Are We Having a Social Media Crisis?
There are 3 characteristics of a true social media crisis:

- **Info Asymmetry**: There is a social media crisis when we do not know any more than the public about what is going on. This is called information asymmetry.
  
  **Example**: A bombing has occurred in a location where we have programs. Participants and/or staff may or may not be affected.

- **Abnormal Criticism**: Some ongoing criticism is expected. When a markedly different line of criticism occurs, however, is when we have a crisis.
  
  **Example**: Criticized for organizing “vacations” for foreigners at taxpayer’s expense (normal criticism) VS. Criticized for organizing a meeting with a convicted gang member.

- **Material Impact**: The scope and scale of potential impact on the company overall is large enough to indicate that the situation is a social media crisis.
  
  **Example**: A staff member or program liaison is accused of assaulting a participant of one of our programs.

Okay, it’s a crisis...now what?

**Internal Alert & Response System**
Not all crises require the same level of response. Here’s who you should contact in case of a social media emergency:

**Point of Contact: You**
This is not a social media crisis, but the situation does need immediate attention. Use your Situational Response toolkit to determine the best course of action and then take it on behalf of the social media profile/s you administer.

**Example**: Internet troll posting on social profiles

**Point of Contact: Social Media Point**
Not a crisis, but this requires a more strategic response. Reach out to the social media point person on your team to help clarify and draft a response.

**Example**: Misinformation posted about organization and you need clarification on the correct information before posting a response.

**Contact**: Social media point person in your office

**Point of Contact: Immediate Supervisor**
This crisis is severe enough to immediately inform your supervisor. He or she will help you decide how to respond and whether or not the rest of the team needs to be briefed.

**Example**: Participant is detained or arrested. Public and media are not yet aware.

**Contact**: Your immediate supervisor

**Point of Contact: Communications**
This crisis needs a strategic response from brand-level profiles and possibly other communications assets (i.e. blog post, landing page, press release).

**Example**: A serious situation such as assault, arrest, or asylum, and it is public and needs to be addressed

**Contact**: Senior Management
1. You Can’t Respond to What You Don’t See
Great response starts with great listening. Staff should keep an eye on Facebook pages and Twitter. Listen for industry news and geopolitical alerts that may affect our work. Conversations are happening, and if we’re not listening then issues can build momentum and be that much harder to respond to.

2. Is It Worth a Response?
Use the Social Media Triage diagram to determine if a comment is worth a response. For negative criticism, avoid responding to these situations:
   a. The criticism is on a small forum where our response will only bring more attention to the issue
   b. The criticism is a blatant attack and clearly outrageous – anyone else reading it will see the critic as the problem, not us
   c. The criticism comes from a known Internet troll who is only looking to get a response

   Sometimes ignoring the issue results in the troll posting increasingly inflammatory comments more often. Maybe they are after a response, or perhaps they take silence as agreement. Either way they must be responded to.
   a. Do NOT delete posts unless they break our community’s posted Code of Conduct. If they do and we then delete the post, then make an announcement to the community why we took the action we did.
   b. If the posts do not break the Code of Conduct but are provocative enough to require a response, then do so with grace and professionalism. Just because a comment is critical does not mean it is not valuable.

3. Act Quickly
The longer we wait to respond the worse the situation will get. Critics will become angry, fans will become confused, and others may pick up on the issue and spread negative buzz.

4. Response Protocol for Emergent Scenarios
Sometimes (hopefully in very rare cases) situations spiral out of our control and become public very quickly. If the situation is not yet public knowledge, notify Senior Management immediately so that a response can be drafted just in case it were to go public. If the situation is public and the organization has been named, defer to Senior Management; your help may be required to publish responses on social media and to continue to listen to the conversation.
8 Tips for Better Situational Responses

1. Show Empathy

Social media is not the place for a canned organizational response. Show empathy and communicate in a friendly tone. It’s easy for trolls to yell at a faceless organization, but when someone says “Hi, my name is Emily and I’m sorry for your trouble…” the troll is no longer yelling at the organization and the anger fades faster.

2. Offer a Real Apology

If we’re in the wrong, apologize sincerely and do not make them feel like it’s their fault (e.g., No “We’re sorry you feel that way.”)

3. Direct Traffic

Even though you may not know the answer or are not the program or team the comment indicates, help direct questions to the appropriate answers on our website or make appropriate staff aware they should respond.

4. Never Fight

Any time we win an argument online, we’re losing: people will only remember that we’re combative. Instead explain our side of the story and aim to start a conversation.
   a. Rule of Three: Respond no more than two times and then take it offline (give person an email address or send them a direct message). More than two responses in a comment thread is an argument.
   b. Don’t get emotional. Any negative comment can help us learn and get better.

5. Post Where the Conversation Began

If the conversation started on Facebook, post there first. If it started on Twitter, post there first. We can always inform other communities and keep them updated later, but we’ll get more traction if we address the crisis where it first broke.

6. Provide a Pressure Relief Valve

Sometimes people just want to vent. It’s best to make sure they do so on our turf. Accumulating ire on a venue we control (e.g., Facebook post, blog, landing page, etc.) will:
   a. Allow us to keep track of the conversation in one place
   b. Provide early warning of new dimensions to the crisis
   c. Give other community members an official place to come to our defense
   d. Give us the ability to set the rules for the exchange

Use our Internal Response & Alert system to determine if the crisis needs input from higher levels. Ask for help in producing a landing page, blog post, or other materials if necessary.

7. Create a Crisis FAQ

For high-level crises, a website landing page should be created (with help from Senior Management in regards to messaging) where all of the information about the crisis will be posted. This allows us to respond to social media questions with a link instead of repeating information. The Crisis FAQ should include:
   a. Acknowledgement of Crisis
   b. Details about the issue (who, what, where, when, why, how)
c. Specific actions taking place in response
d. Real or potential effects
e. Steps being taken to prevent future occurrences
f. Contact information for dedicated staff (most likely Senior Management if it’s at this level)

An example of a situation that may call for a Crisis FAQ would be a group of Americans taking part in an exchange program in Turkey being kidnapped and held hostage by terrorists. Once the media picks up the story we would have questions coming in from many sources, social media included. Rather than post disparate answers across several platforms, it would be beneficial to have frequently asked questions on one landing page. We could then respond with a link and encourage discussion if there are further questions/comments.

8. Learn from the Situation

After the crisis subsides, reconstruct and deconstruct it by documenting its facets:

a. Make copies of all tweets, status updates, comments, emails, etc.
b. Analyze web traffic, engagement, and search volume patterns from the time period
c. Where did the crisis break? When? Where did it spread? How?
d. How did internal notification and response protocol work?
e. Did community members rise to our defense (thank them!)?
f. How did the online crisis intersect with offline coverage?