



# Your Guide to Identifying and Handling a Social Media Crisis as a Digital Agency





# Win the Trust of Your Clients with a Social Media Crisis Management Plan

Every minute counts in the moment of a crisis and not much is worse than being unprepared for one.

This guide stresses the importance of planning for the worst early (before it actually happens) and gives you insight into how to identify a social media crisis and deal with it in the most efficient and painless manner. Note that as each client is unique, each crisis can evolve differently and will require a different approach when your agency is managing one.

It can also be the difference-maker at your next pitch for new client business. Crisis management is often overlooked, and your prospective new clients will take great confidence that you already have a plan to protect their brand's hard-won reputation in the unlikely event of a crisis.

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# How to Identify a Crisis Early

Monitoring keywords and mentions on social media is key to identifying a social media crisis early. You need to be monitoring the following:

- **Client brand name and misspellings, with and without the @ symbol on Twitter**

*"@SendiTravels", "SendiTravels", "Sendi Travels", "Sendai Travels", "SendTravels"*

- **Client products, services and related industry terms**

*"travel company", "luxury beach resort", "beach holidays", "all inclusive holidays"*

- **Support and customer inquiries to your client, with and without the @ symbol**

*"travel tips", "travel safe", "travel aware", "@SendiTSupport"*

- **Competition**

*"@OntheBeachUK", "@FirstChoice", "Expedia", "@Expedia"*

- **News outlets and influencers**

*"NatGeoTravel (@natgeotravel)", "Scott Eddy (@MrScottEddy)", "Kirsten Alana (@kirstenalana)"*

- **Special offers and campaigns**

Twitter is likely to be the earliest place a crisis will emerge, so it's a good place for your daily check. If you don't have a social media monitoring tool in place, you can use Twitter's Advanced Search and Twitter Lists to monitor all the above keyword searches.

Once the monitors are set up, you will be able to quickly spot any changes in the frequency of mentions for each client.

Dedicated customer service profiles can help manage a number of negative responses and are easy to set up on Twitter. Consider this if your client has a large following on social media.



# How to Distinguish a Problem From a Crisis

Handling the usual negative comments will most likely be part of the service you provide for your clients. Be wary of the frequency or severity of negative brand mentions and you should be able to tell a problem from a crisis quite quickly.

However, not all crises start or end on social media. Here are other potential places where a crisis could start online:

- An accident happens that gets immediate media attention and is covered on the news
- One major customer posts a 2,000 essay damning the company on a review site
- The company is featured in a negative review by an influencer or celebrity
- The CEO of the company creates a PR disaster during an interview
- Ex-employee of the company shares sensitive information on Reddit that goes viral
- Your client or stakeholder notifies you that a crisis is imminent
- An action of the company has broken the law

There are free tools available to help you monitor most of the web, such as Google Alerts, but you'll also need to keep a close eye on your client's PR, key customers and industry influencers.

Since you're a digital agency, any small error (e.g. typing mistake or sharing the wrong link) can cause your client to lose trust, which can eventually lead to the loss of that client. See the last section of this guide (Page 11) for the most common errors that can hurt your relationships with clients.



# Why It's Important to Deal With a Crisis Swiftly

The most unfortunate crises don't just damage a brand's reputation, they can also reduce its revenue and, in some cases, share price.



*According to the "Containing a crisis" study by Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, 28% of crises spread globally in 24 hours. It takes most companies 21 hours to correspond with their audiences.*



Implement the simple tips in this playbook and your agency will automatically be in a better position than the vast majority.

Most companies are unprepared for a crisis and it goes without saying that speed matters (a lot).



*Ask yourself: "Can you get a video online from your CEO within 4 hours, any time of the day or night, from anywhere in the world?"*  
- Jay Baer, *Convince and Convert*





# What You'll Need to Tackle Any Kind of Crisis

## Create an internal and external response protocol

The protocol is your plan of action that includes the roles and responsibilities of your team and your client in the case of a crisis.

This will need to be agreed with your client beforehand and you may have multiple workflows for varied severities of a crisis. See Page 13 for your template.

All digital agency team responses and content will need to be sent to the client for approval.

### Major crisis

Both teams are informed immediately. The crisis management workflow is launched and 24/7 monitoring is introduced.



### Medium to large crisis

The digital agency team and the client are informed. The crisis management workflow is approved and launched immediately. Heavy monitoring is introduced.



### Small crisis

The account manager gets involved directly, content is created and heavier monitoring is introduced.



### Major negative feedback

Digital agency staff responds with the account manager's guidance.



### Minor negative feedback

Digital agency staff responds.





## Make preparations where you can

You need to be on the same page with your team and client in the event of a crisis. To do this, make sure that you create the plan and also schedule a fire drill to test and confirm that your crisis management plan works. It's imperative to instruct both your client's team and your own about the changes in the social media policy, and what their responsibilities are. Plan for what you need to do before, during and after a crisis.

## Pause all automation

If a crisis develops, make sure to pause your social media posts. That #FridayFeeling post won't go down well in the context of your emerging crisis. Pausing posts will help you stay in control of the situation and keep profiles updated only with vital information.

Your social media tool should have this setting available, so it's handy to know where it is. On Sendible, it's located in Publishing settings > Preferences. Consider all channels and any that have automation set up, including email campaigns, nurture emails and paid ads.

## Respond coherently on all channels

First, respond to the crisis on the channel it evolved on. Once done, carry on to do the same on all other social media channels, blog and email, if the severity of the crisis is high enough to warrant it. Consider whether the brand needs to apologize for the cause of the problem or simply inform the public that it's being dealt with.

The amount of content required will depend on the magnitude of the crisis. Also make sure that you have a simple workflow system in place where messages are written and approved as quickly as possible, or, ideally, in anticipation of the crisis. Here's what to avoid:

- Arguing or providing personal opinion
- Blocking anyone who disagrees with you (unless offensive to others)
- Deleting critical comments
- Losing your client's brand voice
- Making grammatical or spelling errors



# 7 Most Common Crises and How to Avoid Them

## 1. Bad feedback that goes viral

Bad feedback hurts. But when it goes viral, it requires meticulously crafted responses that will settle the fire and keep the person(s) as satisfied as they can be.

Things to avoid when responding to bad feedback:

- Deleting the comment or post
- Taking too long to answer (*these posts require your immediate attention*)
- Keep posting as you were

Negative feedback can lead to positive customer experiences when handled correctly. It's important to make unhappy customers feel heard and do all you can to delight them as they can later become a valuable resource to your client.

Always take their details so that your client can get back to them to a) solve the issue and b) ask for honest feedback that can be used to improve its future products and services.

## 2. Ongoing pain-points gaining momentum

It's crucial to know what your client's main ongoing problems are and if they can potentially explode online when given the right amount of attention and oxygen. This can be anything from a faulty website to bad customer service.

There is so much you can do as a digital agency during a crisis that directly concerns the product, but you can help fight the fire by preparing a plan for it.

Here's what you can do in addition to creating a crisis management workflow plan:

- Identify the routine issues
- Report to the client on the severity of the feedback and frequency
- Plan marketing campaigns to avoid well-known pain-points
- Create a content library with support articles that have already been written





### **3. Offensive marketing campaign or product launch**

When it comes to marketing campaigns your agency creates and launches - you'll need to own up and deal with it. The best course of action is to question the solidity of the campaign and consider the worst possible outcomes early on.

Introduce the premortem concept into your campaign planning meetings. It allows for everyone in the room to predict everything that can happen during a crisis and prepare responses and reactions well before the campaign launches. Collate the responses and use them to strengthen your contingency plan.

If you prepare for these issues early, you can:

- a) change the tone and language of your campaign to avoid bad feedback,
- b) draft responses before the launch, and also
- c) make the most of your campaign.

Some brands try to be inflammatory with product launches and campaigns on purpose. In this case, you need to especially consider the length of the campaign and what long-term effect it will have on your client's brand image.

### **4. Technical issues with a website, blog, landing page or server**

Make a habit of always checking the customer journey of your clients' prospects. Issues with blogs or landing pages can harm your conversion rate. Customers will be frustrated if they can't access a website, make a payment or receive content they traded their email for.

Anticipate any kind of downtime, and if you notice that the service is down, be quick on your feet to let the client and their audiences know. Especially so if it's a major disruption that prevents their customers from using their services for work, e.g. a server outage.



## 5. Accidents, injuries, disasters and fatalities

Digital agencies managing clients in the leisure, news and travel industries should consider preparing for the most unthinkable and devastating. Accidents happen and are often shared by news sites which means that your client's brand will get extra attention from a wider audience.

Consider monitoring the social media accounts of news sites in addition to other keywords to help you monitor responses and any questions that people have.

The key here is to notify customers if the business is closing for any amount of time and what is being done to resolve the issue. If it's a weather disaster or more lives could be at risk, timely updates are key.

## 6. Pricing increases and product changes

Companies change pricing frequently - with the new tax year, to attract new customers, after being bought by a different company or an audit. Be aware that frequent price changes can spark a colossal negative response on social media.

If your client falls under this category, request immediate updates from the client on all future pricing and product updates as this will help prepare for a crisis (or negative comments) on social media.

When running or planning price promotions consider seasonality, e.g. end of a tax year or quarter, national holidays or special occasions. Also pay close attention to terms and conditions for customers, especially when they change contracts.



## 7. The unpredictable and unfortunate

No one can predict a gunman walking into a restaurant. The main symptom of these type of crises is when the public knows more about it, and earlier than you do. Anticipate a lot of attention from the media and the press, and prepare a public statement by the most senior member of your client’s company.

In these cases it's crucial you create that one place (be it a FAQ page on your website or blog) that you constantly update on behalf of the client. Provide its customers and audiences with up-to-date information on what happened, how it’s being resolved and who is or may be affected.

### + The Small Errors That Hurt Your Relationship With a Client

It's painful to see when your great results are overshadowed by a small typing mistake or incorrect link sharing. But errors happen, even when you have the best intentions.

Social network	Grammar or spelling	Not attaching an image or video	Competitor link shared	Sensitive information leaked
Facebook	<i>Edit the post promptly or repost</i>	<i>Repost</i>	<i>Delete the post</i>	<i>Public, immediate response required</i>
Google+	<i>Edit the post promptly or repost</i>	<i>Repost</i>	<i>Delete the post</i>	<i>Public, immediate response required</i>
Instagram	<i>Edit the post promptly or repost</i>	<i>Can't post without an image</i>	<i>Unlikely you'll be sharing</i>	<i>Public, immediate response required</i>
LinkedIn	<i>Repost the post promptly</i>	<i>Repost</i>	<i>Unlikely you'll be sharing</i>	<i>Public, immediate response required</i>
Pinterest	<i>Edit the post promptly or repost</i>	<i>Can't post without an image</i>	<i>Delete the post</i>	<i>Public, immediate response required</i>
Twitter	<i>Repost the post promptly</i>	<i>Repost</i>	<i>Delete the post</i>	<i>Public, immediate response required</i>

#### **Grammar and spelling mistakes**

Most social media posts can be edited, except for paid ads and posts on LinkedIn and Twitter. Consider reposting the message promptly.

#### **Not attaching an image or video**

You're safe on Instagram and Pinterest, but other networks are a different story. Attach all media to posts when scheduling.

#### **Incorrect link tracking or the absence of a link in a link share post**

Your client will most likely not notice an incorrectly tracked link but a plain text message will stand out.

#### **Wrong post shared or wrong attribution**

Double check all facts and keep a competitor list handy whenever engaging on social media on behalf of your clients.

#### **Sensitive, personal information that shouldn't have been disclosed**

Prevent this from happening by creating a social media policy for the client and keep your own team on track



# Over to You

It's important to make sure that your social media crisis management plan works. Create it, present it and run through it with your client - you wouldn't want to find out that your plan doesn't work in the heat of a crisis. The amount of time and stress you will save by preparing early will pay off at least two fold and may win the trust of your client for years to come.

There is nothing more embarrassing than your client spotting a mistake or a problem first. Your agency must be the first to notice and report, and ideally, solve the issue before it goes out of hand or at least, keep it under control.

Avoid the small mistakes - these usually aren't enough to create a crisis, but they can result in the loss of trust and consequently, the client.

Dealing with problems and complaints will always be a part of social media management. There may be situations where an issue will arise from the blue, but with preparation and knowledge of how to deal with small and big crises you should be well-equipped to make the most of it.



# Crisis Management Workflows Template

**Client** .....

**Account manager** .....

**Type of crisis** .....

*(bad feedback, offensive marketing campaign, accident)*

- Owner of the crisis: .....
- Decision maker(s): .....
- Originally caused by: .....
- Who's in charge if the owner or decision maker is away: .....
- Communication channels to use: *(Slack, email, phone)* .....

## Roles and responsibilities

*(fill in with the name of the person responsible)*

### Agency side

- Updating the team: .....
- Updating the client: .....
- Monitoring social media posts and responding: .....
- Out of hours monitoring: .....



- Writing and publishing social media posts: .....
- Writing the FAQ page / blog / website page: .....
- Pausing automation (paid ads, social media, email and blogs): .....

### Client side

- Informing the agency (if applicable): .....
- Approvals for social media messages: .....
- Approvals for FAQ page / blog / website page: .....
- Communicating with the support and/or legal advisors: .....

Role	Name	Email	Telephone number
Agency owner			
Account manager			
Log keeper			
Primary client contact(s)			
Content approver (client-side)			
Support, IT advisor(s)			
Development advisor(s)			
Legal advisor(s)			



# Your Crisis Management Checklist

- Create a crisis management workflow for multiple scenarios
- Create a copy of a social media policy
- Schedule a fire drill to confirm the efficiency of your plan(s)
- Monitor keywords and mentions on social media and the web daily
- Evaluate the problem and confirm it's a crisis
- Confirm source of the crisis
- Inform your team and the client
- Deploy the crisis management plan
- Pause all social media posts, paid ads and marketing emails
- Respond coherently on all channels (respond first where the crisis evolved)
- Introduce heavier monitoring (out of hours or 24/7)
- Avoid grammatical errors and spelling mistakes
- Don't delete any comments unless offensive to others
- Don't lose the brand's voice when replying
- Create a crisis FAQ web page or blog
- Stay alert until the issue resolves
- Adjust the content schedule
- Follow up on the aftermath of the crisis
- Confirm the bounce back plan with the client



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