A survey of more than 300 organizations designed to determine how social media platforms are being used, the functionality of notification systems and mobile technologies, and the content of associated crisis communications plans.

Presented by: Continuity Insights

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In 2012, Continuity Insights published its first report on the use of social media. The report uncovered mixed feelings toward the use of social media as a crisis communications tool: On one hand, respondents generally felt that social media was not an effective way to communicate with stakeholders during a crisis; on the other hand, over half intended to gather information from social media during a crisis.

The 2012 report also included a profile of respondents’ emergency notification systems and mobile technologies, giving a more complete picture of crisis communications strategies.

This year we dug a little deeper in an effort to learn more about the industry’s social media goals and strategies, how respondents view the risks associated with social media, and whether sentiment towards social media’s effectiveness has changed. Notification system features and mobile technologies remain secondary focal areas.

Using the 2012 results as a baseline, we identified several industry trends, namely the shift away from organizations using public social media channels (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) to communicate with employees.

A total of 315 organizations participated in the survey; a respondent profile can be found on page 5.
Key Findings

- Across the board increases in the use of social media: Facebook up over 3%; Twitter up over 4%; YouTube up slightly (0.4%).
- Slight increase in social media fragmentation: Organizations using one or two of the three main social media platforms but not all three.
- A clear drop in the number of organizations using social media to communicate with employees: Facebook down over 7%; Twitter down nearly 6%; YouTube down nearly 8%.
- Corporate Communications is primarily responsible for social media in 66% of organizations; Business Continuity controls social media in less than 4% of organizations.
- Over half of respondents (57%) feel that the benefits of using social media as a crisis communications tool outweigh the risks.
- Nearly 60% of respondents plan to use social media to gather information during a crisis, up from 52% in 2012.
- Increase in the number of organizations using notification systems (up over 7%), with a majority of those systems utilizing two-way communications (77%) and targeted broadcast areas (52%).
- Notification systems are perceived as much more effective than social media in getting messages out to employees during an event or crisis.
- Over half (53%) rated mobile technologies (smartphones, tablets) as “absolutely vital” in carrying out crisis communications plans.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Ignoring social media is no longer an option. Even if you don’t use corporate social media pages, develop plans for monitoring your brand both during normal operations and crises, and develop strategies for verifying the information you collect. Also, develop a social media policy for employees to help them protect sensitive information and avoid embarrassing gaffes.

Mobile technologies can be an invaluable communications tool during a crisis. Consider ways that they can be included in crisis communications plans.

Lastly, notification systems are the best way to communicate with employees during a crisis — especially if you take advantage of modern features such as two-way communications and targeted broadcast areas. Make sure these systems are central to your crisis communications plans, and the proper training and testing takes place.
Respondent Profile

Over half (51%) of survey respondents list their primary job function as Business Continuity Management, with a significant number selecting Consultant/Analyst (12%), Emergency Management (7%), Corporate Management (6%) and Risk Management (4.4%). Just under half (46%) work in organizations with over 5000 employees.

A very large number (87%) use LinkedIn for personal or networking purposes, with 69% using Facebook.
Adoption

The results clearly show across-the-board increases in the use of social media. Facebook is now used by 60% of organizations, up from 57% in 2012. The number of organizations using Twitter saw a similar gain, increasing from 44% to 49%, while the use of YouTube edged up slightly to 23%. What might be more surprising is that over 20% of organizations do not use any of these three social media platforms.
Integration
A fully integrated social media strategy includes the use of all three major social media platforms. The following Venn diagrams show that many are using a much more fragmented approach, with less than 14% of organizations using all three platforms. Using the 2012 diagram as a comparison, it appears the level of fragmentation increased slightly in 2013.
Target Audience
There was a sharp drop in the number of organizations using social media to communicate with employees. Instead, the public and customers have emerged as the target audiences for information posted to social media.

“Not every endpoint is appropriate for every notification. For example, using public social media for emergencies that only affect employees could be perceived as ‘airing dirty laundry’ or showing competitors or investors a weakness. Only when the emergency affects a great number of customers or the general public, then public social media becomes an appropriate channel, in which case it should be integrated with the notification system to alert those audiences without delay.”

Ara Bagdasarian, CEO, Omnilert, LLC
This result is in line with a 6% increase in organizations that use closed/internal social media tools to communicate with employees. In 2012, less than 22% of organizations used closed/internal social media tools such as Yammer.

Omnilert uses an internal social media tool called “Chatter” from Salesforce.

Bryan Crum, VP Communication, Omnilert, LLC
Also, when asked to rank social media’s effectiveness in getting messages to employees, customers and the public during a crisis, employees received the lowest ranking across the board for Facebook, Twitter (shown below) and YouTube. See Part 3 for more information on the perceived effectiveness of the three major social media platforms versus notification systems.

How useful do you think a corporate Twitter account is in getting messages out to employees, customers, and the public during an event or crisis?
Monitoring
Nearly 60% of respondents said they plan to use social media during an event or crisis, up from 52% in 2012. Unsurprisingly, Twitter and Facebook are clearly the top two sources of information. It is notable that both LinkedIn and Google+ ranked higher than YouTube as likely sources of information during a crisis.

Which social media platforms will you use to collect information during a crisis?
The next logical question is: How will respondents use the information they gather from social media? It appears that only a small portion (19%) have a centralized group such as virtual operations support team (VOST) in place to process and distribute relevant information.

“Social media is certainly a source for information during a crisis, but the quality of the information is sometimes questionable. Misinformation is problematic and can lead to poor decision making. Planners need to develop strategies and exercise caution in order to successfully use social media during a crisis.”

Michael R. Jennings, Senior Director, Disaster Readiness Program Office, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Of all the respondents who plan to gather information from social media during a crisis, fewer than half (48%) have strategies in place to verify the information.
For the same group who plan to gather information from social media, over half (57%) claim to use social media monitoring tools; however, when asked to identify the tools used, 41% answered “not sure” and 37% selected the unsophisticated Google Alerts. During a crisis, the once-daily Google alert is not useful for real-time monitoring and situational awareness. The free and very useful TweetDeck and HootSuite applications are used by over a quarter (26%) of this group.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of social media monitoring tools used or planned to be used by crisis communicators.](chart.png)
Risks
Respondents were given an opportunity to describe the risks they associate with the use of social media. Several recurring themes emerged:

**Reputational risks:** Damage to brand and image, mistakes visible to all

**Misinformation:** Propagation of incorrect/false information, misinterpretation of information, lack of context

**Security:** Hacking of accounts, gateway for viruses, breach of privacy

**Lack of control:** Little control over message and sentiment, comments and people misrepresenting the company/brand; inability to retract misinformation; hard to enforce legal & compliance requirements

**Employee issues:** Release of sensitive information, loss of productivity, inappropriate messages, general lack of understanding of how to use social media

With all of these risks in mind, respondents were asked if they felt the benefits of using social media as a crisis communications tool outweigh the risks. A clear majority (57%) answered yes, with 22% not sure.

“It seems the main concerns revolve around the issue of misinformation, as well as premature or inappropriate information being released. However, I think people need to be reminded that messaging going out via social media (as well as the potential risks associated with them) should be no different than what would be released through traditional mainstream media. The messaging may be shorter and more concise, depending on the social media platform used, but nothing should be going out that hasn’t already been vetted and approved beforehand. If anything, the use of social media now allows us the opportunity to address rumors and misinformation almost immediately.”

Suzanne Bernier, Principal, SB Crisis Consulting

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**Do you think the benefits of using social media as a crisis communications tool outweigh the risks?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>I'm not sure</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
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Ownership
The department responsible for social media in respondents’ organizations is most often Corporate Communications (39%), followed by Marketing (19%) and Public Relations (14%). The Business Continuity department controls social media in less than 4% of organizations.

“...connect your social media assets into your unified notification system. Then get approval of pre-scripted message templates in the notification system by marketing/PR/IR/HR/EM/IT/legal for the most common types of emergencies to occur, with blanks that can be filled in during the crisis regarding specifics such as location or time of event. This ‘set it and forget it’ approach means messages and communication channels are ready to go at a moments notice when seconds count. Then alerts can be initiated from the BC/EM/safety/security office or from a single person under a desk without having to go though hurdles or bureaucracy that slow delivery of time-sensitive alerts.”

Bryan Crum, VP Communication, Omnilert, LLC
Part 2: Notification Systems

Channels

73% of respondents use a notification system, up 7% from 2012. These notification systems primarily use email (97%), phone (83%) and SMS (77%) as channels for message deployment. Over a third (37%) use dedicated mobile applications. A small portion (11%) deploy messages to Facebook and Twitter.

“...We are seeing more clients integrate desktop pop-up alerts and digital signage into the unified notification system. The more channels you broadcast to, the more likely everyone will receive your alerts. Contractors and visitors are not likely to be registered for your alerts, so desktops and digital signs in lobbies, conference rooms, and high traffic areas that typically serve as wayfinding devices or promotional signage can be instantly leveraged during a crisis.”

Ara Bagdasarian, CEO, Omnilert, LLC
Features
Two-way communications are used by over three-quarters (77%) of notification system users, up 6% from 2012. Over half (52%) use targeted broadcast areas and one-third (33%) use geospatial mapping to visually represent the location of employees, assets, incidents, etc. Only 18% of users import data from social media.

"Most companies have active Facebook and Twitter accounts, but they are under the purview of the Corporate Communications department. Also, notification systems still rely on traditional media such as phone and email, with almost none using the social media channels. This suggests that the business continuity and corporate communications departments have not linked up to make social media a part of disaster notification."

John Orlando, PhD

Do you utilize any of the following modern notification system features?

- Two-way communications
  - Yes: 76.5%
  - No: 23.5%
- Geospatial mapping
  - Yes: 66.8%
  - No: 33.2%
- Imported data from social media
  - Yes: 17.8%
  - No: 82.2%
- Targeted broadcast areas
  - Yes: 51.6%
  - No: 48.4%
Messages
A very large portion of notification system users have documented protocols for the content and deployment of notification messages (88%) and/or notification message templates (78%).

Do you have documented protocols for the content and deployment of notification messages?

![Bar Chart]

Do you use notification message templates?

![Bar Chart]
Part 3: Perceived Effectiveness

One of the most compelling results from the 2012 report showed that notification systems were perceived to be much more effective than social media in pushing information out during an event or crisis. This has not changed in 2013, although sentiment towards social media’s effectiveness increased across the board.

Respondents who feel Facebook and Twitter are Very useful or Invaluable ways to push information out increased to 37%, up 6% and 4% respectively.

“For organizations that support the public or a large customer base, if the organization is not posting updates on their official social media accounts, then others will post updates on unofficial accounts, and that is not a good position for the organization to be in.”

Ara Bagdasarian, CEO, Omnilert, LLC
YouTube’s dismal result from 2012 — the percentage of respondents who feel it is a Very useful or Invaluable way to push information out during a crisis — increased slightly (2%) to 16%. In sharp contrast, 82% of respondents feel that notification systems are a Very useful or Invaluable way to push information out to employees, up 6% from 2012.

The bottom line is that most feel that social media is useful for gathering information during an event or crisis, whereas notification systems, and to a lesser extent private/closed social media platforms, are the most effective way to push information out to employees.
For the 86% of respondents that have a documented crisis communication plan, roughly half of those (45%) use a stand-alone document while the other half (43%) house it in a larger document.

Over one-third (36%) of crisis communications plans are updated on a yearly basis, with 41% of these plans addressing the use of social media.
“I found it quite surprising that nearly 40% of respondents said that social media use is still not addressed within their crisis communication plans. Personally, I believe any organization with a crisis communication plan should already have, or be working on incorporating a social media component within their plans. That social media section should include everything from how to get messaging out through various social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter being key), what kind of messaging to deliver, as well as basic step-by-step guidelines on how to develop and post messaging for each social media platform your organization has decided to utilize.”

Suzanne Bernier, Principal, SB Crisis Consulting
Over half (53%) rate mobile technologies (smartphones, tablets) as Absolutely vital for carrying out crisis communications plans, with 46% using mobile applications that make business continuity/crisis communications plans available on mobile devices.

“As mobility becomes more valuable to communication during a crisis or emergency, it becomes clear that cloud-based notification systems are the mandate, whereas network-centric, premise-based or installed notification systems onsite are a liability.”

Bryan Crum, VP Communication, Omnilert, LLC
Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents have documented social media guidelines for employees.
More Information

Questions can be directed to Bob Nakao, Executive Publisher, at Robert.Nakao@advantagemedia.com.

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