



**SMART TIPS FOR CATEGORY 1  
RESPONDERS USING SOCIAL  
MEDIA IN EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT**

March 2012



## KEY MESSAGES

Social media is a social medium for the people by the people about the people.

Social media benefits emergency management as well as the public.

Think before you leap and develop a strategy.

One size does not fit all. Do your research.

Preparedness is the most critical and difficult stage.

Engage, interact, participate...don't just broadcast.

Understand the level of resource needed.

Seek out promising practices and share them.

Start small, fail early, learn often.

This set of smart practices will help to get you started...

# THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: KEY TRENDS

In 2011 at least 77% of UK households had Internet access

In 2011 45% of UK Internet users used a mobile phone to connect to the Internet

The use of wireless hotspots in the UK almost doubled in 2011 to 4.9 million users

In the UK, 6 million people (around 10% of the population) accessed the Internet over their mobile phone for the first time in 2011

Social networking accounts for 23% of all time spent online in the UK

25-34 year olds are now the largest age group on Facebook

1 in 7 minutes online is spent on Facebook

In March 2012 there were 30,484,380 Facebook users in the UK. This represents 48.89% penetration of the population

Facebook has over 900 million users worldwide, half of which use the service on a daily basis

Twitter grew overall by 800% in 2010

Twitter showed explosive growth in 2011 with the number of reported users more than doubling from 12 million to 26 million

Twitter is adding nearly 500,000 new users per day

Twitter's age profile is dominated by the 25 – 44 age group, accounting for over 60% of users

Over 3 billion videos are viewed on YouTube everyday

# SOCIAL MEDIA FOR GOVERNMENT

## What is social media?

Social media refers to online technologies and practices used to share opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships.

Some of the most commonly used social media tools are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

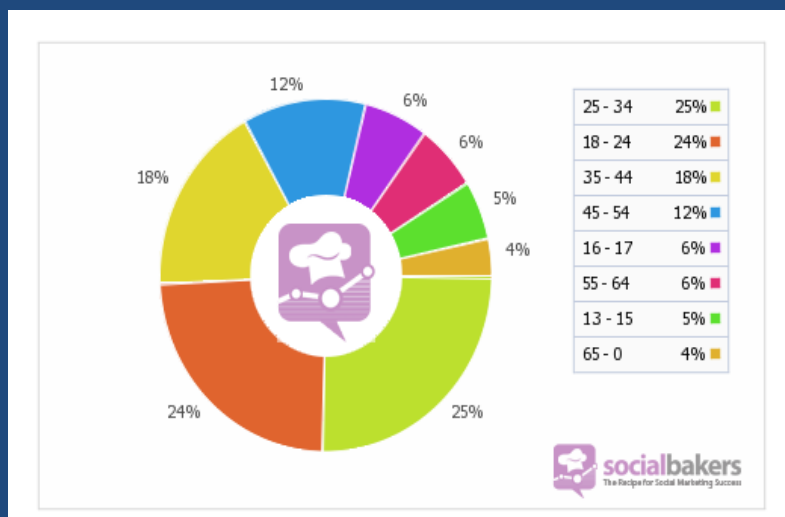
## Use of the internet is growing

Each year more UK households become connected to the internet, and an increasing number of people connect to the internet using mobile phones and wireless hotspots. The worldwide use of social media is also on the rise, with more social media accounts being opened year on year, and a greater proportion of online time being spent on social media sites.

Whilst there appears to be huge growth in the use of social media, trend data is starting to show a decline in visits to official brand websites (e.g. car manufacturers, clothing and sporting goods). It has been predicted that social media sites will increasingly be used as a portal to the rest of the internet, and to access everything we do online.

## Who uses social media?

Demographic information shows that social media is not just a tool for the young. For example, the total number of Facebook users in the UK is reaching 30,484,380, representing a population penetration of 48.89%, and a growth of more than 315,840 in the last 6 months. The figure to the right shows that 40% of these users are over the age of 35.



Age breakdown of UK Facebook users

## Benefits of social media for Government

- Increase access to audiences
- Improve engagement with citizens, partners and stakeholders
- Increase the speed of public feedback and input
- Reach specific audiences on specific issues
- Reduce dependence on traditional media channels
- Counter inaccurate press coverage

## Engaging with distributed audiences

The key characteristics of social media are:

**Connectedness, participation, openness, conversation and community.** These provide the means to encourage engagement and allow Government to develop interactive relationships between themselves and the public.

Effective use of social media can help Government to better understand, respond to and attract the attention of specific and distributed audiences.

# LEVERAGING YOUR NETWORK DURING EMERGENCIES

## How can social media help in an emergency?

- Permits **instant transmission** of messages direct to followers.
- Can **reach** a broad number of people and organisations.
- Contributes to the public's **situation awareness** as an emergency unfolds, and can help responders gain a more accurate picture.
- Helps to **co-ordinate** response efforts.
- Supports **rumour management** and correction of **mis-information**.
- Helps to **connect** the community after an emergency to help the recovery effort.
- Can help to **co-ordinate** clean-up activities and volunteer efforts.
- Provides a way for the community to express and offer **support** its members.

**In the US social media sites are the fourth most popular source to gain emergency information**

**Emergency Management personnel agree that social media is an effective mechanism for sharing timely and accurate information with ease during an emergency situation**

## Case studies of social media use in emergencies

### Examples of using social media in emergencies

Social media has been extensively used to communicate key information during emergencies.

➤ **US Airways Flight 1549 (2009)** – Passengers tweeted **images** of the downed plane.

➤ **Australian Country Fire Authority (2009)** – Australian Fire Authority used twitter to send out regular **alerts** and **updates** regarding the Victorian bushfires.

➤ **Haiti earthquakes (2010)** – social media was used to **share information**, **react** to the situation and to rally **support**

# TWITTER

Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging site that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets.

Tweets are text-based posts which are displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as followers.

## Who else is on Twitter?

UK Police  
UK Fire & Rescue Services  
UK Ambulance / Air Ambulance  
Number 10 Downing Street  
FBI  
CIA  
51 US Representatives

## Key Terms:

**Retweeting** - Retweeting is the act of sharing someone else's tweet with your followers – spreading the word wider.

**@replies** - Use an at sign (@) in front of a Twitter username to reply to someone, to refer to them.

**Hashtags** - Use the sharp or number sign (#) as part of a "hashtag" to organise and categorise your information

## How does Twitter work?

Twitter lets you write and read messages of up to 140 characters, or the very length of this sentence, including all punctuation and spaces.

The messages are public and viewable from the author's profile page. Users are able to decide which accounts they follow and receive messages from.

Users can respond to tweets in the following ways:

- Send the author a message back.
- Subscribe to receive future tweets from the author by 'following' them (if you are not already doing so).
- Retweet the message (i.e., send the message in its entirety to your own 'followers').
- Expand the conversation by sending their own tweet about what the author has written.
- A combination of the above.

## Utility of Twitter in Emergency Management

- Immediacy, in that it gets information out to the public straight away.
- Ability to inform the public and spread understanding. This increases the feeling of safety.
- Wide reach, allowing crisis communication to traders, businesses, media and inhabitants.
- Ability to gain feedback and receive direct communication ensures it is a valuable tool to be engaged with during emergencies.
- Capacity to conduct rumour management and correction of mis-information.
- It is easy to use and therefore allows easy access to all key information, for both responders and the general public.

## Sample Tweets by UK CAT 1 Responders:

~Fact of the day - We travelled more than 270,000 miles last year keeping our district clean. U can report litter online <http://ow.ly/8uTWb>

~Fiat Punto broken into overnight in Co-op car park, Stapleford. Side window smashed and stereo stolen. Remember to #mindyourmotor

~It's #testittuesday once again, make sure you test your smoke alarm today

# FACEBOOK

## What is Facebook?

Facebook is a free social networking site that allows people to connect with their selected network of 'friends'. It currently has over 500 million users worldwide and the average Facebook user has 130 friends.

There are multiple ways to interact - chat, email, photo, video, file-sharing, blogging, common interest groups and more. The average user spends more than 55 minutes a day on Facebook.

## Who else is on Facebook?

UK Police  
Government Departments  
Corporate Companies/Brands  
Public Figures  
Charities  
NHS  
UK Fire and Rescue Services  
Local Councils  
Politicians

## Key Terms:

**Profile** - Contains demographic information, and through which people can contact you.

**Groups** - Enable those with similar interests to discuss a particular topic.

**Fan Pages** - Belong to individuals/organisations, used to discuss interests.

**Wall** - Used to post text, images, videos or links, and view posts from others.

**Friends** - Those you allow to access your profile.

**Likes** - Viewers can 'like' a status update or wall post to show they found it useful. You can also 'like' a page to receive updates from them and access their wall.

**News Feed** - Shows the most recent/most commented on information from your friends or pages that you 'like'.

**Share** - A status update or wall post can be 'shared'. This is then accessible to the sharer's 'friends'.

## Utility of Facebook in emergencies

- Providing swift updates containing information and a link to the main page can update the public in an effective and timely way.
- Providing a forum for discussion (the group's 'wall') so questions and answers can be quickly updated in order to prevent rumour spreading.
- Information can be spread on a large scale and can be shared by 'friends' or 'members' to widen its reach further.

## How does Facebook work?

Pages can be searched for by anyone, but to access it, you must 'like' the page, request to join or request a friend. You can also be asked to join or be sent a 'friend' request.

## How do you communicate?

**Status Updates:** Usually a 1-2 sentence update from the owner of the page. Every time there is a status update it appears on the news feed of 'friends' or those who 'like' the page. They can also be 'shared' by readers, liked and commented on.

**Wall Posts:** Used to share text on the 'wall' and can be uploaded and accessed by all 'friends' or those who 'like' the page. They can be commented on, 'liked' and 'shared'. Wall posts have no length restrictions.

## Example of uses in emergencies

During the Iceland volcano (2010), Facebook was used by the public to advertise shelter and accommodation available through 'I need to get home' groups. Facebook was also used to co-ordinate transportation efforts.

During Hurricane Gustav (2008) Facebook was used to notify emergency responders and the public of events in real time. Facebook was also used to send mass emails to team members when the call notifications system crashed.

The Red Cross uses Facebook to issue alerts of potential disasters.



## IMAGE AND VIDEO SHARING SITES

**YouTube** is a video sharing website. Users can upload and share videos of up to 10 min duration. Unregistered users can watch the videos. Registered users can upload an unlimited number of videos.

**Flickr** is an image and video hosting website where community members can share and comment on media.

### UTILITY OF YOUTUBE AND FLICKR

#### Youtube:

- To house video footage compiled by CAT 1 organisations.
- As a platform for some information appeals.
- As a platform to launch Viral Campaigns.

#### Flickr:

- Use of photos to identify individuals e.g. offenders (2011 summer riots), or missing individuals.

#### Use of Flickr by MET police to identify suspects



### Who else is on YouTube and Flickr?

UK Police  
UK Fire and Rescue Services  
Local Resilience Forums

### YouTube usage

- 60 hours of video are uploaded every minute, or one hour of video is uploaded to YouTube every second.
- Over 4 billion videos are viewed a day.
- Over 800 million unique users visit YouTube each month.
- YouTube had more than 1 trillion views, or almost 140 views for every person on earth.

### YouTube and wider social media

- 500 years of YouTube video are watched every day on Facebook, and over 700 YouTube videos are shared on Twitter each minute.
- 100 million people take a social action on YouTube (likes, shares, comments, etc.) every week .
- An auto-shared tweet results in 6 new youtube.com sessions on average and we see more than 500 tweets per minute containing a YouTube link.
- Millions of subscriptions happen each day. Subscriptions allow you to connect with someone you're interested in – whether it's a friend, or a group – and keep up with their activity on the site.
- More than 50% of videos on YouTube have been rated, or include comments from the community.
- Millions of videos are 'favourited' every day .



## Determine your objectives

- What do you want to use social media for?
  - *Break down your overall goals and see where social media can help.*
- What do you want to achieve? Be realistic!
  - *Usually a mix of 'results', 'tactical' and 'capacity' based objectives such as:*
    - Increase email alert sign-ups by 500 in the next 6 months.
    - Increase website traffic from Facebook by 25% by April 2012.
    - Increase the age/ethnicity/gender/geographical range of Facebook fans by 20%.
    - Identify the top 10 influencers on twitter to help spread messages by August 2012.
    - Conduct an audience survey to determine where to expand and diversify presence.
    - Integrate social media across communications and emergency planning teams.

## Identify your target audience

- Who are they?
  - *Individuals? Organisations? Gender? Age? Locations? Behaviours? Desires?*
- What do they look for?
  - *What do they find interesting and useful? Do they like images and video?*
- What are they saying?
  - *Do they talk about you? Do they talk about emergencies? How?*
- Who are the influencers?
  - *Who do they listen to? Who has lots of fans? Who is linked to other networks?*

## Develop an internal approach

- Which social media platforms and information management tools do you want to use? How will you integrate them?
- Who will be responsible for day-to-day use? Who will be responsible in an emergency?
- What training and education do you need?
- What are the risks and how will you manage them?
- What policies and practices do you need to adjust or develop?
- What kind of interoperability protocols do you need to agree with your partners?
- How will you use social media to manage your relationship with the media?

## Establish a presence

- Open social media accounts, complete your profile, and launch your presence.
- Listen to what your audience is saying about topics you care about. Identify similar sites to yours and gauge how effectively they engage the target audience.
- Download tools that can help you keep track of content.
- Develop a content strategy, including when to use auto feeds and pre-planned responses.
- Begin content distribution.
- Be found: Develop a marketing strategy for how and where you will publicise your social media presence.
- Note and respond to changes e.g. volume, reactions, sentiments.

## Sustain your presence

- Think of ways you can maintain interest in your sites:
  - Consider using a variety of formats – pictures, videos, text, links.
  - Promote ‘helpful’ content and share other peoples’ content.
  - Inject some fun and make use of games and competitions.
- Strive to interact and engage rather than broadcast:
  - Plan regular posts, monitor your sites frequently and ensure you respond to questions and feedback.
  - Ask questions, promote discussion, ask for feedback.

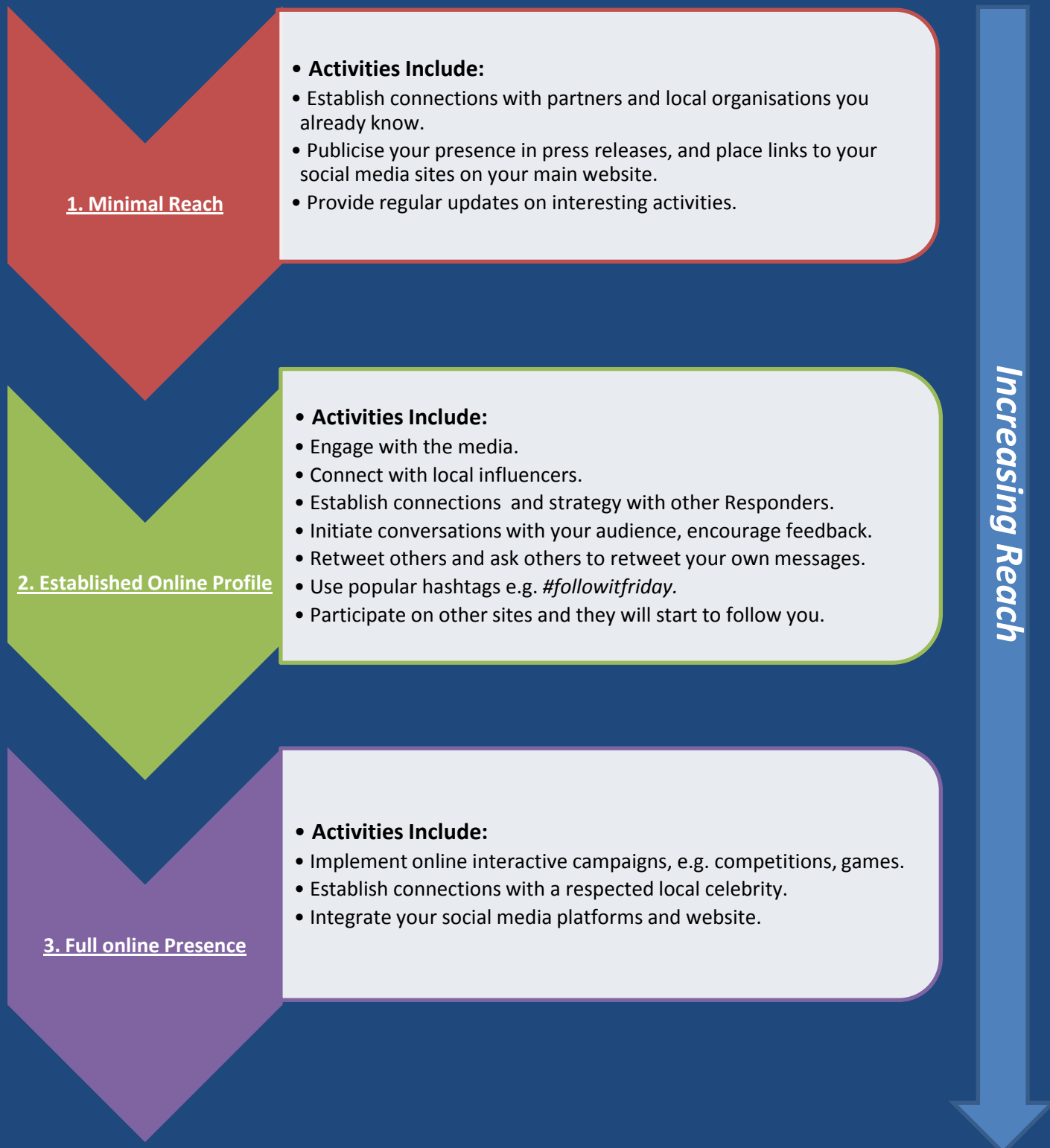
## Evaluate and learn

- What does success look like? How do you know when you have met your objectives?
  - Try – one size does not fit all!
  - Measure – measure how well you are meeting your objectives.
  - Iterate – always feed information back and update your approach.

## PREPARE: Expand the community

### How can you increase your fan base?

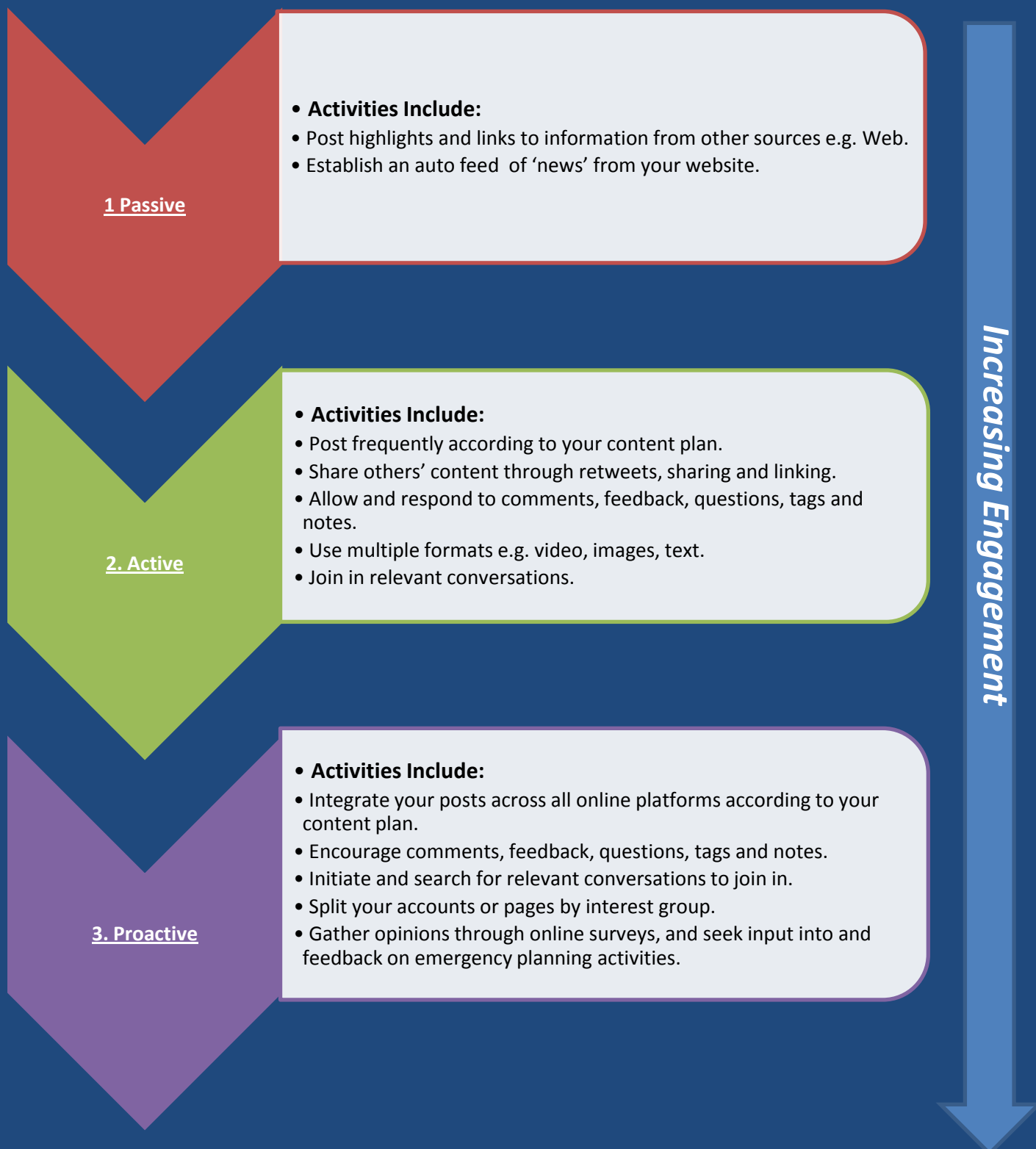
Preparedness is the most challenging phase of implementing and sustaining a social media presence. A lot of effort and resource is required to build up a strong network of 'fans' to enable you to reap the benefits during the Response and Recovery phases. You will not gain a strong fan base just by creating a social media account or profile. Think about when, where and how you will promote your presence, and consider the different stages of expansion and associated activities below.



# PREPARE: Achieve online Engagement

## How can you engage with your audience?

Social media is all about engaging, interacting and participating, rather than one-way broadcasting. Your engagement strategy will start with understanding your target audience. Once you know who they are and what interests them, consider the following engagement stages and associated activities. Bear in mind that as a general rule of thumb, whilst the benefit gained increases with the level of engagement achieved, so does the level of resource and effort required.



## PREPARE: Tips on Engagement

### How to respond to criticism

Take it in your stride and work to find an answer. How you respond is vital. It is a positive thing that people care enough to enter into a discussion!

#### Do:

- Respond as quickly as possible.
- Respectfully correct inaccurate information.
- Explain how you are going to address the criticism.
- Invite further feedback.

#### Don't:

- Ignore it or delete it.
- Yell or preach.

### How to handle mistakes

Accept the fact that you will make mistakes but don't let this fear stop you – we are only human, and the audience knows that!

Acknowledge that you were wrong and be quick to make any necessary changes.

LEARN from the experience!

### Building credibility

Make sure you set up your profile fully, using familiar corporate images and logos.

Be transparent – say who you are and who you work for.

Add value by sharing tips and insights.

Be as accurate as possible.

### Use a personal approach

Learn from observing how others speak and interact.

Use some pre-prepared responses until you feel comfortable.

Think customer not corporate.

Inject some fun into your posts where appropriate.

Be appreciative of peoples' suggestions and feedback.

### Accuracy

On a day-to-day basis providing accurate postings will help to build your credibility with the audience.

HOWEVER, during an emergency people actively look to social media for information that will help them build situation awareness and make decisions. Provide a steady stream of information to them, acknowledging where you are still waiting for facts and confirmations, and then provide updates when you receive them.

## PREPARE: How are you going to use it in an emergency?

There are several areas that should be considered and planned for once an emergency occurs

There are a number of 'management' issues to consider when using social media in emergencies. These include how the capability will be resourced during an emergency, and the logistics of this. Good practices include:

- Devising a rota system for staff who are 'online' 24/7 to monitor and respond to social media updates.
- Organise access to social media during the emergency (perhaps mobile access) and ensure relevant staff members have been trained, and have access to the sites.
- Ensure plans are flexible and able to deal with a variety of emergencies, and maintain flexibility.

**Management**

**Method**

The content of messages is critical. Areas to consider include:

- Using hashtags to allow information to be easily found. These could either be pre-prepared or created during the emergency. Hashtags can also be identified by monitoring conversations as there may already be some popular themes.
- Do you want a separate channel? This could be a separate twitter or Facebook account known as 'dark sites'. These are ready to use sites containing links and information, but which are only activated during an emergency.
- Creating a newsroom feel environment on Facebook encourages confidence in the site as a valid and reliable source of information. It also enables quick updates, feeds and further information to be displayed.
- Consider how you will approach 'accuracy' issues. The public actively seek out information during emergencies and posting 'something' is preferable to posting nothing until all the facts are known.

Ensure protocols are in place. Aspects include:

- Ensuring there is an understanding between CAT1 responders of the roles of individual agencies. This could include nominating a lead responder, and a policy for other CAT1 responders to 'retweet'.
- Incorporate social media into emergency response exercises to enhance training, and ensure staff are familiar with the technology and dealing with a range of situations.
- Devise messaging protocols such as the frequency of messages, and whether certain content may need approval. Ensure there are relevant mechanisms in place.
- Raise the awareness of the public regarding what is available through social media during an emergency, and what they might expect. For example, not using social media as a replacement for the 999 service.

**Protocol**



# RESPOND: Using social media during an emergency

During an emergency social media can be employed in a variety of ways to assist efforts to RESPOND to a ongoing incident.

Social media can be used as a **systematic emergency management tool**. It can be used by emergency management communicators to help:

- **Communicate** and **engage** with the public/affected individuals.
- Establish **situation awareness**.
- Upload **images** to verify or refute rumours.
- Gather **damage estimates**.

**Effective and immediate communication during an emergency is critical to fulfilling Emergency Responders' missions.**

## Tips to increase SM effectiveness in RESPOND phase

Use sign-off 'Please RT' (retweet) to increase spread of message

Target influential online individuals and encourage them to retweet messages.

Ensure police are engaged with social media

## Case study of using social media in an emergency:

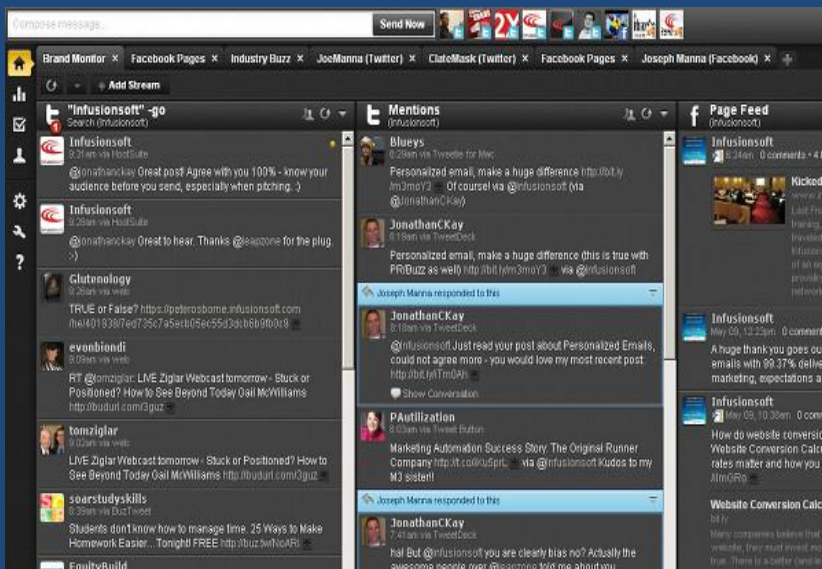
During the 2011 summer riots the following steps allowed full integration of social media as a communication strategy when RESPONDING to an emergency.

- **Maintenance of social media presence** by communication team staff 24/7 for up-to-date news reporting and monitoring.
- **Use of hashtags** to ensure information was rapidly seen by the largest proportion of users.
- **Posting of audio messages** (shared through social media) from an Assistant Chief Constable.
- **Collecting and disseminating positive messages** to front line staff.
- **Answering questions** posed by social media users regarding the incident.
- Using social media to **counter mis-information** and confirming, or rejecting, rumours.

## Use of tools during emergencies

Several tools have been constructed that should greatly improve the integration of social media into emergency response. Tools such as TweetDeck (right) will:

- **Reduce resource** (time and personnel) requirements with regards to monitoring, searching and engaging with social media.
- **Reduce burden** on social media staff due to improved ability to filter key information.
- Help to triangulate and **co-ordinate campaigns** across social media.



## RECOVER: Using social media after an emergency



### Case study: 2011 summer riots – Broom Army goes viral

*“Hundreds of people armed with brooms, bin bags and rubber gloves turned out across London to help clean up the damage caused by a third night of rioting, looting and arson.*

*Co-ordinated online on Facebook and Twitter, volunteers mobilised in the worst-hit parts of the capital to sweep streets, help local shopkeepers and show solidarity with communities thrown into turmoil by the violence. “ – Daily Telegraph 9/9/2011*

Social media can assist the key areas of recovery in the following ways:

- **Environmental:** Social media can help co-ordinate clean-up efforts, recruit volunteers, and inform the public about waste collection efforts.
- **Humanitarian:** Social media can help communicate health care facility information and locations of health centres.
- **Economic:** Social media can be used to help disseminate information regarding businesses and encourage economic recovery.
- **Infrastructure:** Social media can be used to communicate recovery of infrastructure, to identify areas that are in most need of recovery. Site clearance can also be co-ordinated.

### **Tips to increase social media effectiveness in RECOVERY phases**

Use social media to disperse information about aid and support, and update it regularly.

Use sign-off ‘Please RT’ (retweet) to increase the spread of the message.

Target influential online individuals and encourage them to retweet messages.

Monitor for ‘emergent behaviour’ that can support recovery efforts, e.g. volunteer efforts.

Spread information that will help co-ordinate recovery efforts e.g. location of supplies, aid, volunteers.

## OVERCOMING SOME OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES

### **Lack of knowledge / understanding / skills**

Try to identify an expert in your organisation – they may not be in the communications team!

Online communities and information can help.

Training courses are available.

### **Potential for criticism and negative feedback**

Use it as an opportunity to influence perceptions and engage in conversation.

Always respond, never ignore it.

Observe and learn from others' experiences.

### **Prohibitive cost / resource**

Spread the load.

Set realistic goals and be explicit in your profile about what the public can expect.

Use tools and good practices to help reduce effort.

Look into using volunteers during emergencies.

### **Handling the information**

Use freely available tools designed to help manage social media e.g. Hootsuite, TweetDeck.

Look for trends and verify those trends.

Develop and try out and develop some procedures.

### **Lack of control**

Do not try to control your information – that's not what social media is about.

Adjust your communication policies and practices for social media – it's a different ball game.

Use a disclaimer in your profile.

### **Measuring effectiveness and benefits**

Set realistic goals and objectives.

Counting 'likes' and number of fans is important, but think about how you can also measure behaviour change.

Track successes and promote them in your organisation.

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

### **Statistics and trends**

[www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/index](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/index)

[www.socialbakers.com](http://www.socialbakers.com)

<http://www.wave6.co.uk/>

### **Guidance**

Engage: Digital and social media engagement for the police service, NPIA 2010

The health communicator's social media toolkit, Nov 2009

Engaging through social media. A guide for civil servants. COI 2009 <http://wiki.gsi.gov.uk>

Social media guidelines and best practices. Facebook. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 3 January 2011. [www.cdc.gov/socialmedia](http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia)

Social media guidelines and best practices. Twitter. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 December 2011 [www.cdc.gov/socialmedia](http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia)