



LiveWorld

Responding to
Crises & National Events



Responding to a National Event

When the nation or international community is in the throes of a crisis, tragedy or event, it is important for brands to be prepared with responses that show respect, mirror the national feeling and, most importantly, don't offend.

Identifying an Event

In the wake of national and international events such as the Boston Marathon bombings, the West Texas explosion, Superstorm Sandy, the Paris Attacks, or school and business shootings and the like, it is important to be able to recognize and react to these events to ensure your brand is appropriate and timely.

The larger question is: How do you identify one of these events?

- Generally these events are large in scale and stop the normal functioning of the country and the news. If the 24-hour news channels are talking only about the event, then it qualifies.
- Regional events will likely be a large focus for local and regional news, but will often only have part-time coverage on national news stations. These events still fall within the topics for this guide.
- Social media leaders must stay alert to these situations. We highly recommend setting up news alerts (via AP, CNN, MSNBC or a similar service) to ensure you are notified as quickly as possible.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE AND REACT TO THESE EVENTS TO ENSURE YOUR BRAND IS APPROPRIATE AND TIMELY.

Stop Everything

Here are some guidelines for appropriate response, once an event has been identified. All Stop.

- Stop all prescheduled social media content, promotion and campaigns immediately. Ensure that the “all stop” includes content management tools, any agencies or partners, and all levels of social staff team members.
- It is critical to ensure you don’t overlook any of the social activities in this all stop. Many of the blunders we have seen from brands are around content that has been scheduled by a brand in a management tool such as HootSuite, and no one thinks to take it down.
- Ensure you stop all activities including scheduled posts, marketing or purchased promotions of existing posts, and that you have alerted any real time posting teams to stop.
- Ensure you stop activity on ALL properties including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, etc.
- Ensure you communicate clearly with all parties that are involved to reduce any delay in stopping these activities. Include all levels of internal team members, agencies, media agencies, partners, etc. Consider establishing a distribution method and contact list before an event happens to ensure no person or group is overlooked.
- Reduce any brand interaction to focus on business-related interaction.
- Continue business-related brand interaction: outreach for customer service, product issues, etc. should continue.



DURING A NATIONAL CRISIS A GOOD RULE OF THUMB IS THAT SOCIAL INTERACTIONS SHOULD BE GREATLY REDUCED OR ELIMINATED COMPLETELY.



Brands should NOT respond if the event is in any way tied to a political hot button issue for the brand



Crafting a Condolence Report

Once you have ensured there is an all stop, it's time to quickly craft a condolence post. There are a host of considerations behind this post:

Deciding if you should respond

First, consider if the brand should respond at all. While each event must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, best practice is to respond with a simple condolence message for the following reasons:

- Humanizes the brand: Shows that the brand is made up of people who are saddened along with the country.
- Gives Credibility: Demonstrates that the brand is living social media in real time vs. using media as a broadcast tool, and it establishes credibility in social spaces.
- Spreads the Word: Your post can help spread the word about current events. Brands that react quickly can actually be alerting your followers to the events. This positions the page as a real time source of information and provides additional credibility.
- When **NOT** to respond: Brands should NOT respond if the event is in any way tied to a political hot button issue for the brand. An example of this would be responding to an oil spill if you are in the oil business or even in an adjacent field.

Writing the Post

Now that you have determined you will respond, craft the best response. While every event has different circumstances, some considerations and tips remain the same:

Example responses:

- Our hearts go out to the people of Boston and everyone impacted by today's events.
- Sending condolences and love to the families in Newtown, Connecticut. Every parent grieves with you tonight.
- From our small town to yours, our thoughts and prayers go to West, Texas.
- The <brand> team stands with the victims of the Joplin tornado and has partnered with the Red
- Cross to provide aid. To see how you can join us in helping, go <link>.
- The <brand> team mourns for those lost in the Sandy Hook shootings and sends our thoughts and prayers to the town of Newtown as they recover.
- Tonight every parent grieves with the families of the Sandy Hook victims. The team here at <site or brand> sends our love to each family involved. --<host name>



Considerations

- Short is best. The less cluttered, the lower chance there is something that might offend someone.
- Brand tone: Be sure the post reflects the brand tone and voice. If the brand is very casual and hip, then consider going slightly more formal and respectful for this post. If the company is formal and corporate, then reflect that voice. Don't completely change your voice for this post; it won't come across as genuine.
- Including religion: The decision to include religious references, prayers in this case, should be based on the culture of the page and brand as well as the target audience. If use of a religious reference isn't right for the brand or the target audiences, select an option with thoughts or hearts go out.
- Signing the post: Should the post come from the brand, the brand team or a host/persona? The key is to reflect the voice that's most consistent on the social property. Is there a host that comments regularly? Then perhaps the sentiment should come from the host and include the brand in the mention.
- Generally if this is a brand page, then the sentiment should either be generic (no mention) or from the "whole team."
- If this is a community page with a host, then consider the sentiment coming from the host.
- Include commonality: In some instances, it is acceptable to include commonalities that make the sentiment resonate with the audience. Examples above include "from our small town to yours" and "every parent will grieve." This should only be used when the social property is a community and **NOT** a brand page, and when the commonality is mutually recognized.

What NOT to do

- Understand that your condolence post creates a space for your audience or community to mutually deal with the event that has occurred. The brand should generally not engage on this thread. Sometimes the discussions on this thread can include speculation surrounding the event itself. Do not post or engage in updates or speculation around the events. Leave that to the news teams.
- Do **NOT**, under any circumstances, try to use this as a marketing opportunity or to promote the brand or products. Something bad has just happened. Be human and compassionate.
- **NEVER** trade actions for a donation to relief efforts. If you are going to be charitable, invite others to join but do not focus the event or giving on your brand.

What's Next

Now that the condolence post is up, what should the brand do next?

Stop Period

- Once the condolence post is up, the brand should continue to suspend normal SM posting, media and engagement efforts for an appropriate length of time following the event. See the section on re-starting for recommendations on duration of the stop period.
- During this stop period, we recommend the brand teams review their content calendars to ensure they are ready for the restart. This review should include:
- Review existing content for any possible overlap with the event. Remove or rewrite anything that could be in poor taste or refer to a region or city involved.
- Determine the plan for the missed content. Will you reschedule, drop or rewrite any of this content?
- Review the first week of content to ensure it has the appropriate tone and content for the reverence period (explained below).

Alert Moderation Teams

- Events can bring out the best and the worst in people, and they will often display this online.
- With this in mind, we recommend you alert and clarify to your moderation team what they should be watching for in the condolence post as well as in other comments. This is especially critical if the event is in any way controversial.
- Reiterate the community rules about political statements, hate language, and aggressive posts with both the moderation team and the public, should the topic turn sour.
- If needed, post a public response to diffuse any conjecture on what happened by referring people to the investigating authorities for information on the event.

Actions to Help

- Large brands should consider joining relief efforts as soon as an event occurs. Do NOT trade likes or other marketing actions for donations. Brands can announce a donation to a reputable aid agency or even just share the NGO so others can also donate to help. (Or both, e.g.: <Brand> just gave \$25K to the American Red Cross for relief efforts. If you'd like to help out too, please go to <http://someurl.com>.)
- If your brand has a team that responds to these events with products or expert staff, we recommend you not mention this during the first days after an event. We recommend you tell the story from the perspective of the participants or volunteers after the event has passed.
- An example might be if a brand employs local and regional medical staff that joins the rescue group during a natural disaster.
- This shares the brand's efforts without appearing to seek credit.
- Sharing helps to focus the community on the more positive recovery and aid portions of the event and displays how the brand has contributed.
- The recovery seems more personal when told from the perspective of a volunteer.

When to Re-Start

- Deciding how and when to restart posts on a brand's SM sites can be a little tricky. While each event should be considered individually, some consistent guidelines remain:
- For national impact, wait a minimum of 24- 48 hours after the end of the event before restarting ANY social programs. Examples would be the Sandy Hook shootings or the Boston Marathon bombings.
- For regional events, wait 12-24 hours after the end of the event before you restart national efforts and consider extending the stop time for this specific region. Examples would be the explosion in West, Texas or the tornado in Joplin, Missouri.
- For events that continue over a period of time, this decision becomes harder. While the specific circumstances should be reviewed, you should at least give a 12-24 hour delay after posting the condolence message before resuming additional content. **ALL CONTENT** posted while the event continues should meet the reverence guidelines below. Examples would be Superstorm Sandy, hurricanes and floods.
- When in doubt about timing, align yourself to the tone of the news cycle and the magnitude of the event. In some extreme cases, it might make sense to wait even longer before resuming normal posting routines.

Reverence Period

- Once past the initial event, posts that follow should be somewhat muted in tone and content to mirror the somber tone of the country. Posts that are overly silly, humorous or self-promotional will still fall flat and could even be offensive to some in this halo period.
- As mentioned above, we recommend you carefully review and edit your content calendar before restarting any social media activity.
- After events, we often see stories of survivors, heroes and towns coming together to rebuild or recover from a tragedy. The country recovers with these stories of hope and the American spirit. Finding posts that give hope, in the framework of your brand and content, will align nicely with the general feel in the days that follow an event.
- Be sure these stories are **APPLICABLE** and **TRUE** before sharing.
- An example: Post a member story about an animal rescue following a natural disaster.
- The reverence period should last a minimum of three days, for the duration of rescue efforts and funerals, or in the instance of an ongoing event, for the duration of the event.
- **NEVER** post inflammatory, provocative, or self-serving promotional posts during the reverence period.

Getting Back to Business

As the nation moves beyond the event and life begins to normalize, the brand posts and content should mirror this change and move back to the tone, cadence, and subjects from before the event. Be sure to note all of these dates on a timeline for metrics and reporting to indicate why engagement dropped in the week when these events occur.

About LiveWorld

Through services and software, LiveWorld empowers the largest companies in the world to deliver social customer experiences that deepen relationships between brands and customers. Our marketing, customer service, and insights solutions enable companies to maximize the potential of social media and online communities. LiveWorld services include strategy, campaign management, content moderation, customer engagement, social media analytics, and customer service. For over 19 years, LiveWorld has delivered services and software for moderation, engagement, customer service, and insight, enabling brands to manage social media and online community programs at scale. LiveWorld clients include the #1 brands in consumer packaged goods, retail, pharmaceutical, financial, and travel services. LiveWorld is headquartered in San Jose, California, with offices in New York City and Austin.

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