CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA:

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING IN AN EMERGENCY

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

In July 2013, a Boeing 777 crashed on landing at San Francisco International Airport after a transpacific flight from Seoul, South Korea. An observer waiting to board another flight snapped a photograph of the accident with her mobile phone and uploaded it to Twitter less than one minute after the impact. Within 30 minutes, there had been more than 44,000 tweets about the accident, including photos and videos taken by survivors as they escaped from the wreckage.

The wave of social media coverage illustrated two phenomena which have vastly complicated the challenge facing communication professionals in the aftermath of an aircraft accident or serious incident. Firstly, the sheer number of people actively using social media platforms is now approaching some two billion potential “citizen journalists” or 28% of the world’s population. The second is mobility: more than half of all internet access globally is via mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets, and notebook computers.

If an aviation incident occurs in a populated area or at a highly visible location such as a busy airport, eyewitnesses or participants can now capture and share images of the event, upload videos or post comments via their mobile devices before the airline concerned may even be fully aware of what has happened. Once the story breaks on social media, the opportunity to provide factual information and influence the developing narrative is reduced to minutes.

However, social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook provide airlines and other parties with an equal opportunity to reach the news media and other audiences quickly and to provide constantly updated information in an emergency. A social media strategy should therefore be an integral part of any airline’s plans to respond to an accident or major incident.

These guidelines, which update a previous version published by IATA in 2012, are not a social media plan or strategy. Rather, they are intended to help airlines, manufacturers, airports, investigating bodies and other involved parties with some principles that can be adapted to their communication plans in response to this evolving media environment.

The time to prepare for an accident or serious incident is before it occurs, and these preparations should be exercised on a routine basis. In addition to this publication, IATA has detailed Emergency Response Planning (ERP) guidance materials on how to prepare for these rare events from an operations perspective.

1. PRINCIPLES OF CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

1.1 Objective

The objective of crisis communications is to mitigate potential reputational damage by providing credible, accurate information about an unfolding crisis situation as rapidly as possible and to demonstrate that the organization is responding in a professional, planned and appropriate manner. A key challenge is to maintain public confidence in the company, and in its leadership team.

Research by the global Public Relations firm Ketchum has shown that the key attributes of effective leadership include communicating in an open and transparent way; admitting mistakes; collaborative behavior in finding solutions to problems; a caring relationship with employees; showing respect for different cultures and – most important of all – aligning words with actions.

A company which takes responsibility for managing the consequences of a crisis, and which communicates its actions effectively, can emerge with its reputation intact and with minimal damage to its ongoing business and its relationships with key stakeholders.

1.2 Speed of response

With eyewitnesses and participants able to upload photos, videos and commentary about aviation incidents as they develop, airlines no longer have the luxury of time to assemble a crisis team, to gather and verify information and navigate an extended approval process before issuing an initial statement. An airline which fails to keep pace with the developing story online may be perceived as disorganized or floundering in its response. Before the development of social media, a realistic target was to issue a first “holding statement” within one hour of notification of an incident. Today, the airline should aim to issue its first comment, acknowledging that it is aware of the incident, within 15 minutes. The practicality of issuing a statement so quickly means that online channels are the best solution. While the use of Twitter is popular but not universal among airlines, this has become the de facto standard for rapid communication in a crisis and allows instant updates to be posted as new information becomes available.

1.3 Accepting responsibility

After an accident or serious incident, the airline and other parties involved should be seen to accept responsibility for managing the consequences of the event, and this should be the focus of their communications response. This does not imply accepting liability or culpability for the accident itself, but means that the airline will provide humanitarian support for any survivors, and for the families and loved ones of the passengers and crew members. Specific actions which the airline could communicate may include activating an emergency call center; opening a family reception center; providing short-term financial assistance to affected families; sending trained Family Assistance volunteers to help families; or memorial activities.

1.4 Appropriate messaging

The content and tone of public statements, particularly in the early stages of a crisis, is critical in positioning the airline as a responsible, well-managed organization which is committed to “doing the right thing”. Statements should acknowledge the facts and describe the actions taken to date, while expressing concern for those affected.

Once the basic messages have been established, they should be repeated consistently in statements issued via any channel, including press briefings and interviews. Despite the pressure to speculate, the airline and the other parties involved should avoid discussing the potential cause(s), of the accident. If the airline is asked about specific factors that may have contributed to the accident, such as potential weather issues or mechanical problems, its response should be limited to expressing its support for the technical investigation and extending its full cooperation. All questions on the potential causes and the progress of the investigation should be referred to the investigating body.

1.5 Knowing the audiences

It is easy to become fixated on the demands of the news media after an accident or major incident, but the airline and other involved parties will need to communicate with multiple other audiences, including:

- Survivors of the incident (if any)
- Family and friends of those on board
- Other individuals or organizations directly affected
- Employees
- Customers (individual/corporate/loyalty program members)
- Investors
- The financial markets
- Business partners
- The travel trade (eg. travel agencies; tour operators)
- Codeshare/alliance/franchise partners

- Suppliers
- Service providers
- Investigating bodies (technical/judicial/criminal)
- Family advocates and support groups
- Regulatory agencies
- Local/provincial/national government
- Embassies
- Governments whose citizens were involved or affected

While statements issued to the news media will be read or heard by a wide cross-section of these audiences, there are numerous additional channels which should be integrated into the overall communications response, including:

- The company website
- Social media platforms (eg. Twitter, Facebook)
- Employee intranet
- Individual or group briefings (eg. for families, employees, unions, shareholders etc.)
- Personal letters from the company
- Customer communications
- Communications from company representatives (eg. law firms/insurers)

There are also other “touch points” through which customers and other stakeholders may receive information from an airline involved in a major incident, and it is important to ensure that they are not overlooked. They include:

- The Passenger Information Center (i.e. the emergency call center)
- Reservation agents (at ticket desks & call center)
- Front-line employees (check-in agents, cabin crew)
- Marketing materials
- Direct mailers (for example, to members of loyalty programs)
- Advertisements
- In-flight magazine

Front-line employees should be briefed on what they can say in response to questions about the situation from customers or members of the public, who may decide to share what they are told via social media.

Marketing and advertising campaigns should be reviewed, to check that they do not contain inappropriate messaging or images - for example, a promotional campaign featuring an aircraft type, or a route, which has just been involved in an accident.

1.6 Maintaining credibility

One of the key objectives for any organization in a crisis must be to establish – and maintain – credibility. This will ultimately depend on the audience's perception of the honesty and sincerity of the statements which are made, and whether they truthfully reflect the way the organization is responding to the event – in other words, that there is no "credibility gap" between words and actions.

In the early stages of the response, there will inevitably be tension between the need to verify information, and the pressure to respond instantly to media enquiries and social media posts. Factual information, such as the flight number or route of the aircraft, should always be verified before it is communicated. But if basic facts are still uncertain, the airline may say that it is "aware of the (media) reports, and attempting to confirm them". In subsequent statements, conditional language can be used to indicate information which may change – for example: "latest reports indicate" or "as far as we know right now" – and it should be made clear that the lack of certainty is due to a fast-developing situation where the outcome is still unclear.

Statements should acknowledge facts and avoid evasions, obfuscation or legal jargon. If an airline has been involved in an accident, it should not refer to it as an "incident" or an "operational issue". Failing to acknowledge the true nature of the event will indicate that the airline concerned either does not realize, or is not willing to admit, the full extent and implications of what has occurred. More damagingly, it will suggest that it has not accepted responsibility for dealing with the consequences.

1.7 Expressing regret

In some countries (for example, Japan or other Asian societies), a formal "apology" is expected from parties involved in any incident which causes damage, inconvenience or distress to others – regardless of whether they were to blame for the event. Companies which fail to express regret or sympathy for those affected can expect to be severely criticized, particularly if there has been loss of life or serious injuries. Their relationships and standing within the local community may also be damaged.

Companies from outside these cultures, particularly those originating in more litigious societies, may see an expression of regret as an admission of guilt, and therefore an acceptance of legal liability. Indeed, legal counsel may specifically advise against making any such statement, for that reason. However, a carefully-worded expression of regret, which does not specifically admit liability or blame, can play a critical role in establishing a positive view of the company involved, and will ease the recovery of its business.

This principle applies universally, and reflects the expectation that those involved in a crisis, particularly one in which people have lost their lives or suffered serious injuries, will display real human emotion and empathy for those affected. This is particularly true when social networking allows people around the world, even those unconnected to an aircraft accident, to express their sympathies, or even to create online memorials for those lost. The parties directly involved in the accident should not ignore or stay aloof from those conversations.

An airline which is involved in an accident in a foreign country, or which involves people from another culture, should take advice on the most appropriate way to express regret and to show sincerity and respect. This may go beyond verbal statements to include bowing or making a "wai" gesture with the hands. In some cultures, an immediate offer of compensation for loss of life or damage to property is expected.

1.8 Coordinating with other parties

Journalists are usually highly attuned to discrepancies or inconsistencies between statements made by different parties involved in any major news story, particularly a fatal accident where issues of cause or "blame" will be a major factor in the coverage. It is therefore important that the various parties (particularly the airline, the manufacturers and the investigating body) coordinate the release of information to ensure basic facts are consistent and to minimize any perception of "finger-pointing".

Any accident investigation involves multiple parties, including the aviation authority or accident investigation board for the state of occurrence, the state of registration of the airline, the state of manufacture of the aircraft, various technical advisors and possibly Governments of states with large numbers of citizens on board. Generally, the aviation authority in the state of occurrence leads the investigation and is responsible for controlling the flow of information about the course of the investigation and its ultimate conclusions.

The airline should not reveal details of the investigation, but there is a wealth of other information it can legitimately provide – for example, factual details about the flight; the aircraft and engine combination; the airline's operations and history; its training and maintenance capabilities. The airline should also stress that it will fully cooperate with the investigating authorities, and that it has complete faith in the ability of the investigating bodies to determine the causes of the accident.

As a professional courtesy to other parties involved in the accident, they should be provided with advance warning or a copy of any statement which contains new information, before it is released into the public domain. This will allow them time to prepare responses to any new questions from the news media or other stakeholders.

1.9 The impact of statements on others

Any aviation accident or serious incident raises questions about safety. At various times, the media may focus on the safety of the aircraft and/or engine type; on pilot training, maintenance, airport equipment and procedures; air traffic control; or the regulatory environment. Every accident therefore has the potential to implicate a wide spectrum of "secondary" parties who were not involved in the original event – for example, other operators of that aircraft type, or of the specific airframe/engine combination.

A decision to ground a particular aircraft "in the interests of safety", taken unilaterally by one airline or regulatory body, creates serious issues for every other operator of that type, regardless of whether they (or their regulator) take the same action. Similarly, statements or actions by *any* party involved in an accident may have implications for *all* parties. Public confidence in the aviation industry may be damaged if individual airlines, manufacturers, service providers or regulators appear to be trying to protect their own reputation by deflecting blame or "pointing the finger" at someone else. Safety should not be a competitive issue.

2. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND MESSAGING

Numerous parties will be involved in the response to an aviation accident or serious incident. To a greater or lesser degree, all will face pressure to provide information to the news media and other parties, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the event. Depending on the circumstances, this may include the airline, emergency services, the investigating body, government agencies, arrival and departure airports, codeshare or franchise partners, air navigation service provider and the aircraft manufacturer. To avoid confusion and inconsistency, it is important that each party understands its role in the response, the kind of information it can legitimately provide, and the appropriate messaging to use.

2.1 Operating carrier:

The operator of the aircraft will inevitably attract the most intense media interest and demands for information after an accident. With the likelihood that "breaking news" about the accident will appear on social media channels almost immediately, the airline should be prepared to issue a first acknowledgement of the event within 15 minutes of notification. This first brief message would ideally be posted on one or more of the airline's social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or Google+. The first message should include the following:

- Confirmation that the airline is aware of the event, or of the initial media reports
- Any factual information which is already verified (flight number, aircraft type, origin/destination, nature of the situation)
- Commitment to provide further information as soon as it is available

A more complete "holding statement" should then be released to the media and posted on the website and other online channels, followed by further updates as more information becomes available. The airline may also choose to respond with factual updates to comments posted to its "owned" social media platforms, or on third-party sites (see section 3.iv)

The first "holding statement" should include the following:

- Confirmation of the nature of the event
- Expression of regret and concern for those on board
- Factual information which has been verified (flight number, aircraft type, origin/destination, number on board, where and when the event occurred)
- Actions taken by the airline since it was notified - for example, opening an emergency enquiry center, mobilizing support teams
- Immediate priorities for the airline – for example, dispatching a "Go-Team" to the scene, or contacting loved ones of those on board

2. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND MESSAGING

As the situation develops, facts should be clarified in successive statements. These can be issued via a combination of traditional press releases and social media channels. Social media can be used as a “pointer” drawing attention to key facts or to more detailed communications in other channels such as press releases or website postings.

After the initial acknowledgement, future statements from the operating carrier should include some or all of the following:

- Expressions of regret and concern for the wellbeing of passengers and crew members and/or sympathy for victims and their loved ones
- Factual information about the flight (eg. flight number; aircraft type; origin; destination; number of passengers and crew; departure time; where and when the incident occurred; codeshare partner/s involved)
- Specific actions the airline has taken since it was notified of the event (eg. activating crisis management center/s; activating a passenger information center; deployment of special assistance teams; establishment of family assistance center/s; care and support provided for survivors and/or families; financial assistance; memorial ceremonies)
- Factual information about the aircraft (aircraft and engine types; dates of manufacture and acquisition; flight hours, number of flights; how many in the fleet; seating configuration; cargo capacity; maintenance history)
- Factual information about the crew (names*; designations; operating experience; type ratings; history with the airline)
- Factual information about the passengers on board (number of passengers; names*; nationalities; number of adults/children)
- Expression of support for the investigation
- Factual information about the airline (history; company structure; network; aircraft fleet; crew training; maintenance; previous accidents or incidents)

*NB: Names of passengers and/or crew members <u>should not be released publicly</u> until their legal next-of-kin have been notified

The Operating Carrier should avoid commenting on any of the following:

- How the investigation will be structured, and what it will focus on
- Information in the maintenance records
- The possible cause/s of the accident – for example, failure of onboard systems or airport equipment
- The way the aircraft broke apart, and what this might indicate
- Finding key pieces of evidence, eg flight data or cockpit voice recorders
- The actions of the crew before the accident, or what they might have done to prevent it

- The possible relationship between crew training and the accident
- The possibility of pilot error, or of error or wrongdoing by any other employee
- The likelihood that someone else must be to blame
- The role of weather or air traffic control
- The condition of human remains, and how they will be identified

2.2 Franchise services: Operating carrier

Many airlines, particularly regional carriers, operate in the livery, and using the flight designator code, of a larger “mainline” carrier, under franchise agreements. The smaller airline may be owned by the mainline carrier on whose behalf it operates, but it is legally designated as the operating carrier, and should therefore take the lead role in dealing with the news media after an accident or major incident.

Press releases should be issued under the letterhead and in the name of the operating carrier, and any spokespeople quoted in statements or appearing at press briefings or interviews should be employed by the operating carrier.

However, the fact that a franchise flight carried the livery, flight number and passengers of another airline cannot be ignored. If this relationship is not acknowledged and clarified, it may cause confusion among the news media, families, and other stakeholders. In addition to the “best practice” guidelines described in section 2.1 above, a franchise or “feeder” airline should therefore also include some or all of the following in its public statements or in comments to the news media:

- The nature of its relationship with the “mainline” carrier on whose behalf the flight was operated
- The support which the “mainline” carrier is providing to survivors and/or to family members of those on board
- The support which the “mainline” carrier is providing to the operating carrier (eg. logistics; activation of its call center to handle enquiries about passengers; assistance in establishing family assistance center/s)

2. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND MESSAGING

2.3 Franchise services: Mainline carrier

After an accident involving an outsourced franchise or feeder operation, any attempt by the mainline carrier to distance itself from the accident or from the operating carrier will raise questions about its integrity and commitment to its ticket-holders. It is therefore in the interest of the mainline carrier to be seen to support the smaller operating carrier and that statements from the two companies are consistent.

While the operating carrier should take the lead in dealing with the news media, the mainline carrier should focus on the following in any statements or responses to questions:

- Expression of concern for survivors and/or sympathy for victims and their loved ones
- Acknowledgement that the accident/incident involved a franchise service operated on its behalf, and carrying its customers (ticket-holders)
- Actions taken to provide care and support for survivors and/or families of the victims
- Assistance provided to the operating carrier (eg. logistics; activating telephone enquiry center; establishing family assistance center)

All other questions should be deferred to the operating carrier, or to the investigating body.

The mainline carrier should not:

- Deny or downplay the existence of the franchise partnership
- Speak on behalf of the operating carrier
- Issue statements or make any comments which contradict or are inconsistent with statements made by the operating carrier

2.4 Codeshare partner/s

The proliferation of codeshare and alliance partnerships has made it increasingly likely that two or more airlines may be involved in the same incident – either as the operating carrier or as a codeshare partner whose flight designator code is carried on that service, and whose passengers or crew members may be on board.

In such cases, the operating carrier should always take the lead in dealing with the demands of the news media. However, it is important that codeshare partner/s are prepared to respond to questions from journalists or from other stakeholders. The Codeshare partner should focus on the following:

- Expressing concern for survivors and/or sympathy for victims and their loved ones
- Acknowledgement that the accident/incident involved a codeshare service on which its own customers (ticket-holders) and/or crew members may have been on board
- Actions taken to provide care and support for survivors and/or families of the victims
- Assistance provided to the Operating carrier (eg. logistics; activating telephone enquiry center; establishing family assistance center)

All other questions should be deferred to the Operating carrier, or to the investigating body.

The codeshare partner should not:

- Deny or downplay the existence of the codeshare partnership
- Speak on behalf of the operating carrier
- Issue statements or make any comments which contradict or are inconsistent with statements made by the operating carrier

2.5 Aircraft and engine manufacturers

After an aircraft accident or serious incident, the primary role of the aircraft and engine manufacturer is to support the accident investigation and to keep the Operating carrier and other operators informed of any relevant information or recommendations which may result from the investigation. The manufacturers will normally be in constant contact with the airline's flight operations or engineering departments after an accident. A similar dialogue should also be maintained with the airline's Public Relations staff, to ensure they have access to the latest information and to ensure that responses to the news media and other stakeholders are consistent from both parties.

While the manufacturers will often attract intense media interest, particularly if the performance of the aircraft or engines appears to be a factor, they are strictly bound by the "party" rules on the release of information which are normally imposed by the investigating body. However, the manufacturers still have a role to play in providing factual background information about the specific aircraft or engine type, as long as the information is not intended to encourage journalists to make judgments or reach conclusions about the likely outcome of the investigation.

In statements to the news media, the aircraft and engine manufacturer should focus on:

- Expressing concern for survivors and/or sympathy for victims and their loved ones
- Factual information about the aircraft or engine type (serial number; date of delivery; flight hours; number of flights; number in service; number of operators)
- Expressions of support and commitment to the accident investigation
- Description of actions taken in response to the accident/incident (eg. deployment of accident investigation team)
- Safety record of the aircraft or engine type
- Actions taken (if any) as a result of the investigation

The manufacturers should not:

- Comment or speculate on the progress or likely outcome of the investigation
- Selectively "leak" information which is intended to exonerate the aircraft or engine type or imply that other parties or factors were responsible
- Comment on or publicly dispute statements made by the investigating body
- Attempt to discredit or undermine the investigating body, or its findings

2.6 Airport operator

If there is an accident or serious incident at or near an airport, the airport itself will become the focal point of media attention. Journalists will congregate in the terminal area attempting to find company spokespeople, eyewitnesses and the friends and family of those on board. TV crews and photographers will also demand access to the accident site, or a suitable vantage point. Depending on the circumstances, the airport itself may be temporarily closed or suffer serious disruption as a result of the accident, so it will need to communicate quickly with passengers and with airline station personnel and ground handlers.

The airport operator will have an important role to play in dealing with the news media on-site and coordinating any press briefings or media access to the accident scene. If the airport has a media center, this should become the location of media briefings by any of the parties involved (eg. the Operating carrier). Where appropriate, joint press briefings may be arranged which could involve the airport authority, emergency services, Operating carrier and/or the investigating body.

The airport itself should also be prepared to respond to questions from journalists. Any statements or comments should focus on the following:

- Expressing concern for survivors and/or sympathy for victims and their loved ones
- Factual information about the circumstances of the accident/incident
- The progress of the search and rescue operation
- Facilities and equipment which the airport has provided to support the search & rescue or recovery operations
- Support provided by the airport authorities to the Operating carrier (eg. assistance in establishing a reception center for “meeters and greeters”)
- The impact on the ongoing operation of the airport
- Actions which the airport has taken to mitigate the impact on other airlines and to minimize passenger inconvenience

All other questions should be directed to the Operating carrier, the emergency services or the investigating body.

The airport operator should not:

- Speak on behalf of other involved parties – for example, the Operating carrier
- Be the first to release information about the number of injuries or fatalities, or their identities
- Speculate about the potential cause of the accident/incident
- Comment on the accident investigation

2.7 Air navigation service provider (ANSP)

There have been numerous examples of accidents which implicate the air navigation service provider (ANSP) – for example, mid-air collisions or accidents in which questions were raised about the information or instructions given to the crew by air traffic controllers. In these cases, the ANSP can expect to become one of the targets of media and public attention as well as being a party to the investigation.

The ANSP should be prepared to respond to questions from journalists, and from other stakeholders (for example, employees). Any statements or comments should focus on the following:

- Expressing concern for survivors and/or sympathy for victims and their loved ones
- Factual information about the circumstances of the accident or incident
- Expression of support and commitment to the investigation
- Description of actions taken in response to the accident/incident
- Factual information about the nature of the service provided by the organization, its resources, operating structure, ownership etc.
- The training and experience levels required of front-line staff such as air traffic controllers
- Actions taken (if any) as a result of the investigation

The ANSP should not:

- Comment or speculate on the progress or likely outcome of the investigation
- Selectively “leak” information which is intended to exonerate individuals or the ANSP itself, or imply that other parties or factors were responsible
- Comment on or publicly dispute statements made by the investigating body
- Attempt to discredit or undermine the investigating body, or its findings

2.8 Investigating body

The investigation body is normally the main source of information about the progress and conclusions of the technical investigation into any aircraft accident or serious incident. Other parties invited to participate in the investigation are generally required to accept rules prohibiting the disclosure of information on the progress or findings of the investigation, unless that information is released by the investigating body itself.

As the investigation team comprises recognized experts in their respective fields, there is usually enormous interest from journalists in any information they provide, particularly in the first few days after an accident. The investigating body should therefore consider holding regular press briefings and maintaining a flow of information as it becomes available. Statements or comments to the news media from the investigation body could include:

- Factual information about the accident or incident (aircraft and engine types; operator; circumstances of the accident; persons on board; number of injuries and/or fatalities)
- Actions taken by the investigation body to date (deployment of investigation team; name of investigator in charge; parties invited to participate in the investigation)
- Structure of the investigation team and focus areas
- Potential timeline for the investigation
- Timeline and channels for the release of further information (eg. daily press briefings, press releases, statements posted on website)
- Statements of initial findings
- Date and location of any public hearing
- Date when the final investigation report will be published
- Summary of key findings and safety recommendations, if any

3. USING ONLINE CHANNELS

Within a relatively short period of time, the proliferation of social media has fundamentally changed the way in which people access and share information. To adapt to this new environment, the use of online platforms and social media channels should be an integral part of the overall communications response for any airline, and for other parties which may be involved in a major event. Social media channels can be used actively, to share information and to engage in online conversations, or passively, to obtain information and to monitor conversations about the company.

3.1 Tips for developing a social media strategy for crisis situations:

I. Most airlines are now active on social media, using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram to support their sales and marketing initiatives and to maintain an ongoing dialogue with customers and online followers. The challenge in a crisis situation is to integrate these platforms into the overall communication response, in order to ensure consistent messaging across all channels.

II. A starting point for developing an online crisis communications strategy is to determine which social media channels are already used by the organization, and who manages them. This may be at several levels – personal, divisional, regional or corporate. For example, the commercial department may use Twitter or Instagram for sales promotions. Other channels may be operated by overseas offices – for example, regional websites or Facebook pages. High-profile executives or Board members may also be active on Twitter or Facebook, or publish personal “blogs”.

   To ensure consistent messaging across all channels, the administration rights for all of the company’s social media channels should either be consolidated within one department, or the individual account “owners” should be named in the crisis communications plan, so they can be easily reached in a crisis and instructed to post the updates released by the communications team. Individuals within the management team who use social media personally should also be persuaded to limit their comments to the approved messaging. Other employees should also be reminded of the company’s social media policy (see section 3.3).

III. Monitoring online conversations about the company is an essential form of business intelligence, particularly during a crisis, and will allow the company to adapt its communication strategy and engage more effectively with key influencers as the story develops. There are numerous free and paid online tools which allow companies to monitor online conversations, to measure sentiment about particular issues, and to analyze the impact of the company’s own social media activities.

Most of these online monitoring and measurement tools offer upgraded pay-to-use options, but the free options are usually sufficient to develop a broad picture of social media activity. The most popular tools include:

- Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts): Provides an automated alert each time new material about a given subject is posted on the web
- Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com): A social media management tool which covers multiple social networks, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, WordPress, and Google+. Provides social profiles and analytics
- TweetReach (www.tweetreach.com): Monitors how far tweets travel, measures the actual impact and implications of social media discussions. Allows you to identify the most influential followers
- TweetDeck (https://twitter.com/tweetdeck): A tool for scheduling tweets and monitoring interactions and messages, as well as tracking hashtags and managing multiple accounts
- Klout (www.klout.com): Measures engagement across multiple social media platforms and awards a score based on the accumulated influence
- Social Mention (www.socialmention.com): Monitors over one hundred social media sites and measures influence in four categories: strength, sentiment, passion and reach
- Twazzup (www.twazzup.com): Provides real-time updates on Twitter conversations, including the top influencers on a particular subject, top retweeted photos and links and the top 10 keywords related to a search
- Addictomatic (www.addictomatic.com): Searches the main live sites on the web for the latest news, blog posts, videos and images
- HowSociable (www.howsociable.com): Measures brand impact using a 'magnitude score' of 0-10 that indicates the level of online activity around a brand in a given week across the 36 most popular social media sites. Also allows users to see which sites have the biggest impact

IV. Decisions on whether to actively engage with online conversations about the crisis situation, whether on owned or third-party platforms, should be a policy decision made at a senior level. Staff designated as online “spokespeople”, should have received appropriate training and be clear on the communication strategy and messaging. The company’s own social media platforms may be used to engage directly with customers, to acknowledge their concerns or answer questions in real time – for example, about potential service disruption as a result of the event.

V. When responding to online conversations or posts, respond in the same medium – Twitter to Twitter, or Facebook to Facebook.

3.2 Commonly used online channels:

3.2.1 Company website

The company website is a primary communication channel, and usually a major source of revenues through online booking. It is also one of the first places journalists, customers and others will look for information about an accident or major incident, and how it might affect ongoing operations. All public statements should be posted to the website, with the link referenced in press releases and social media postings.

Tips for using the website:

I. A “dark site” should be prepared during “peacetime”. This is a special site which can be activated almost immediately (within minutes) after notification of an accident and replaces the normal home page on the website. The “dark site” should only be activated in the event of an accident with fatalities.

II. For lesser events (or for non-airline parties involved in the accident), a link displayed prominently on the home page is sufficient, using the words “For more information on the incident involving xxxx, click here”.

III. The “dark site” should be branded very simply, without any of the colorful logos or images which normally appear on the home page. It should display the latest statement on the situation. Previous statements should be archived and available via a link.

IV. Customers should be able to click through a link to reach the standard home page so they can continue to make online bookings or access other information. However, any inappropriate images should be removed from the home page after an accident – for example photos of smiling cabin crew, or promotions involving the route flown by the aircraft involved.

V. Other material which may be provided on the “dark site” includes:
   - Background information on the aircraft and engine type
   - Background information on the company and its operations
   - Summary of the company’s response to date
   - Link to video of statements made by the CEO or other senior executives

Some organizations publish a “blog” from the CEO on the website. Blogs are usually less formal in tone than other forms of executive communication, and are intended to show the “human” face of a large and otherwise impersonal organization.

In the event of an accident or serious incident, a CEO blog can be an effective means of demonstrating a genuinely “caring” response by talking about the personal impact of the event and what it meant to the author. But it needs to be carefully worded to avoid appearing glib or insincere. If the sentiments expressed are not authentic, the blog should not be published.

3.2.2 Twitter

Twitter is the most widely used "micro blogging" service, with millions of users posting short messages (tweets) to their online followers every day. Twitter is available in almost 30 languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Arabic. However in China the most popular micro-blogging service is Sina Weibo, which has more than 500 million users, and carries more than 100 million messages every day. Any Twitter user can become a "follower" of anybody who tweets, and anyone receiving a tweet can reply to everyone copied on the message, or "retweet" it to their own followers. This can create an exponential surge in the number of users talking about a compelling story.

Twitter has become a primary source of breaking news, particularly in fast-developing situations like an aircraft accident. A tweet from a survivor or eyewitness can reach tens of thousands of users around the world in minutes, including "mainstream" journalists who monitor Twitter.

The 140-character limit does not provide space for detailed explanation or context, but Twitter allows companies to post instant updates to a potentially global audience, and to link to more detailed statements or to videos posted elsewhere. Companies which use Twitter as an "instant messaging" service after an accident or major incident are usually perceived to be showing a greater degree of transparency and a willingness to engage with the online audience.

Tips for using Twitter

I. A Twitter feed should be established in "peacetime" and used for regular announcements and promotions. This will build a dedicated follower community of customers, fans and mainstream journalists.
II. Hashtags (#) should be combined with keywords to "tag" the subject matter of a Twitter post – for example: "#(flight number)" or "#(flight number) response". Use a maximum of two hashtags per tweet. Hash tags allow followers to group and identify Twitter conversations on this topic.
III. Tweets can be used to update followers on the latest information on the company's response (for example: "#(flight number). Passenger information center now open. Call 800 1234 5678".
IV. Posts should include links to more detailed sources of information – for example, statements posted on the company website or a video on YouTube
V. Twitter can be used to post links to statements made by other parties, or to "retweet" messages which are supportive of the company's position. A retweet always includes the Twitter username (@xxx) of the person who posted the original comment. A re-tweet is simply a tweet which is re-posted by the same username. This extends the longevity of the post by ensuring it appears again, possibly several times.

VI. Exercise caution when using Twitter's automated "retweet" button, as this simply forwards the entire message to your own followers without any additional comment. It also shows the original author's username first. If you wish to add a comment before forwarding the tweet, retweet the post manually.

VII. Share Twitter content with the audience on other networks by re-posting tweets on Facebook and LinkedIn, when appropriate. A tweet can also be embedded into the website. Click on the date in the upper-right-hand corner of a tweet. Then click More and select Embed Tweet. Copy the code and add it to the website.

3.2.3 Facebook

With more than one billion users, Facebook is arguably the best social media channel for engaging with customers and "fans" of the company. In "peacetime" the company's Facebook page can be used to promote new products and services and to engage in conversations with customers. In a crisis, it becomes an invaluable addition to the company's overall communication response.

Tips for using Facebook

I. The Facebook page should be treated as a primary communication channel after an accident or serious incident. Any statements and information published on other channels should be posted to Facebook, and updated at the same time.

II. After an accident, the cover photo and any colorful images on the Facebook page should be reviewed and temporarily replaced by somber or plain branding. Inappropriate or insensitive images, for example pictures of smiling cabin crew, should be removed.

III. Because users can post their own comments and refer to other sources of information, conversations on the Facebook page should be monitored and a policy established for responding to comments, or for correcting any misinformation or incorrect statements which are posted.

IV. Facebook can be a useful channel for engaging directly with customers in a crisis – for example, by responding to their questions or concerns in real time.

V. Particular attention should be paid to posts by employees. If the post contravenes the company's social media policy, it should be deleted or hidden.

VI. Inappropriate or abusive posts can be hidden by hovering the cursor to the right of the offending post. The "hide" button will appear. When this is clicked, a dialogue box will appear which asks if you want to hide all current and future posts by that user.

3.2.4 YouTube

Hundreds of hours of video material are uploaded onto YouTube every day, and the site attracts more than one billion unique visitors per month. The YouTube search engine is the second most commonly used after Google, with some three billion searches per month. TV coverage of aviation accidents is commonly uploaded to YouTube, including amateur video taken by eyewitnesses.

Many companies, including airlines, have created their own dedicated “TV channel” on YouTube, through which they regularly post videos to be viewed by customers and other followers. A dedicated YouTube channel can be customized with the company’s corporate branding and include images, links and relevant information.

Tips for using YouTube

I. Even if the airline does not operate a dedicated YouTube channel, statements made by the CEO or by other senior executives after an accident can be uploaded to YouTube. The video should be publicized by posting the link on the website and on Twitter.

II. When uploading videos to YouTube, choose the appropriate category and use keywords (“tags”) to describe the content. The tags will allow users to find the video via the YouTube search engine.

III. As with Facebook and other social media sites, other users may post comments in response to anything posted on YouTube. You should monitor these comments and make a policy decision on whether to respond to any negative or misleading statements.

IV. YouTube is owned by Google, and user accounts are identified by the individual’s Google+ profile. The company profile should be established on Google+ before posting videos to YouTube.

3.2.5 Google+

Google+ is a social networking service created by Google, which allows companies to create an online profile which links to all Google services, including Google Search and YouTube. With more than 540 million users, it is the second largest social networking site after Facebook. Companies can use their Google+ page to share photos, videos, promotions and other information with customers and online followers.

After an accident or major incident, statements or images published on any other online platforms should also be posted to the company’s Google+ page.

3.2.6 Photo-sharing sites

Some airlines use photo-sharing sites like Instagram and Flickr to publish photographs of their product or for special promotions. In a crisis, photo-sharing sites have limited usefulness, but any material previously posted to these sites should be reviewed, and any inappropriate images removed. For example, photographs of the aircraft involved in the accident, or promotions involving the destination of the flight which crashed. These sites may also be used as part of the airline's online memorial activities after an accident, posting photographs of flowers or other commemorative materials.

If external parties – for example, family groups - set up photo-sharing websites to commemorate those lost, the company should monitor the content and determine whether to post its own comments or photos to the site. This should be done with extreme sensitivity, and will largely depend on the relationship which has been established with the families concerned.

3.2.7 Third-party websites

There are numerous examples of third parties (for example, law firms or family groups) setting up websites which are positioned as "official" sources of information about an accident. The purpose of these websites is usually to solicit business from people considering legal claims for compensation, or to offer advice and information about the status of the investigation and any associated litigation. Family associations may also form after an accident, and may create websites as online "memorials" to the victims.

In each case, the airline should be careful not to allow the name or URL of these websites to be associated or confused with the airline's own website. While you cannot prevent third parties from creating websites dedicated to a particular accident, you can minimize the potential for confusion by immediately registering any domain names which they might try to use. These could include:

- xxxx Airlines accident.com
- xxx Airlines Flight xxx accident.com
- Flight xxx.com
- Flight xxx accident.com
- Flight xxx information.com

3.2.7 Online forums

There are numerous online forums dedicated to the aviation industry. Some are “members-only” and intended to be used exclusively by people working within a specific community (for example, members of a cabin crew union). Others can be accessed by anyone with an interest in the subject, such as the Professional Pilots’ Rumour Network (www.PPRUNE.com).

Best practice for engaging with online forums:

I. Conduct an audit of online forums which are likely to be used by specific audiences which are important to the organization – for example, employees.
II. If necessary, register for any forums you have identified as priority targets so you can monitor conversations and post information when appropriate.
III. Never join forums or post comments under a pseudonym. If you are joining the forum on behalf of the organization, create a username which clearly identifies you (for example, “Air xxx Communications”).
IV. Ensure that any information or comments posted are identified as official statements, and are consistent with your overall messaging strategy.
V. Remember that any material you post can be copied and forwarded to anyone. Work on the assumption that anything you say, even on “member-only” forums, may become known to the news media, or to other stakeholders such as family members.

3.3 Employee social media policy

Everyone within the organization is potentially a spokesperson. This applies particularly to employees who use social media channels to keep in touch with friends and contacts around the world. Employees who identify their connection to the company - for example, on their LinkedIn profile, or Facebook page - may be “befriended” by unscrupulous journalists or other interested parties (for example, lawyers) after an accident. These new “friends” can then access their photo albums and read comments by them or by colleagues in their network.

While you cannot prevent employees from using social media channels in their personal time, you should introduce an Employee Social Media Policy which includes the following:

- Guidelines on whether employees can access social media channels during working hours (some may need to do this in the course of their work)
- Prohibition on posting photographs or video taken on company premises, or in the course of their employment with the company, on social media sites
- Prohibition on posting comments on social media sites relating to their work for the company, or about senior executives, their supervisors or colleagues
- After an accident or serious incident, issue a reminder to all employees not to post information, or to engage in online discussions, about the event.

4. BEING PREPARED FOR CRISIS

The day after an accident is not the time to develop a crisis communications strategy. Invest the time to create a robust communication plan in “peacetime”, and on training and exercising the people who will implement it.

If your organization has limited resources, or does not employ fulltime communication professionals, consider where you could source external help to deal with the full spectrum of communication challenges you would face in a crisis. Focus on what you *can* do with your current resources, rather than on what you can’t.

4.1 Creating a crisis communications plan

A crisis communications plan should describe how the company will mobilize its communications resources to support the response to a crisis situation and provide guidance on roles, responsibilities and action steps for each member of the communications department.

The main elements of a robust crisis communications plan include:

- Statement of company communication policy, including authorized spokespeople
- Outline of the communication organization, and its interface with the corporate Crisis Management Team (the head of communications should sit on the CMT)
- Description of functional roles and responsibilities, and candidates to fill them
- Checklists for each functional role, outlining the main tasks
- Templates for initial “holding statements”, including initial online posts, which can be issued immediately after key information is confirmed (for various possible scenarios, including aircraft accident; serious incident; diversion; hijacking or other security incident; service disruption)
- Contact lists for important internal and external contacts (including media lists, lists of online influencers and service providers)
- Standard forms and documentation (for example, media call logging form, press conference registration form)

4. BEING PREPARED FOR CRISIS

4.2 Crisis communications team: Key positions

The crisis communications team is responsible for developing and implementing the company's communication strategy and for ensuring that it is able to communicate rapidly and effectively with key internal and external stakeholders across multiple channels.

In a crisis, the company's internal communications team may need to be supplemented by external resources, for example from a Public Relations agency. At a minimum, the team should be capable of executing the following functional responsibilities. If resources are limited, one individual may be responsible for two or more functions.

I. Communications Representative on the Crisis Management Team
The Communications Representative on the CMT is responsible for providing strategic communications advice to the CEO and members of the CMT, and for ensuring that the airline is providing accurate and timely information to internal and external stakeholders, via all available channels. This position is normally filled by the Head of Communications.

II. Press Team Leader
The Press Team Leader is responsible for the overall management of the PR Team and for ensuring that the communication strategy is executed. This includes managing the flow of information to the news media via press releases, social media posts, interviews and press conferences and ensuring that media enquiries are being managed effectively, at head office and at other locations.

III. Editorial Writer
The Editorial Writer is responsible for drafting all written materials, including press releases, backgrounders, briefing documents and statements delivered by company spokespeople.

IV. Social Media Manager
The Social Media Manager is responsible for managing the company's social media and online channels and ensuring that new information is posted promptly. The Social Media Manager is also responsible for coordinating online activities with other departments such as the commercial team, monitoring online conversations about the situation and advising on whether the company should engage with online conversations by posting responses on "owned" or third-party social media platforms.

V. Internal Communications Manager

The Internal Communications Manager is responsible for ensuring that all statements issued externally are provided to employees via internal communication channels such as blast emails, company intranet or bulletin boards. This includes liaising with operational departments to ensure that front-line employees such as cabin crew, call center agents or airport staff are provided with guidance on how to respond to customer enquiries.

VI. International Coordinator

The International Coordinator is responsible for maintaining contact with overseas offices and PR Agencies and for ensuring that they receive updated information as it is released from Head Office. This includes ensuring that media enquiries are managed effectively in markets affected by the crisis and that local media coverage is being monitored and reported to Head Office.

VII. Media Monitoring Coordinator

The Media Monitoring Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all relevant electronic, print and online media coverage is collated and reported to the Crisis Management Team. This includes ensuring that the CMT is alerted to any “breaking news” or new developments.

VIII. Media Enquiry Center Manager

The Media Enquiry Center Manager is responsible for supervising the team answering incoming media calls, and for ensuring that agents responding to the media are provided with updated statements and talking points. A summary of media enquiries should be provided regularly to the Press Office Team Leader.

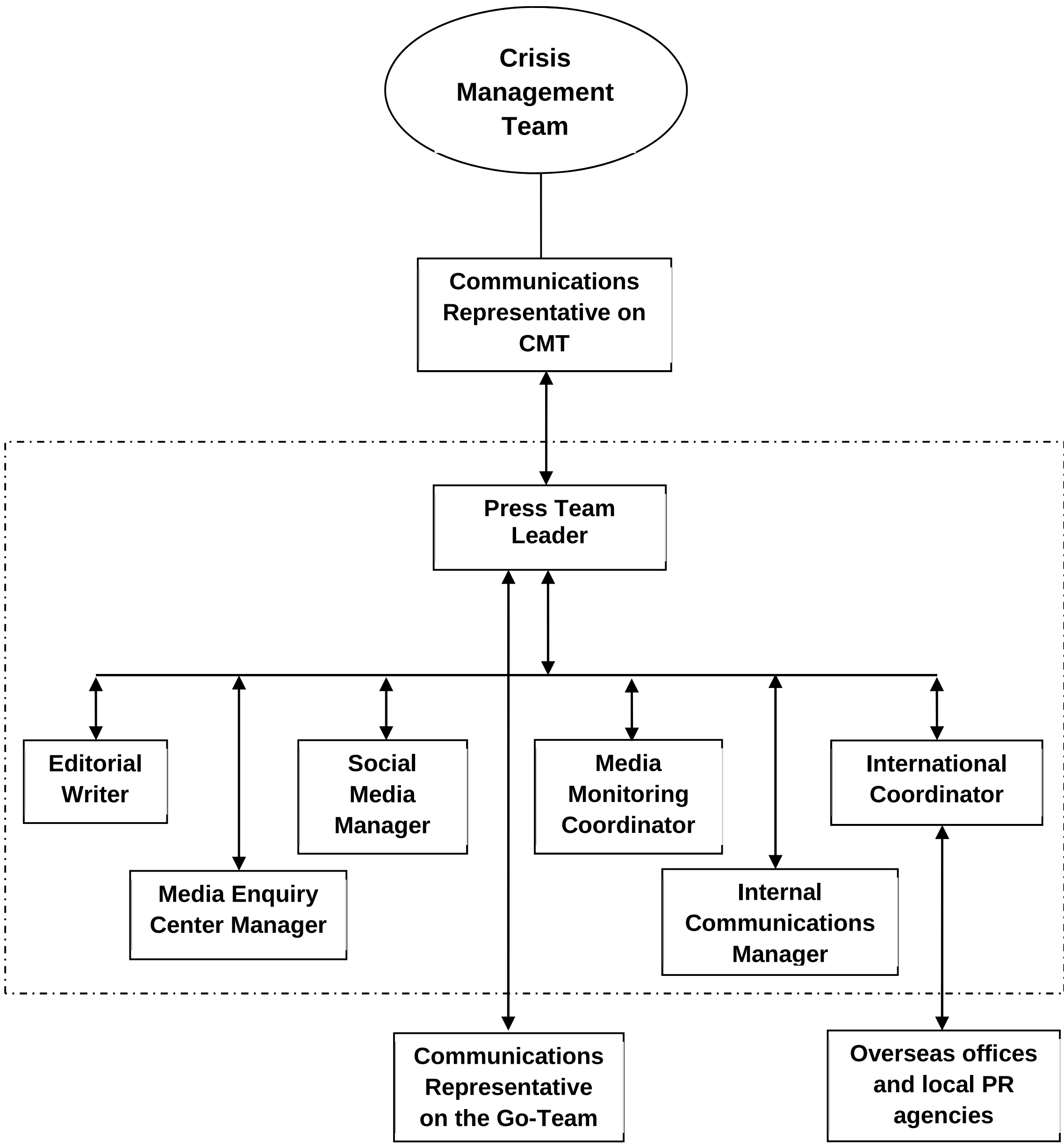
IX. Communications Representative on the Go-Team

The Communications Representative on the Go-Team is responsible for travelling to the scene of the event and coordinating all media activities locally. This includes arranging press briefings and interviews by the senior executive on-site and ensuring that the Press Office Team Leader is kept informed of developments at the scene. If the resources are available, more than one communication representative may travel with the Go-Team, or other members of the communication team may “rotate” to the accident location and provide some backup and relief.

It may also be helpful to assign a member of the communications team to the Family Assistance Centre (FAC), where family interviews and briefings are conducted. There is often intense media pressure around the FAC, with journalists attempting to interview family members or even to attend the confidential briefings. Family members should not be prevented from talking to the media if they wish to do so – but equally, they may also need to be protected from unwanted media intrusion. Family members should also be advised not to take photos or videos within the FAC, or to post information from the family briefings on social media sites.

4. BEING PREPARED FOR CRISIS

4.3 Crisis Communications Team: Organization Chart



4.4 Training spokespeople

Dealing with the news media in the midst of a major crisis, particularly with the added emotional stress of dealing with a fatal accident, is not “business as usual”. Spokespeople need to understand how to defend the organization under pressure from aggressive reporters who may know more about the situation than they themselves do. Front-line operational or commercial managers based far from Head Office (for example, airline country managers or station managers) may be the first company representatives to reach the scene, and may have no previous experience of dealing with the news media.

Anybody designated as a potential spokesperson in a crisis should receive appropriate training. This includes senior executives who may have previously received “media training” or who may feel that they are already familiar with how journalists work. Crisis communication training should provide:

- An understanding of the challenges the organization will face after an accident, and what audiences expect to see and hear
- How the news media work, and what they will look for
- The impact of social media on breaking news coverage
- The role of company spokespeople
- How to deliver key messages
- Handling different interview situations – live, recorded, stand-up, “down the line”, “ambush”
- The importance of non-verbal communication
- Interview techniques – “blocking and bridging”
- How to hold a press conference

4.5 Exercising the plan

Do not leave your crisis communication plan on the shelf and allow it to gather dust. The moment you most need it, the plan will be out of date, nobody will understand their roles, and key players may no longer be with the organization. Ensure that you review or update your plan at least every six months. Check contact lists and the nominated candidates for key positions. Ask whether the current version of the plan still reflects the “real world”, or if it is now outdated as a result of organizational changes.

At least once per year, conduct an exercise to test the plan and to ensure that everyone understands their role, and the purpose of the plan. An exercise may be a simple table-top or a full-scale input-response exercise run by a “control team”.

4. BEING PREPARED FOR CRISIS

Accidents do not happen with plenty of warning, during working hours. Neither should your exercises. Run no-notice exercises at inconvenient times, or when key players are absent. This will provide a far better indication of your true capabilities, and your ability to respond effectively to a major event which occurs at 2 a.m. on a Sunday morning.

The proper time to prepare for an accident or serious incident is before it occurs, and these preparations should be exercised on a routine basis. In addition to this publication, IATA has detailed Emergency Response Planning (ERP) guidance materials on how to prepare for these rare events from an operations perspective.

Communications exercises which you may consider running include:

- Notification exercise: Check contact numbers are valid and key players can be reached quickly
- Slow walk-through: Take a potential scenario and ask a series of questions of your team. Check whether your current plan provides the answers
- Tabletop: Run through a simple scenario and test one aspect of the plan – for example, developing updated press statements
- Input-response exercise: Test the entire communication plan by using an exercise control team to provide "inputs" via phone calls, emails, social media postings and "news reports".

After each exercise, conduct an immediate de-brief to capture key learning points and ensure the plan is updated and improved. Exercises may include other departments, or overseas offices. You may also wish to include third parties (for example, codeshare partners) in your exercise.

Time invested in preparing, training and exercising your communication plan is never wasted, even if you never experience an accident or major incident.

5. SAMPLE CRISIS STATEMENTS AND FORMS

5.1 First tweet – Aircraft accident

"#*(flight number)*alert. We are investigating reports of an incident involving flight xxx *(origin)* to *(destination).* We will provide more information shortly".

5.2 Second tweet – Aircraft accident

"#*(flight number)*alert. *(Airline)* confirms flight xxx *(origin)* to *(destination)* involved in an accident at *(location).* Response teams being mobilized. More information will follow".

5.3 Third tweet – Aircraft accident

"#*(flight number)*alert. Media Statement 1 – *(flight number)* accident. Released at *(time, date). (Link to statement published on company website)*

5. SAMPLE CRISIS STATEMENTS

5.3 Holding statement – Aircraft accident

XXX bulletin #1
Issued at (*time*), (*date*)

ACCIDENT TO XXX FLIGHT XXXXX:

(Airline) regrets to confirm that flight (*number*) from (*origin*) to (*destination*) has been involved in an accident at/near (*location*).

The aircraft was a (*aircraft type*)

At this time, search and rescue operations are in progress.

It is believed that there were (*number)* passengers and (*number)* crew on board the flight, but we are currently confirming the details of the passenger manifest.

XXX has established/is working to establish a passenger information center, and a toll-free number is available/will be available shortly for family or friends of those who may have been on board the aircraft.

The toll-free number (*if available*) is: (*give number).* For those calling from outside (*country*), please call *(give international country code or alternative numbers).*

Updated information will also be posted on the XXX website and on Twitter at @(airline name) #(flightnumber).

Note to Editors: We ask that members of the news media do not call the XXX Telephone Enquiry Center, as this line is reserved for family members seeking information about those who may have been on board. Please direct your calls to XXX' media hotline, (*give number).*

5.4 Second statement – Aircraft accident

XXX bulletin #2
Issued at (*time*), (*date*)

ACCIDENT TO (*AIRLINE)* FLIGHT XXXXX:

(Airline) can now provide further details on the accident to flight (*number*) from (*origin*) to (*destination*) earlier today. The accident occurred at/near (*location*) at (*time*) while the aircraft was *(phase of flight).* The aircraft was a (*aircraft type*)

We deeply regret to confirm that there are a number of fatalities among those on board, although we do not have further details. Search and rescue operations are still in progress, and we will release additional information as soon as it becomes available.

(Airline) Chief Executive XXX said: "Everyone at XXX is deeply shocked and saddened by this tragic accident and our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of our passengers and colleagues on board the flight *(number)*".

It is believed that there were (*number)* passengers and (*number)* crew on board the flight, but we are currently confirming the details of the passenger manifest.

(Airline) has established/is working to establish a passenger information center, and a toll-free number is available/will be available shortly for family or friends of those who may have been on board the aircraft. The toll-free number (*if available*) is: (*give number).* For those calling from outside (*country*), please call *(give international country code or alternative numbers).*

Updated information will also be posted on the *(Airline)* website: *(give address) and on Twitter at @airlinename #flightnumber*

Note to Editors: We ask that members of the news media do not call the XXX Telephone Enquiry Center, as this line is reserved for family members seeking information about those who may have been on board. Please direct your calls to XXX' media hotline, (*give number).*

5. SAMPLE CRISIS STATEMENTS

5.5 First statement – Aircraft incident

XXX bulletin #1
Issued at (*time*), (*date*)

INCIDENT TO (*AIRLINE*) FLIGHT XXXXX:

(Airline) can confirm that flight (*number*) from (*origin*) to (*destination*) was involved in an incident today at/near *(location)* when *(describe nature of incident).*

The aircraft was a (*aircraft type*)

The crew of flight *(number) (describe actions of crew)*, in accordance with standard operating procedures. The aircraft landed safely at *(airport)* and there were no injuries to the passengers and crew on board.

It is believed that flight *(number)* was carrying (*number)* passengers and (*number)* crew, but we are currently confirming the details of the passenger manifest.

Our priority now is to ensure that passengers are rebooked on other flights and can continue their journeys without further delay. *(Airline)* regrets the inconvenience caused by today's incident.

The incident will be investigated by *(name investigating body)* and *(airline)* will cooperate fully with the investigation.

Updated information will also be posted on the *(Airline)* website: *(give address) and on Twitter at @(airlinename) #(flightnumber)*

<u>5. SAMPLE CRISIS STATEMENTS</u>

5.6 First statement – Aircraft diversion

XXX bulletin #1
Issued at (*time*), (*date*)

<u>DIVERSION OF (*AIRLINE*) FLIGHT XXXXX:</u>

(Airline) can confirm that flight (*number*) from (*origin*) to (*destination*) diverted to land at (*location*) today, after *(describe nature of in-flight incident).* The aircraft landed safely at *(time)* and there were no injuries to passengers or crew members on board.

The aircraft was a (*aircraft type*)

The crew of flight *(number) (describe actions of crew)*, in accordance with standard operating procedures.

It is believed that flight *(number)* was carrying (*number)* passengers and (*number)* crew, but we are currently confirming the details of the passenger manifest.

Our priority now is to ensure that passengers are rebooked on other flights and can continue their journeys without further delay. *(Airline)* regrets the inconvenience caused by today's diversion.

The incident will be investigated by *(name investigating body)* and *(airline)* will cooperate fully with the investigation.

Updated information will also be posted on the *(Airline)* website: *(give address) and on Twitter at @(airlinename) #(flightnumber)*

5.7 Aircraft emergency report form

EMERGENCY REPORT FORM	
REQUIRED INFORMATION	KNOWN FACTS AT THIS TIME
DATE	
TIME	**LOCAL:-** **UTC:-**
LOCATION	
Flight Number	
Code share Flight Number	
Sector	
Aircraft Registration	
Aircraft Type	
Phase of Flight	
Number of Passengers on Board	
Number of Crew on Board	
Number of Staff on Board	
Number of Ground Casualties	
Description of Aircraft Emergency	

5.8 Media call logging form

MEDIA CALL LOGGING FORM	
Name of journalist	
News organization or publication	
News outlet:	
Time/date of call	
Nature of enquiry	
Special "issues" raised?	
Call handled by	
Follow-up actions?	

5.9 Log of Twitter posts and responses

LOG OF TWITTER POSTS AND RESPONSES	
USERNAME/CONTENT/TIME	COMPANY RESPONSE/TIME

6. CASE STUDIES

6.1 A380 engine failure—Social media breaks the news

Social media has the potential to carry breaking news of an incident, and to drive mainstream news media coverage, before the airline is even aware of what has occurred. This was illustrated in November 2010, after a Qantas A380 suffered an uncontained engine failure four minutes after taking off from Singapore. Pieces of the engine penetrated the wing and fuselage of the aircraft, disrupting electrical, fuel and hydraulic systems, and causing a cascade of system failure messages in the cockpit. The aircraft flew a holding pattern while the crew attempted to assess the scale of the damage and prepared for a return to Singapore. After 1hr 39 minutes, the A380 landed safely in Singapore, despite the reduced maneuverability, and the passengers were evacuated without any injuries.

Although the incident ended successfully, by the time the A380 touched down in Singapore, every major news organization was reporting a serious aircraft emergency, while the Reuters newswire issued a "breaking news" alert confirming that the aircraft had crashed over Indonesia. The AP and Kyodo newswires also reported the crash of a "Singapore-bound jetliner". Meanwhile, Qantas was unable to verify the nature of the incident because it could not communicate with the flight crew.

The media coverage started with a report on an Indonesian TV station of an "explosion" in the skies over Batam Island, and the recovery of multiple pieces of aircraft debris on the ground. A viewer tweeted the news, with the words "airplane crash". Almost immediately a series of similar tweets were posted, catching the attention of mainstream news organizations around the world. A photo posted on Flickr clearly showed the Qantas logo on part of an engine cowling. While this was not the first time "citizen journalists" had spread news of an aircraft incident, it was the first time that the wave of online commentary had started while the aircraft was still airborne.

The incident illustrated the challenge of trying to keep abreast of a fast-developing story on social media, when very little confirmed information is available. Following the incident, Qantas introduced a new social media monitoring capability and started a Twitter news feed. It now operates both a Twitter feed and an online newsroom (www.qantasnewsroom.com.au) where a "Qantas Responds" page contains statements and updates on developing news stories.

6. CASE STUDIES

6.2 B777 crash in San Francisco—Multiple sources of information

Airlines should be prepared to monitor and respond quickly to social media coverage of an unfolding crisis at all hours of the day. This was demonstrated in July 2013, when an Asiana Airlines Boeing 777 approaching San Francisco (SFO) after a long trans-Pacific flight hit the sea wall and crashed onto the runway, killing three passengers and injuring more than 180 others. A passenger in the airport terminal snapped a photo of the crash on her mobile phone and uploaded it to Twitter less than one minute after the impact. While the airline was not identified at that point, survivors soon added their photos of the wreckage, with the Asiana logo clearly visible. Within 30 minutes, there were more than 44,000 Tweets about Asiana, and 52,000 tweets within the first hour.

The accident happened at 11.28am on a Saturday morning in San Francisco, which was 03.28am on Sunday morning at Asiana's home base in Seoul.
Journalists covering the crash contacted Asiana via its Twitter feed to request a statement, but the first response took more than an hour and contained no information about the accident. Meanwhile, other sources were quick to confirm details of the aircraft type and flight number, with tweets appearing from the aircraft manufacturer Boeing, the airport operator SFO and the investigating body, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

Asiana's priority was in providing information to the traditional media and published a press statement three hours after the crash. A total of four updates were issued on Twitter over the next 12 hours. The airline also placed importance in coordinating its communication activities with the NTSB.

SFO issued 15 Twitter updates during the first 12 hours after the accident focused on informing airport users of service disruptions. When the main SFO website crashed due to the number of visitors, the SFO Facebook page was used as an alternative channel.

Among the most prolific of social media voices was the NTSB, which posted 86 tweets during the first week after the accident, including information recovered from the flight data and cockpit voice recorders. The NTSB published regular updates on the accident investigation to its website, including live streaming of daily media briefings and photos of the crash site.

The Asiana crash demonstrated the need for the airline to establish itself as a credible source of information alongside the many other voices that will be providing information.

6. CASE STUDIES

6.3 A380 diversion to Baku, Azerbaijan

Social media can be used as tool to relieve the pressure on traditional communication channels. Singapore Airlines used Facebook as its primary communication channel when an A380 operating from London Heathrow to Singapore was forced to divert to Baku, Azerbaijan in January 2014 with a loss of cabin pressure. The aircraft landed safely in Baku around 1am local time, but the 467 passengers were stranded in the airport transit area because they couldn't enter the country without visas. A replacement A380 was dispatched from Singapore to collect them, but a delay in securing overflight clearances meant that it did not arrive in Baku until almost 11pm the following evening.

Many of the stranded passengers used the airport's free wireless network to upload photos and provide details of their experience, with some posting "selfie" pictures of themselves wearing oxygen masks during the descent. While some passengers complained about the delay and the lack of accommodation in Baku, others praised the performance of the crew and recognized that this was an extraordinary event.

Singapore Airlines published three statements to its Facebook page and its social media team responded instantly to comments posted by passengers in Baku. By monitoring online conversations about the diversion, the airline was also able to correct false information promptly.

A key learning was that cabin crew on the ground in Baku should be kept informed of rumors spreading online, so they could reassure the passengers in person. The airline has since amended its procedures to ensure that social media intelligence is shared with operational departments during a developing incident. Another key learning was that the volume of calls from mainstream news media was minimal, because journalists had obtained all the information they needed from the airline's Facebook posts.

6. CASE STUDIES

6.4 Aftermath of an emergency landing—aligning operational and communications plans

Social media is always “on”. Incidents at an airport are exposed to anyone with a camera and internet connectivity. What they see can become a story in its own right.

Painting over the airline markings after an accident or serious incident was once a standard checklist item in the emergency plans of airline station managers. But when passengers and other airport users can upload photos and videos of a stricken aircraft to social media channels as the incident is developing, there is no point in trying to obscure the airline’s name hours later.

In September 2013 a Thai Airways Airbus A330-300 was damaged in a landing incident at Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi airport. Several passengers suffered minor injuries during the evacuation and the incident was reported in the press. An even bigger story emerged after the airline blacked-out its tail logo.

Photographs of the A330 nose-down on the runway, with the airline’s name and logo obscured by black paint, appeared the next day in local and international newspapers and on dozens of social media sites. The operational response to the incident was timely and appropriate. But blacking-out the tail logo was interpreted as a “cover-up” in social media circles. It’s a reminder that operational plans (as well as crisis communications plans) need to be reviewed in light of ubiquitous social media.

6.5 Monitoring for inflight emergencies

Brussels Airlines discovered the challenge posed by online flight tracking sites when an Avro RJ-85 operating from Brussels to Bilbao in October 2011 experienced an in-flight engine shutdown and had to divert to land in Toulouse.

The crew was instructed by Air Traffic Control to change their transponder code ("squawk") to 7700, the international emergency code which identifies an aircraft in distress. The aircraft tracking site flightradar.com automatically tweets an update to its followers whenever an aircraft squawks this code, identifying the flight number, aircraft type and routing.

Because the crew changed the squawk code before they had an opportunity to notify the SN Brussels operations centre, the airline began receiving calls from journalists before it was aware that the flight was diverting to Toulouse. As a result, the airline communications team and the flight operations department now monitor flightradar.com and the Twitter hashtag #7700 to ensure that they are aware of any inflight emergencies before the media starts calling.

In addition to flightradar.com, there are numerous online aircraft tracking sites, including flightaware.com; planefinder.net; radarbox24.com; aeroseek.com and flightwise.com. Many of these sites provide real-time updates on aircraft squawking the emergency code. There are also several Twitter feeds which will alert followers to aircraft in distress, including @flightemergency; @aircraftretweet; @airlive.net and @planefinder7700.

6. CASE STUDIES

6.6 Preparing for a Family Visit to a Mass Casualty Site

Managing a visit to a mass casualty site is a complex and highly emotional undertaking. Thorough preparation and contingency planning are critical.

In the case of an air accident, surviving families often desire to visit the site. Airlines generally accommodate these wishes. Such visit are "public" events attracting media attention. They are also emotional events which must be handled with discretion and respect.

This case study looks at the family visit to Utoya Island just outside of Oslo, Norway following the 22 July 2011 terror attack that saw 69 people (mostly youth) killed on the island. The following month, the Norwegian government arranged for site visits by the victims' next-of-kin of and for those who had survived the attacks. With less than four weeks to plan for the two separate visits, the organizers faced come critical challenges:

> **Managing Risks:** Preparations included conducting a risk analysis listing 15 possible scenarios such as physical mishaps, injuries and serious psychological reactions among the visitors. Additionally, a dress rehearsal was conducted the day for before the arrival of the first group of visitors.
>
> On the days of the visits, health teams composed of doctors and nurses trained specifically in the field of emotional trauma were present, as were grief counselors, including members of the clergy.
>
> **Managing Media:** Another issue was balancing media interest in the visit with the absolute requirement to respect the privacy of survivors and next of kin. To accommodate this, a "media camp" was set up off site but with sightlines to the island. Support team members were always present in the media camp to answer practical questions or to help with interview arrangements.

A local hotel served as a headquarters and provided a base camp and restaurant for visitors and staff. Communications, media enquiries and information to staff and participants were also managed out of the hotel. Social media sites including Twitter were monitored to provide early detection of potential questions or grievances towards the organizers.

While this clearly was a deeply painful event, feedback from participants was generally positive. Survivors and victims' next of kin appreciated the opportunity to speak among their respective groups and to gain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the tragedy. While it is impossible to foresee or plan for every contingency, thorough advance preparation can help in dealing with a visit to the site of a mass casualty event.