



Beyond Crisis Communications

Capitalizing on Social Media to Bolster Business Continuity Management

With more organizations embracing “social business” and introducing enterprise social software into the workplace, forward-looking business continuity (BC) professionals are struggling to determine how they can integrate these tools effectively into their programs.

Certain aspects of business continuity management (BCM) are already being transformed by social media. Leaders in the crisis communications community are currently debating the benefits and risks of incorporating social media into their plans. Emergency management professionals have clearly embraced social media as an effective tool for emergency response. Interest in social media has prompted the US Federal Emergency Management Agency to offer a course entitled *Social Media in Emergency Management*. The June 2012 update of DRI International’s professional practices¹ includes new recommendations on the inclusion of social media in several professional practices.

BC professionals are also taking advantage of social media to network and share ideas with colleagues across the country and around the world, and to collaborate on projects that are valuable to the industry as a whole. For example, BCM encyclopedia wikis are available publically online and many BC groups are active on LinkedIn. These forums give professionals the opportunity to debate issues and add to the collective knowledge of the industry.

As part of the evolution of BCM, can social media tools be utilized throughout a business continuity program? What are the benefits and risks? This article argues that the BCM profession can and should embrace social media tools as a method of augmenting all ten of DRI International’s professional practices

What is Social Media?

Social media includes more than the social networking sites which seem to dominate the news. Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan, 2010). Web 2.0 is a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, as with traditional websites, but rather are continually modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan, 2010).

Social media includes collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) (Kaplan, 2010).

¹ DRI International, Professional Practices for Business Continuity Practitioners, June 1, 2012 Version 1, accessed on Aug 20, 2012 at <http://www.dri.ca/PROFESSIONAL/PDF/professionprac-June15-2012.pdf>



for BC practitioners².

Benefits of actively using Social Media in BCM

Understanding and mastering new software tools can be daunting. However, projects that embrace social media are recognizing many benefits that derive from tapping into a wider network and leveraging the collective knowledge of an organization.

Many BCM programs suffer setbacks when very few people are engaged in the process. Using a social media tool to widely publicize the planning progress and participation can improve a struggling BCM program by increasing the visibility of the project. BC planners can cultivate buy-in by connecting additional people to the planning process, and by distributing BC information more widely through social media tools.

Timely information from internal experts can improve the value of the BCM program. The BC professional can use social media to collect more comprehensive and timely data by engaging more members of the organization and bypassing typical business silos. BC planning team members can use social media tools to clarify and respond to information immediately. This free-flowing dialogue can help experts feel more involved and valued. New solutions to continuity issues can be vetted quickly and comprehensively.

In order to capitalize on these benefits, BC managers are envisioning ways that social media tools can be sensibly integrated into their professional practices.

Collaborative projects

Collaborative project tools create an international or an entity-wide method of information collection and distribution. The BC professional can adopt these tools for risk evaluation and control, as well as BC plan documentation and maintenance programs.

Wikis allow users to add, remove, and change text-based content and can be public, like Wikipedia, or internal to the organization and password

A risk register wiki can be developed to gather information for the risk evaluation. It can reach a larger number of employees, can aggregate results in real time and can remain active to identify threats that may arise or change between periodic risk assessments. A risk register wiki could include information on existing risks, measure risk threat perception, and assign responsibility for risk controls. With the information available to the whole organization, duplication of effort is reduced, silos break down and responsibility for risk control is driven by the group.

BC documentation can be created and maintained using a BC wiki. Mike Minze, CEO of INEVOLVE SB, shared his experience:

“At many organizations where I have worked, Microsoft SharePoint has been a critical component of the documentation aspect of BC. By its design, SharePoint is a collaborative tool for collecting and sharing information in a decentralized environment. SharePoint allows us to develop a platform to share processes,

² DRI International, Professional Practices for Business Continuity Practitioners, June 1, 2012 Version 1,



documentation, control versions of plans and processes and establish ownership of plans and manuals... SharePoint is flexible enough to support single site BCP programs or enterprise programs that require wikis for each site or business unit.”

Sharepoint is one example of software that can bring the power of collaborative projects to BC documentation.

Blogs and Microblogs

A BC blog on the corporate intranet could invigorate the BCM program in several areas. It can help establish the need for a BC program during project initiation and create awareness of the BC program throughout the process. A blog can be used to announce training sessions, recognize and reach out to those who participate as well as encourage and explain the need to keep information up to date.

Use DRII PP1 – Program Initiation and Management section 1.a. to h. for blog topics

An exercise provides many opportunities to make the most of on a blog. Prior to the exercise, the planner can publicize dates, identify participants and discuss objectives. During the exercise, the facilitator can post blog entries with quick lessons. After the exercise, the coordinator can share lesson notes, and invite feedback from participants on their experience.

Microblogs (such as twitter) can also be used to disseminate private information internally or public information externally. Dr. Wayne Boone, Coordinator and Principal Instructor of the Infrastructure Protection and International Security Program at Carleton University in Ottawa, believes that these short messages contain a certain urgency that e-mail does not have. This may prompt faster response to requests for information and improve plan maintenance. Responses may also be more precise due to the limitations on the number of characters in a microblog.

Content Communities

Content communities allow their users to share multimedia content with a wider community. Many BC professionals from around the world have already created and shared videos on prominent content communities that can be integrated into training and awareness programs. At the time of writing this article, a search of YouTube for “business continuity” returned nearly 5,300 results. Visual learners will benefit from the use of photos and videos in training and awareness sessions.

Social Networking Sites

“Facebook for businesses,” or enterprise social technology, can allow BC professionals to promote their services organization-wide. If the organization is using enterprise social technology, the BC team can post and populate their profile pages. They can improve their visibility by using key search words for the profession, such as disaster recovery, emergency response,

“When discussions are captured on social technology rather than private e-mail a history is available to new employees.” John Orlando, PhD, Vertek



preparedness and resilience. They may also set up a corporate BC group and invite all members of the planning team to participate.

Public social networking sites can promote coordination with external agencies to establish policies and procedures to coordinate response, continuity and recovery activities. A professional social networking site allows the BC professional to connect with officials at external agencies at the local, regional and national levels. The BC professional can then join or establish a group that includes all of these agencies. They may use this group to form an ongoing dialogue on applicable statutes and regulations or as one source of contact information during an incident.

Risks to Using Social Media in BCM

There are risks to using social media within a BCM program that must be recognized and managed.

Security is always important. Confidentiality, integrity, availability, privacy, and sensitivity must be maintained to ensure that information is released only at the proper time and to the proper audience. Social networking sites have been hacked and have had passwords stolen. An internal BCM wikis should have strong password protections which are changed regularly.

The BC planner is still responsible to follow approval processes and determine the value of widespread planning participation. Some experts worry about a lack of control over content. Without proper controls, incorrect or unapproved information may appear publicly before it has been verified by the continuity coordinator. Disgruntled employees could also tamper with the information contained in collaborative projects, post negative responses to blogs or disrupt the social community with misinformation.

A corporate-wide risk register could expose an organization to liability if risks are reported and not acted upon. It must also be protected from unauthorized access.

As with all digital information storage, hard copy backups of a BC wiki must be available and maintained. Perry Depew, Vice-President of FDI Consulting, Inc. cautions, "Keep in mind that the plans have to be available when systems are offline and facilities are not accessible. Therefore, having copies on other readily accessible media is a requirement."

Content on blogs can also become stale if not regularly updated and maintained by the BC teams or continuity coordinator. One way to overcome this problem is to share a blog with other departments, which will encourage regular updates.

Conclusion

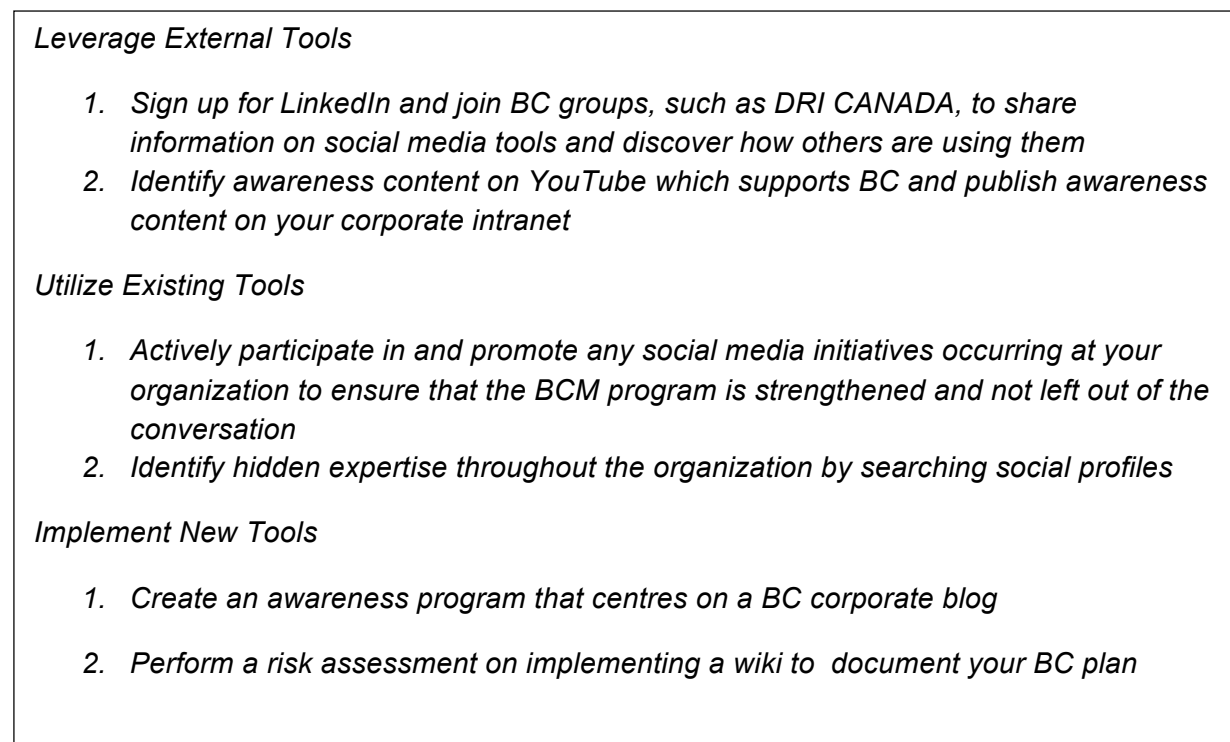
Social media tools can be incorporated into a BCM program for networking and data gathering purposes. Proper measures must be taken to ensure the validity and security of this data. Nevertheless, integrating these new tools into BCM could help overcome some common program stumbling blocks. Social media tools hold out a promise to improve the quality and timeliness of BC planning data and to increase corporate awareness of the BC plan and its



value. Each BC professional must decide how best to leverage these new tools within the culture of their organization.

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Figure 1 Social Media Tool Roadmap



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