¹⁴

Figure 2: Screenshot of protest group US Uncut organising protest locations via social media platform Facebook (Source: www.facebook.com)



I need to reassure the relevant audiences that my business continuity planning is sufficiently robust

Traditionally, business continuity consultancy helps companies ensure their plans are fit for purpose, and relevant to audiences such as their shareholders, regulators, partners, suppliers and business-to-business customers.

Social media can provide transparency and reassure these corporate audiences that suitable plans have been made – for example, when a company posts references to the existence of contingency plans on a corporate blog.

From an internal perspective, enabling conversations (through blog comments, for example) once plans are published on social media platforms can additionally encourage stronger relationships with stakeholders. Additionally, as social media platforms are generally geared towards ongoing updates, they will facilitate the swift communication of any plans which may have altered or updated during an incident.

Business continuity procedures should also acknowledge social media itself as a potential source of incidents. They should ensure sufficiently robust processes around e-disclosure¹⁵ are in place should an incident occur – for example, if an employee publishes something inappropriate on a social media platform about another employee, it may be called as admissible evidence in future formal proceedings.

Barclays has outlined its business continuity policy online¹⁶, outlining its commitment to maintaining critical services in the event of a serious business disruption. By ensuring its business continuity policy is transparent and publicly available, Barclays has reduced the risks of a reputational crisis in the event of such an incident.

I need to demonstrate an appropriate duty of care to my employees during and after an incident occurs

Human factor planning acknowledges that incidents can affect any employee in the organisation to varying degrees. Every employer has a duty of care to protect both their employees' mental and physical health.

Alongside implementing employee assistance programmes and appropriate pastoral support, organisations may consider using social media to facilitate employee interaction and feedback. During an incident, social media may enable employees to communicate with their organisation in a swift, practical way that could help employees feel more connected at a potentially difficult time.

After an incident, social media usage may involve enabling employees to share experiences online which they may not wish to discuss in person, or to seek help anonymously. Additionally, social media may enable employees across departments to find and connect with one another easily to share their experiences in informal groups. The www.londonrecovers.com blog was a prime example of how those involved in all four of the 7/7 bombings supported each other and ultimately assisted each other in their psychological recovery process.

During Egypt's political upheaval in 2011, Google used a combination of social media and offline methods to track an Egyptian employee who went missing during the protests.

After confirming that Wael Ghonim had disappeared, Google remained in touch with his friends and family through online and offline communications. A shareable spreadsheet detailing his latest online activity and known whereabouts was published among Egyptian protesters on Twitter, with users on the ground updating information as it became known. Wael Ghonim was eventually released by the Egyptian Government.

I need to manage employees speaking their minds about the organisation, or being inappropriate in social media spaces

As referenced above, social media can contribute to, as well as help alleviate, business continuity incidents. Organisations need to manage the potential risks that exist around employees engaging inappropriately in social media sites on behalf of the organisation (be that through a personal or corporate account), or in a wholly personal capacity during working hours. The subtleties of using social media, and the permanence of what is written¹⁷, means that simply requesting employees to use their own 'good judgment' is unlikely to be sufficient.

Training sessions for employees will emphasise these benefits and guidelines, while forums and internal wikis¹⁸ may be used as a space for employees to post their experiences, feedback and any questions they have about engaging in social media.

As an employee's social media presence may be associated directly with an organisation, it may be necessary to prepare for any potentially unpleasant social media activity once they leave the organisation. This might involve timely and effective collection of employees' online conversations across social media platforms to satisfy any e-disclosure requests. Should a former employee post something inappropriate about an organisation, a social media monitoring programme will flag anything requiring investigation. The processes, responsibilities and incident escalation routes defined in response workflows and will help organisations determine the most appropriate course of action.

A representative for Chrysler responsible for the organisation's Twitter feed posted an obscene update, insulting drivers in Detroit.¹⁹ The representative, employed by an external agency, had mistakenly posted a personal update to the official Chrysler feed. Had Chrysler agreed clear guidelines with its agency, it is likely that this mistake would have been avoided. Chrysler was forced to remove the update and issue a statement to its 8,000 Twitter followers.

I need to manage my organisation's public reputation in the event of an incident

If a business continuity issue arises, it may be severe enough to damage an organisation's reputation. Traditional crisis training and incident management planning can help control this, but as coverage spreads quickly online, organisations may need to use new tools to deal with a PR crisis.

As referenced in previous examples, a social media monitoring programme can enable an organisation to track specific terms – either mentions of the organisation itself or mentions of the incident. Workflows and escalation routes can help establish when it is appropriate to respond to coverage and who should do so. Further training sessions may be necessary to demonstrate example scenarios to employees and to ensure they understand and are comfortable with each possible stage in the workflow. An internal forum may be an appropriate place for them to raise any ongoing concerns about engaging in social media.

In January 2011, an AirAsia passenger flight skidded off the runway injuring four passengers. Before the news could spread online and potentially turn into a PR crisis, AirAsia ensured it relayed up-to-date, accurate information through its official and CEO's Twitter feeds.²⁰ By taking immediate steps to alleviate alarm, AirAsia reduced the potential spread of misinformation and panic.

Figure 3: screenshot of regional airline AirAsia providing updates on a runway incident via social media platform Twitter (Source: www.twitter.com)



I need to ensure my staff understand their responsibilities in the event of a business interruption

The development of social media business continuity plans will help ensure staff are comfortable with their roles should an incident arise. Scenario testing and rehearsals will ensure employees are familiar with their responsibilities on a practical level.

Additional technologies can help enhance this training, such as using interactive webinars as a training mechanism to disseminate information through interaction and discussion, rather than simply presenting it. Enterprise tools (such as BlueKiwi²¹) can enable relevant employees across global offices share their experiences and knowledge of carrying out their responsibilities by bringing them into collaborative groups online.

After its takeover of AGF, Allianz used BlueKiwi to streamline and facilitate internal communications among new staff.²² The organisation used BlueKiwi to reach employees at all levels and to obtain their input on marketing strategies. The integration of enterprise tools across the company means Allianz has another tool with which to train its employees and gather their feedback on business continuity processes which involve them.

Conclusion

- The growing importance of social media is changing the business environment in which organisations operate, often intensifying business continuity challenges that they face around reputation management.
- However, social media can dovetail with traditional BCM processes by supporting multiple business functions prepare and respond to incidents, as well as ensuring that organisations undertake ongoing, preventative actions that can quickly become business-as-usual activities.
- To this end, the role of BCM is to ensure that the risks, challenges and opportunities that social media presents are understood, assessed and planned for across the organisation. This is particularly important for the human resources and public relations teams.
- In summary there are six key themes around which social media can support BCM, namely:
 1. Using social media monitoring tools to support horizon scanning
 2. Developing procedures and workflows to help organisations respond appropriately to stakeholders via social media at the appropriate times
 3. Communicating and sharing content more quickly and with greater transparency to support better decision making
 4. Enabling feedback and co-creation of processes or procedures with employees to deliver a better duty of care to employees
 5. Building stronger relationships with stakeholders to foster greater trust and support for when incident does occur
 6. Delivering training to employees in more collaborative ways.

How can SunGard Availability Services assist with organisational social media issues?

SunGard Consulting can assist organisations with their social media development in the following areas:

By identifying the most appropriate social media monitoring tool for their needs, and provide the expertise required to establish a programme tailored to their requirements.

By helping the organisation develop and embed a social media policy for existing employees, providing them with clear, simple guidance on engaging in social media and emphasising the benefits of being active in social media spaces.

By helping the organisation develop their social media business continuity plans.

- ¹ Facebook statistics: www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics
- ² CNet news article: http://news.cnet.com/8301-13577_3-20005101-36.html
- ³ Twitter feed: <http://twitter.com/BPGlobalPR>
- ⁴ E-Consultancy article: <http://econsultancy.com/uk/blog/4791-first-direct-opens-up-to-customer-comments>
- ⁵ Yammer website: <https://www.yammer.com/about/about>
- ⁶ SunGard website: www.sungard.co.uk/Services/Consulting/BusinessContinuityConsulting/BS25999GapAnalysis
- ⁷ This will involve assessing any of the organisation's existing social media platforms (e.g. a Twitter feed) as well investigating the volume and topics of conversation about the organisation in social media places (plus who is involved in the conversation)
- ⁸ Social capital can be described as 'what and who the organisation knows' in support of the mediation of information
- ⁹ GAP Facebook page (www.facebook.com/gap) and Marketing Week Article www.marketingweek.co.uk/sectors/retail/gap-bungles-crowd-sourcing-in-logo-crisis/3019406.article
- ¹⁰ For example through a customer service email address or telephone helpline
- ¹¹ www.nytimes.com/2010/02/07/business/global/07toyota.html
- ¹² www.sentimentmetrics.com
- ¹³ This will include measuring indicators such as the number of inbound links to a blog to illustrate its influence.
- ¹⁴ Coverage of disruption at Bank of America in the mainstream media: <http://huff.to/glHnnJ>
- ¹⁵ E-disclosure statement: e-disclosure is the identification, preservation and collection of electronically stored information for regulatory and internal investigations and lawsuits.
- ¹⁶ Barclays demonstrates publically (via its website) that it has business continuity plans in place: <http://bit.ly/dSwJyE>
- ¹⁷ Once information is posted to social media sites, it can be difficult to comprehensively expunge. Furthermore the audience may question why the information has been removed – potentially inflaming the issue.
- ¹⁸ A wiki is a website that allows a group of users to easily create and edit a number of interlinked web pages, often to support corporate intranets and knowledge management activity.
- ¹⁹ Online coverage and case study of Chrysler's Twitter update: <http://bit.ly/g8MBqq>
- ²⁰ A case study of the AirAsia runway crash (see slide 16): <http://slidesha.re/hlZ8XV>
- ²¹ BlueKiwi website: www.bluekiwi-software.com/
- ²² A case study of Allianz's usage of BlueKiwi: www.bluekiwi-software.com/our-champions/clients/



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