



Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009

Conference Report

Frocomm Australia

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Introduction

[Frocomm's](#) 2nd Annual Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009 was part of an extended series of events for public relations and marketing professionals that Frocomm is committed to presenting. Featuring an array of thought leaders and public relations industry heavyweights from leading consultancies, public and private sector organisations, it provided participants with an abundance of **crisis communication "brain nutrition"**.

The focus of the conference was on social media's relevance to crisis communication. Presenters made it crystal clear that any contemporary crisis communication plan that does not include social media is **an incomplete one, and seriously flawed**.

In fact, as the communication programs of many organisations, especially government ones, still do not reflect the impact social media is having, it may well be that crisis communication becomes (or is) the first **toe in the social media waters** for them.

Key themes of the summit included:

- The need for **social media guidelines** for employees
- **Understanding** what is going on in the social media space before entering it
- The speed of social media and this being a **double-edged sword**
- The power of **pictures and video**, especially on free websites like YouTube
- The challenges and opportunities to protect, build and **trust** towards an organisation
- The opportunities social media provide for **direct communication** with stakeholders
- The influence social media-driven information is having on **traditional media coverage**
- Social media should **not be used at the expense** of other, existing methodologies.

The content of this special, free summit report was produced by Craig Pearce of [Craig Pearce Strategic Communication](#) and [Bluegrass Consulting](#). This report summarises key summit 'take-outs'. Craig has also analysed and added value to some of the presenters' **insights and perspectives**. Further analysis of public relations, marketing and more can be found on his blog, [Public relations and managing reputation](#).

In the true spirit of social media, please interact with us, either through email, or on Craig's blog, to let us know your thoughts on the contents of the report. Also, please share this document with your colleagues and peers and tweet away – or share your thoughts via LinkedIn, Facebook et al – about its existence.

Thank you to the many presenters who shared their knowledge and gave up their time for the summit. Hopefully the continued sharing of this knowledge will help many more than those who attended it.

There is nothing quite as social as social media in a face-to-face environment, however, so I hope to see at future events we hold.

Kind Regards,

Glen Frost

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Thank you to all the presenters who shared their knowledge at the conference:

Chair: Ross Monaghan, Deakin University (and Founder, The Media Pod)

Brian Giesen, Director Social Media, Ogilvy PR Australia

Craig Badings, Director, Cannings

Rupert Hugh-Jones, Partner, Scaffidi Hugh-Jones

Libby Day, Director of Corporate Communication, Roche (makers of Tamiflu)

Graham White, Managing Director, Howorth, Ogilvy PR Australia

Amanda Little, Managing Director, Edelman Australia

James Griffin, CEO, SR7 Online Reputation Management

Amber Brodecky, Director, Communities and Media Relations, Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner Victoria

Campbell Fuller, Principal, Porter Novelli

Ross Neilson, Director, CPR Communications

Thank you to the organisations who participated at the 2008 and 2009 conferences.

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Australian Veterinary Association

BHP Billiton

Blue Care

British Consulate-General

CARE Australia

Child Support Agency

Citibank

City of Belmont

Corporate Conversation

CPA Australia

CPR Communications

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry

Department of Environment

Department of Health and Ageing

Department of Lands

Department of Sustainability & Environment

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development

Dept of Education Training and the Arts

Dept. Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs

Downer EDI

ECH Inc

Edelman

Eli Lilly

ERGON Energy

Essential Services Commission

Galaxy Communications Vietnam
Gladstone Ports Corporation
GWM WATER
Hothouse Interactive
Hydro Tasmania
KBR
Kreab Gavin Anderson
Main Roads
Man Investments
Mango Communications
McGrath Estate Agents
Mediascape
Medicines Australia
MLA
NSW Maritime
NSW State Emergency Service
Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner
Opera Australia
OPTUS
Pembroke School
Porter Novelli
Queensland Health
Randstad
Red Bull Australia
Roche Products
Rockdale City Council
Scaffidi Hugh-Jones
Sefiani Communciations Group
Southern Regional Water Pipeline Alliance
SR7

Sydney Opera House

Symantec Corporate

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

The Salvation Army Employment Plus

The University of Queensland

Toga Hospitality

Tourism Sunshine Coast

Toyota Motor Corporation

University of New England

Veolia Environmental Services

Western Power

WESTFIELD Ltd

Westralia Airports Corporation

Woolproducers Australia

Yarra Valley Water



Chapter 1

Social media: strategic insights for crisis communication

Social media is a double-edged sword for crisis communication. On the one hand, it allows issues to be **identified, monitored** and **managed** extremely quickly. It also allows for real-time **interaction** with stakeholders, providing a mechanism through which disinformation ‘spot fires’ can be put out before they turn into raging bushfires.

A crisis – in tandem with social media – actually provides an opportunity for stakeholder engagement and **relationship enhancement**.

But that’s the good news! The flip side is that, as [Laurel Papworth](#) has observed, social media has a ripple effect. It allows for news to spread – yes, that burning metaphor again – like wildfire. Nothing sells like [bad news](#). This goes for social as much as traditional media. There are a plethora of examples where social media mechanisms have led to a **reputational hammering** for organisations.

So, why can social media be of use in the management of crisis?

[Ogilvy’s Brian Giesen](#) is one of many who said – at [Frocomm’s](#) Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009 – that it is because of the pervasiveness and influence of social media:

- 8 million Australians on Facebook as at October 2009
- 20 million unique monthly visitors to Twitter as at May 2009,
- Twitter more mainstream than news sites like [The New York Times](#)
- Word of mouth (social media or face-to-face) generates more trust than traditional media or advertising
- Because it is online, the crisis ‘footprint’ cannot be erased
- Crisis “history” can always be searched for and/or recirculated
- The web amounts to speed of information spread
- In a crisis information cannot be contained within geographic constraints

Brian purports that organisations have six hours to decide what approach to take to a crisis, before the proverbial really hits the online fan. Then it all goes **exponential** on us. And this is via both social and non-social digital media.

His underlying advice in regard to a social media crisis management methodology? All pretty simple really, just like any crisis management plan:

- Produce a plan
- Listen up! (**following** via social media using whatever works best)
- **Create** the content
- **Engage** with stakeholders
- Respond
- Recover

The devil, of course, is in the detail, or the strategic judgement that goes into how the crisis is dealt with:





- To respond or not respond?
- The level of engagement that is applied
- Who do we speak to?
- Who or what are the influencers?
- Who or what has the largest stakeholder reach?

Below: overview of how PR practitioners can use Twitter: thanks to Ogilvy 360 Digital Influence for this slide

See also: <http://tinyurl.com/ogilvytwitter>

A Strategic Approach to Using Twitter

STRATEGY	FOLLOW	CREATE	ENGAGE
Customer Relations	Your customers and potential customers	Content relevant to your customers: tips, company info, etc.	Answer questions, respond to comments about your brand
Crisis Management	Your brand, products and relevant issues	Direct to additional resources, updated information, explanation	Answer questions, respond to comments, raise issues, provide info
Corporate Reputation Management	Industry leaders, similar interest groups, news/media	Insights, expertise, become a thought leader	Jump in the conversation. Be transparent and add value
Event Coverage	Those interested or attending event, media	Event information, updates, behind the scenes coverage	Set up Tweet-ups, talk to attendees, ask and answer questions
Product Promotion & Sales	Current and potential customers, those interested in similar products	Links to online promos, insider info on upcoming sales, discount codes	Check replies and DMs, answer questions, provide info when needed
Issue Advocacy	Those interested in your cause, industry leaders, news	Added value: health tips, disaster alerts, fundraising info	Know your followers, thank them for support, get them involved



Chapter 2

Social media: tactical tips for crisis communication

There were plenty of tactical, hands-on tips for using social media in a crisis provided at [Frocomm's Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009](#). [Ogilvy's Brian Giesen](#), [Edleman's Amanda Little](#), [Howorth's Graham White](#), [Scaffidi Hugh-Jones' Rupert Hugh-Jones](#), [SR|7's James Griffin](#) were amongst the public relations thought leaders and industry heavyweights who participated.

Some of their hands-on tips have been loosely grouped into the following categories:

- Human resources and messaging
- Advertising
- Monitoring
- Tools: engagement and broadcast.

Human resources and messaging

Key learning:

Have a **non-communication/public relations** employee talking to bloggers to optimise the relationship benefits

- Best practice is not to have the media relations person be an organisational media spokesperson. In pressured times like a crisis, the same applies to social media
- There can, of course, be coaching and messaging for an organisation's social media conversationalist, but there is where social media [policies/guidelines](#) come into play
- Crisis situation-specific elements to address in the guidelines include:
 - Listen to stakeholders and actually **REALLY** hear their point of view
 - Acknowledge and respect people's points of view
 - Assess whether it is appropriate to ask the person being communicated with to relay to others this new information
 - Prioritise influential voices
- Use an '**authentic**', **human voice** – as opposed to applying corporate-speak – as social media will not tolerate a faceless, mechanical approach
- Stick to the classic spokesperson approach
 - the more senior the better
 - the more he or she recognises the issue and concerns the better
 - the more human and less air-brushed the better
 - the more prepared with messages and trained to speak to media (or through social media) the better

- Ensure that an organisation determines a **narrative** to the crisis and sticks to it – through the application of **consistent messaging** – via different mechanisms
- The minimum hours required to adequately manage your social media reputation online is 16 hours per week or 3 and half hours per day
- Those hours aren't dedicated to a single campaign, but the monitoring and management of your digital footprint alone.
- Once a campaign begins the amount of time spent monitoring, responding and engaging needs to increase rapidly
- HR resource issues should be considered before embarking on a social media campaign. Importantly, the day-to-day monitoring of your online presence is critical
- This is even more imperative for platforms like Twitter where communication is almost instantaneous.

Advertising

- Use **keyword advertising** to ensure links to organisation-driven information on the topics searched for comes up high in search rankings
- Advertise on **blog forums and communities** discussing the issue, with links to organisation-driven information.

Monitoring

- Ogilvy's [The Daily Influence](#) can help provide a dashboard for issues **monitoring**. There are a range of paid and free services to facilitate this occurring, though Amanda Little is an advocate of a customised, paid-for **dashboard** due to the diversity of information sources that exist on the web. Some options for your arsenal:

- [Google alerts](#)
- [Tweetdeck](#)
- [Radian6](#)

- Other approaches to monitoring include:
 - Performing key word searches on social media sites (this helps in the critical step of identifying online brand advocates – and critics – so that strategies can be put in place to leverage/address these people)
 - Subscribing to industry-relevant blogs.

Tools: engagement and broadcast

- '**Dark' websites** – whether using Wordpress or another digital format – can feature pre-prepared information in a pre-prepared format that can quickly be customised and turned 'live' when a crisis hits

- Pre-registered URLs can also help (e.g. KentuckyFriedChickenresponds.com)
 - Make sure the content is made easily sharable through incorporating applications such as Digg, Technorati, Facebook etc
- A **webcast** of organisational statements can be uploaded, making for a 'media conference' that can be accessed at any time by any media anywhere (important in a global context where social/digital media facilitates worldwide coverage). The webcast should be formatted so that it can be embedded in blogs as per standard YouTube videos
- **Video** is a messaging tool of high utility; YouTube is a search engine of significance in its own right, whilst plenty of people prefer to learn/understand from watching footage rather than reading
- **Forums** are particularly applicable to Australia, so focus on them, whilst Australians have not engaged with blogs as much as in some other countries (though a few people I know are sceptical of this claim re forums, so it may be specific to certain sectors, such as fashion and IT)
- **Twitter** is good at getting the message out, though it clearly cannot be relied upon in isolation:
 - It needs to be part of an holistic social media crisis management and stakeholder engagement 'package'
 - Further advice on Twitter was to make sure you direct message (DM) people who make comments, but do it strategically. Some comments you need to let go through to the keeper whilst it may be prudent to engage with some twitterers (or tweeters...) to, firstly, nullify/correct disinformation and, secondly, either through asking or hoping (!) for corrected information to be tweeted out through the individual's network.
- When transmitting issue response tweets, link to more comprehensive content on your website
- Always correct disinformation about the issue. Incorrect information, especially if it is inflammatory or 'bad news sexy', will probably be a hotter online ticket than good news. Just ask the [media](#) on that point. But don't be condescending when making the correction
- Don't engage with bloggers who want money to cover the issue in a positive light. Instead, as with traditional media, offer them access to unique information or spokespeople. Emphasise this gives them additional credibility for their blog and can facilitate more eyeballs for them
 - Social media is useful for media relations, too, as through a mechanism like Twitter you can determine which media is driving online comment. You can then make an informed decision to place more resources in addressing that specific media source and customising a response/content to ameliorate the reputational damage it might be generating
 - As such, it is important to follow negative as well as positive comment about your brand on an ongoing basis as well as, of course, in a crisis situation

- Lots of journos are on Twitter so can be good way of cutting through the barriers (i.e. which could be something as simple as the multi-tasking pressure journalists themselves are under in crisis coverage/analysis) and engaging with them
- The future for Twitter (from Graham White): it will find its role; will probably need to monetise in one way or another, with an example of this being charging corporates being followed once they reach a certain level (e.g. 20,000 followers etc).

[Ogilvy have bookmarked some useful [resources](#) on Twitter.]

Further sage words of advice from Craig Badings of Cannings, just in case anyone was fool enough to consider thinking it was possible: “You don’t make friends during a crisis.”

There are two points to make about this:

- In a crisis, aim to minimise the increased amount of enemies you make
- Look at it as an opportunity to form a solid base of stakeholders who, whilst they may not be in a **swoon over your organisation** at the conclusion (if there ever really is such a thing from a branding perspective) of the crisis, at least there is solid, respectful ground on which to form **new**, and **renewed**, positive, mutually beneficial **relationships**.



Chapter 3

Corporate social responsibility: mitigating reputation risk in a crisis

An organisation needs to understand the **core values** of its stakeholders and customise communication processes in respect of, and in response to, those values, asserted [Rupert Hugh-Jones](#) from [Scaffidi Hugh-Jones](#) at [Frocomm's](#) Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009. This assertion was made in the context of crisis communication, but it could equally be applied to all aspects of an organisation, both communication and non-communication related.

This perspective is a manifestation of the guiding principle of strategic public relations, [two-way symmetrical communication](#), where organisational perspectives, processes and, yes, values, do not come about in isolation to stakeholders, but through an **organic, mutually respectful process**.

[Craig Badings](#), of [Cannings](#), took the same approach in his presentation at the summit. Craig wielded the hatchet to Milton Friedman's dictum of "The business of business is business..." Craig said, "This no longer cuts it. Companies know this, the public knows it and so do NGOs, regulators and government.

"This is the **era of the ethical consumer**," Craig continued. There is nowhere for organisations to hide. This reinforces the responsibility that public relations practitioners have to [influence](#) organisational behaviour. This will help organisations develop more mutually beneficial relationships with their stakeholders, at the same time impacting positively on society.

Craig posed the question, can CSR or [thought leadership](#) lessen the impact of a crisis or lead to a faster recovery? He asserted that these days companies are not only, "expected to come up with products that are good for the bottom line, they also need to be **good for society**."

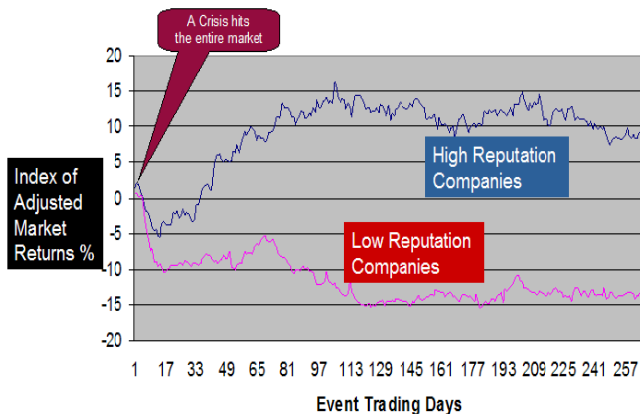
CSR, of course, is fundamentally about aligning an organisation with society and stakeholder expectations. Operating at its optimum level, it is not 'bolt-on', it is fully integrated and part of the **organisational culture**, as [SR|7's](#) James Griffin implied at the summit. Being socially responsible, then, is just about the best form of reputation enhancement and crisis preparedness that an organisation can undertake.

"CSR in the truest sense is about conducting a thorough risk analysis and aligning programs with your company values that best mitigate those risks in a collaborative a manner as possible," said Craig. Integrating CSR within the values of the business, as Rupert also implied was necessary, enhances the integrity of the organisation and its approach to business.

Craig discussed the findings of the [Reputation Index](#), which corroborates that, "a well-regarded company is more likely to be trusted, liked, admired and esteemed than others – all **strong mitigating factors** when a crisis hits and all likely to afford you, for a while at least, the benefit of the doubt."

Reputation and Performance

Studies of Multiple Crises show that Reputation helps handle crises better



SRI Investment Portfolios outperform other Indexes



Importantly, Craig provided data that strongly suggests organisations with an enhanced reputation **withstand crises markedly better** than those that do not have a good reputation. There are also plenty of academic studies supporting this assertion.

The dialectic that determines why organisations adopt CSR is an interesting one. As Craig pointed out, it is not unusual for the 'adoption' to be driven by a desire to placate stakeholders, rather than be truly aligned with the way a business operates or its values. Philanthropy does not = social responsibility or true two-way symmetrical communication. It is a superficial gesture, no matter how big the handout. Giving money to a worthy cause hardly mitigates the fact that you might be **slashing rainforests** and paying workers a **pittance** so that you make enough money for the hand out.

Similarly, producing a flashy CSR report (printed on recycled paper...) does not constitute social responsibility.

However, if the reporting and the philanthropy help peel the scales from the organisation's eyes as to the benefit and payoff in CSR, then who cares? It has a purpose. Sometimes, the **cart does come before the horse**.

A further extension of this is an organisation's use of social media. Utilising social media implies an organisation is applying a CSR/two-way symmetrical communication approach because social media means it is...

- listening, talking to and trying to understand its stakeholders (or is it?)
- open to altering its processes, products, services, behaviours and approaches to stakeholder engagement, so it is more in line with stakeholder needs and wants (or does it?).

The answer to both questions is no. But if the use of social media means some of those stakeholder messages are filtering their way **up to the boardroom**...then maybe, just maybe, that social responsibility will come.

CSR, then, is really public relations operating at its most strategic level, applying the methodology of two-way symmetrical communication.

This is clearly an excellent way of **minimising the likelihood of a reputational crisis** impacting on an organisation as well as minimising the impact of a crisis when it does occur.



Chapter 4

Crisis communication and social media: stories from the front line

Whether through addressing a flu pandemic or the cataclysm that we know all too well in Australia, bushfires, the same **principles of crisis management** apply. Some of them include building trust in an organisation, using your employees as ‘advocating communicators’ and putting human safety at the top of the **priority pyramid**.

And whilst using social media is an excellent way to communicate and engage with stakeholders, “trust is harder to maintain in a social media environment,” said [Rupert Hugh-Jones](#) from [Scaffidi Hugh-Jones](#) at [Frocomm’s](#) Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009

One way of building trust, said Hugh, is having real people represent the organisation in a crisis through social media, both in reality and in ‘attitude’. Organisational representatives should be allowed to express their personality and their empathy, as long as key organisational messages and culture are transmitted, which obviously means training and counsel as appropriate.

Subtext: ditch the **cold corporate edifice** approach.

An interesting [post](#) on The Guardian goes further into this aspect, discussing how organisations need to trust their **employees**, sound **human** and be **transparent**: [don’t lie, don’t pretend and don’t be rude](#) being the mantra.

Discipline is another key factor to bear in mind when using social media in a crisis, said Rupert. Messages are spread over a plethora of communication devices. In this case they are all dialogue- characterised rather than solely broadcast- characterised, so the potential for message ‘erosion’ is amplified.

For consistency and discipline to be maintained, organisations need to be “water tight” in knowing who is undertaking what precise role, as per standard crisis communication planning

“Be intelligent in managing conversations,” said Rupert. Which partially means that whilst there is a corporate approach to take, customise the response to the individual. **Empathise. Acknowledge. Respond.**

As [Graham White](#) said at the summit, the tone and style of communication with stakeholders is critically important in social media. “Don’t preach,” he said. It is not about broadcast, it is about participation. Engage, don’t announce. “Be informal and conversational,” Graham continued. “Your goal is to build a community (of fans), a community that can, and will, support you in trying times.”

This amplifies what I have said elsewhere that, perversely, a crisis is actually an opportunity to engage and to convert, to build advocacy for your organisation or brand. The **sin** is not in falling victim to a crisis communication situation, the sin is in not responding **professionally**, not **learning** and **evolving** from the situation and not taking the opportunity to **build bridges** with your stakeholders.

On the topic of Twitter specifically, Rupert put these notions forward:

- Evidence suggests that platforms such as Twitter have the potential to rapidly induce a '**networked panic**' of pandemic proportions.
- The impact of Twitter in the context of a global health issue has been demonstrated with the H1N1 outbreak. Tens of thousands of concerned and connected citizens and organisations were tweeting daily earlier this year
- Tweeting is not confined to individual citizens. In the USA, one million-plus subscribed to the government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Not only does the web allow a two-way exchange of information about a pandemic," said Rupert. "It uses that conversation to map the progression of the pandemic, bypassing traditional tracking methods."

Rupert summarised what he thinks are the key utilitarian uses of three key social media tools:

Twitter:

- Use as early warning system
- Talk to your staff and customers on a daily basis / talk to them instantly
- Calm your staff / customers
- Reassure your staff / customers
- Excite your staff / customers
- Dispel rumours / correct misinformation
- Share ideas and news

Facebook:

- Dispel rumours
- Post videos, pictures and links to other content
- Speak to your staff / customers

Blogs:

- Share ideas / send messages
- Share your news with public and the media
- Dispel rumours / correct misinformation

Fire

Amber Brodecky, Director Communities and Media Relations, for the Victorian [Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner](#), led the crisis communication effort in response to the deadly Victorian Bushfires, Australia's worst natural disaster, earlier this year.

A [visual summary of the Victorian bushfires](#) (Warning: some pictures are disturbing)



If you can't click through to YouTube, copy the following line into your web browser:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UE3UvdyaFN0>

A statistical summary of the tragedy is not able to reflect the anguish it caused, but the figures are sobering:

- 173 lives lost
- 2,000+ homes and businesses destroyed
- 1,500 properties damaged
- 430,000 hectares of land burnt
- Fires affected 78 Victorian communities across 25 municipalities.

Some web 2.0 tools were used to assist communication, but a model for strengthening their use as part of operational planning is currently being devised by the emergency services. The key principles that inform the communications approach still make for compelling reading, however.

They include:

- An approach that is based not on spin, but providing information communities need to put in place safe behaviours

- Messaging that builds on the 9/11 model used by [Rudy Giuliani](#):

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What we know▪ What we don't know▪ What we are doing▪ What we want you to do |
|--|

- Ensuring messages use a 'call to action'
- Being realistic, real-time, disciplined and two-way in communication
- Taking the view that resilient communities are informed communities.

Amber said that the media were an important link in emergency management chain and they were viewed as partners, rather than a group that need to be managed. Similarly, local communities were also viewed as partners, playing a key role in their own safety planning.

The emergency services were also transparent in updating the public on fatalities and losses, with the view that an open, honest approach is best.

[Some powerful moments from the Victorian bushfires](#) (Warning: some pictures are disturbing)



If you can't click through to YouTube, copy the following line into your web browser:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAp26V7bl_s

Flu

Porter Novelli provides another example of how **selected** social media tools and **selected applications** of those tools can be effectively applied. Sometimes, it isn't necessary to throw the kitchen sink at the problem. As always, public relations professionals need to assess the situation, build the appropriate strategy and utilise the most efficacious tactics in the most effective manner.

[Porter Novelli](#) (PN) applied social media tools to help [Australian Pork Ltd](#) (APL) in its management of the communication dimension of the A/H1N1 (swine) flu epidemic this year.

PN's corporate and crisis practice principal, [Campbell Fuller](#), said social media was used to monitor conversations about swine flu and pork consumption and assess awareness and key message penetration. The challenge for APL and PN was to convince consumers that pork was safe to eat and the flu could not be contracted through eating pork, thus arresting falling meat sales.

Though Porter Novelli and APL were prepared to engage with consumers through social media to counter misinformation about eating pork and catching the flu, they found this was not necessary.

Instead, what Porter Novelli found was that:

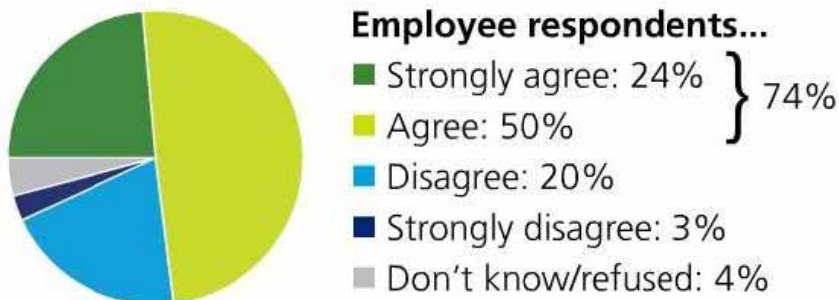
- Coverage achieved in traditional media, especially TV news, syndicated radio programs and daily newspapers, and their online versions, easily flowed through to online and social media channels
- Active social media participants became **advocates for pork**
- Social media participants swiftly responded and corrected negative and incorrect information without any involvement from APL, posting links to mainstream sources
- Medical and veterinary **experts**, and ministers' reassurances, were seen as credible, highlighting the importance of being able to call on strong stakeholder relationships established over many years
- Messaging surrounding the impact (i.e. lower sales/revenue, thus livelihood ramifications) the issue was having on farmers – a personal approach – had traction. Most people **love a symbol**
- Real primary producers appeared in the media to help show the **human face** of the crisis, leaving APL's chief executive Andrew Spencer as the corporate spokesperson.

Porter Novelli used consumer surveys to measure changes in sentiment toward the purchase and consumption of pork. Within a month, negative sentiment was almost zero and pork sales had returned to almost pre-crisis levels.

Chapter 5

Social media: the good, the bad, the scary...and the strategic?

74% of employees surveyed say it's easy to damage a company's reputation on social media.



Social networking and reputational risk in the workplace • Deloitte LLP 2009 Ethics & Workplace Survey results

Source: Deloitte

Strategically, social media offers immense **utility** for public relations professionals when it comes to crisis management but, conversely, it also opens up organisations to immense **risk**.

On the upside, said James Griffin of [SR|7](#) at [Frocomm's](#) Crisis Communication & Social Media Summit 2009, an example of the positive power of social media is the over \$3 million US dollars of **revenue** that has been generated by Dell through its Twitter platform engagement. "This has created a new asset for Dell," said James. "Allowing the company to build trust, revenue and its brand."

And organisations need all the help they can get, it seems, if the findings James cited from AON's Australasian Risk Management Benchmarking Survey are anything to go by. "Brand and image have been ranked above corporate governance and other **risk categories**

including legal, human resources and information systems as the number one risk concern since 2007.”

But the “wild wild web”, as James calls it, has a set of risks of its own. “It is a world where people are largely anonymous,” he said. “People feel empowered to say anything regardless of the truth. It is a world where blogs, videos and Twitter broadcasts are more powerful and faster than bullets.”

James quoted Deloitte findings that 58% of executives agree that reputational risk and social networking should be a boardroom issue, but only 15% say it actually is. “Staggeringly, Deloitte also found that only 17% of companies had any form of program to **mitigate risks** associated with social media.”

An opportunity for communicators? It certainly looks like it.

James said that critical to understanding the importance of social media, and an insight into where social media is heading, is that both Bing and Google will be integrating Facebook status updates and Twitter posts into public search results. “This means a standard Google search for a company is as likely to bring up the official webpage as it is the live feeds of customers, suppliers or employees who happen to comment on that brand and organisation.

“In addition, it will make it faster and easier for the media to source negative or sensationalist stories about goods, services and individuals. The flipside is that there will increasingly be more opportunities for organisations to leverage and use social media as a means for **positive brand engagement.**”



Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky



A powerful strategic point is that 60% of Australians trust the recommendations of their peers. And with the prevalence of social media as networking tool for peers, the **importance of the media** to public relations professionals and marketers is clear.

“The key is knowing where the positive content exists and developing strategies around maximising authentic brand advocates, said James. “These are critical in times of crisis.

iSnack. iFail? Or eyeballs = iWin?

The KRAFT iSnack 2.0 campaign is a very good illustration, said James, of how the integration of social media platforms makes it critical for your organisation to have a presence on each one.

SR|7 was commissioned by the Sydney Morning Herald to provide data and analysis of the KRAFT iSnack 2.0 marketing campaign as it unfolded. Central to the drama around the branding of the product was a very funny but subversively critical YouTube video which, James said, “featured heavily in the majority of traditional news articles both online and offline was linked to, and from, a variety of social media platforms.

“The Kraft experience highlights the power of social media in shaping perception about goods and services. It is clear that Kraft did not have the tools in place to counter arguments and discussion online about iSnack 2.0”

Counting and caring: monitoring results

YouTube video:

- Monday 10am 1,110 views
- 1 day later #1 most watched video – Australia
- 3 days later 45,956 views

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-GNilv65Ew>

(Warning: video contains swear words)



Views were **accelerated** by these sources:

- First referral from YouTube - [Homepage](#) 9,391
- Other / Viral 17,581
- First embedded on - www.facebook.com 10,414
- First view from a mobile device 5,703
- First referral from - www.facebook.com 4,722
- First embedded on - www.thepunch.com.au 4,324
- First embedded on - www.crikey.com.au 1,780
- First embedded on - www.defamer.com.au 1,590

James made the following further points:

- Collecting only brand mentions will miss the most relevant conversations.
Discussions are key
- Simple measures (counts, brand mentions, sentiment) are **not useful** for understanding why people do what they do and, without understanding, we don't gain the insight of what to do next
- Effective social media monitoring is going beyond buzz and 'sentiment', to understand the emotional and motivational drivers of your customers or clients.
Human analysis of social media data is vital.

Web visuals' growing impact

The power of visuals – and moving visuals at that – on the internet seems to be **replacing the primacy** that television has (had?) in our lives. Online visuals can be seen at the viewer's convenience and may take only a minute or so to view. From there, it takes mere seconds of effort before an online missive is despatched, whether through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blog and others where untold numbers of people may see it.

Strategic alliances

One method of combating this is applying the tried and true methodology of [strategic alliances](#), even **more potent** in the social media environment than in a non-digital environment. The three primary benefits of strategic alliances are that they enlarge the **communication footprint** an organisation can have, they can enhance the **credibility** of alliance 'partners' and they provide excellent **ROI** (especially if they are mostly free!).

In this context, the following is relevant:

- Identify customers, suppliers or other organisations that have appropriate communication mechanisms in place and a mutually beneficial interest in, helping communicate your messages/position
- This is particularly useful, in the context of this discussion, if those mechanisms include social media and their audiences are complementary/relevant to your own
- As these messages, even if they are flagged as being your own organisation's, come from a **third party**, they come with their brand imprint and, presumably, **credibility**
- Even, as has been seen *ad nauseum* at the Frocomm summit and elsewhere, if the alliance's social media network is not big but it is **influential**, then it will be a strategic tactic (um, verging on tautological here...) worth implementing.

These alliances won't be 'one-offs' (who the hell is going to, firstly, want to institute an alliance with your organisation when it is in the credibility 'bad books' and, secondly, have the time to do the sign off protocol turnaround in about 24 hours flat?).

As Libby Day, From [Roche Australia](#), said at the summit, alliances and partnerships are built up over years, not hours. Whether we are talking social media or 'simple', professional relationships, it takes trust to form alliances and for those alliances to be willing to put themselves at some level of risk by associating themselves publicly with another organisation under the gun.

But if those relationships are **meaningful** from a two-way perspective, if they are **mutually beneficial** and if they are founded on **trust**, then they may well help your organisation get **over the crisis line**.