



# Business Continuity Management and Social Unrest

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During the 2011 Stanley Cup riot in Vancouver, rioters smashed store and office windows, looted businesses, and burned cars, causing millions of dollars of damage.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, during the G8 and G20 Summits in Toronto, small groups of militant protestors burned police vehicles, smashed bank windows and vandalized stores. Afterward, Toronto businesses submitted over 400 claims to the federal government for compensation, totalling \$11-million.<sup>2</sup>

Even when protests are relatively peaceful, businesses can still be negatively affected. The presence of protesters and police discourages customers from coming to the affected area. Dining reservations are cancelled, foot traffic decreases, and sales decline. This spring, the Montreal Chamber of Commerce estimated business was down by 15 per cent for retailers and restaurant owners in the downtown core due to student protests, and that protesters had caused several million dollars in economic damage.<sup>3</sup>

“You can’t stop events from happening,” says Trefor Munn-Venn, President of Social Catalyst and former Director of National Security and Public Safety with the Conference Board of Canada, “but the speed with which you can bounce back is very important.”

DRI CANADA offers businesses guidelines to assist in developing, implementing, and maintaining business continuity management (BCM) plans which can allow businesses to resume or continue operations under adverse conditions.<sup>4</sup> Social media can be integrated into these plans in three key ways: through crisis communications during an event, through monitoring and risk evaluation, and through recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Maureen Healey, Associate Executive Director, Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA), interview, 15 Aug 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, “Businesses will get compensation for G8, G20 summit damage,” Postmedia News, 15 Jun 2011, <http://www.globaltvbc.com/businesses+will+get+compensation+for+g8+g20+summit+damage/295017/story.html>.

<sup>3</sup> LuAnn LaSalle, “Student protests hurting one of Montreal’s biggest bar-hopping streets,” Canadian Business, 16 May 2012, <http://www.canadianbusiness.com/article/84415--student-protests-hurting-one-of-montreal-s-biggest-bar-hopping-streets>.

<sup>4</sup> DRI International, “Professional Practices for Business Continuity Practitioners,” 2012, <http://www.dri.ca/PROFESSIONAL/practices.asp>.



## Crisis communicating during an event

Social media refers to publically accessible “activities, platforms and practices that enable users to create, recommend, filter and share knowledge, opinions and content.”<sup>5</sup> These networks have a huge user base. Twitter claims 500 million users<sup>6</sup> and Facebook is about to hit the 1 billion mark.<sup>7</sup> Social media networks are free, easily accessible on mobile devices, and easy to search, making them ideal tools for connecting and communicating on a day-to-day basis and during an emergency.

During a protest or a riot, businesses need to gather information from internal and external sources, coordinate activities, and disseminate instructions and information.<sup>8</sup> Social media can be useful in these key communication activities and a valuable addition to other communications tools, such as phone and email. For example, Twitter can be used to gather information from police and to maintain communications with employees, customers, suppliers and stakeholders. Businesses can also reply to questions and concerns: Are the streets blocked? Is the protest violent? Are the police present? Should employees stay home or is it safe to come to work? Responding quickly and honestly to these questions improves business credibility and strengthens relationships with followers.

### Key Questions for a Social Media Strategy

- What is the intent of the social media account?
- Who can speak/post on behalf of an organization?
- What accounts are associated with an organization? Who owns them? What

Rumor management is also critical, warns Munn-Venn. Know what is being said and address it before it gains traction. For example, Montreal police used their Twitter account (@SPVM) to quickly address rumors during student protests, such as claims that the army was being called in or that a protestor had been killed. If someone falsely reports that a business had been damaged or closed, that business can use social media to quickly quell such harmful rumors.

Yet in order to successfully communicate with the desired audience, businesses need to have a clear understanding of social media networks and their capabilities, the audience these networks reach, and the processes by which these social media channels are established and maintained. Additionally, businesses must have a clear social media strategy in place and establish authentic relationships before trouble starts.

## Monitoring and evaluating risk

Businesses can use social media not only to respond to direct questions and comments, but also to monitor what is happening prior to or during a protest, and assess any potential threat.

<sup>5</sup> Sungard, “Social Media in Business Continuity Management White Paper,” 2011, <http://www.sungard.co.uk/Documents/SG-Social-Media-White-Paper.pdf>, p.2.

<sup>6</sup> Lauren Dugan, “Twitter to Surpass 500 Million Registered Users On Wednesday,” Media Bistro, 21 Feb 2012, [http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/500-million-registered-users\\_b18842](http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/500-million-registered-users_b18842).

<sup>7</sup> Owen Thomas, “Facebook Will Hit One Billion Users Any Day Now,” Business Insider, 24 Aug 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-one-billion-user-milestone-2012-8>.

<sup>8</sup> DRI International, 2012, p. 6.



In March 2011, an American protest group called US Uncut staged protests at fifty Bank of America branches across the United States, using Facebook to organize attendees.<sup>9</sup> Had Bank of America been monitoring social media for comments about their organization, they would have been better prepared for the large numbers of protesters that congregated at the targeted branches. Munn-Venn also advises business to monitor what is being said about their close neighbours and their neighbourhood, since the protest's impacts may spill over beyond the targeted organization.

There are a variety of tools which can help organizations monitor events and comments, ranging from simple (Google Alerts) to highly specialized (Radian 6). Businesses can also benefit from knowing what tools protesters are using to communicate with each other. For example, Vibe is an app for Android devices which allows users to send messages to within a certain radius, such as to warn of police presence or advise a route change.<sup>10</sup> Messages can be set to expire within seconds, minutes or hours. Businesses that are monitoring such communications will be better prepared when their street is suddenly filled with protestors.

### **Recovery from social unrest**

In the wake of a violent riot or prolonged protests, businesses must act to quickly restore operations. This time-sensitive process can be greatly assisted by the immediate nature of social media.

During a protest or riot, businesses can communicate with customers and stakeholders about what is happening on the street outside. Once the protest has moved on, or police have secured the area, businesses can assure stakeholders that all is well, or report any damage that was suffered. When the streets are open to traffic, businesses can entice customers back with special offers and loyalty rewards.

For those businesses that suffer damage and looting during a riot or violent protest, social media can play a big part in mobilizing support, reassuring patrons, and attracting customers. This last application was particularly important in the aftermath of the Vancouver Stanley Cup riot.

### **Case Study – The Stanley Cup riot and the Vancouver campaign**

On June 15, 2011, outdoor viewing parties in downtown Vancouver for Game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals turned into riots when the home team lost. Rioting and looting left windows shattered, stores gutted, and burnt cars strewn over a 10-block radius of the city's main shopping district.

Within a day of the riot, the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA) was hearing from its members that customers were cancelling reservations, employees were afraid to come to work, and people were staying away from the downtown

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<sup>9</sup> Sungard, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Wagstaff, "Vibe: Private Twitter Alternative Helps 'Occupy' Protesters Organize Anonymously, Time Techland," 30 Apr 2012, <http://techland.time.com/2012/04/30/vibe-private-twitter-alternative-helps-protesters-organize-anonymously/>.



core because of a perceived lack of safety. There was an urgent need to get the message out that Downtown Vancouver was safe and open for business.

Fortunately for Vancouver businesses, the DVBIA already had a strong and well-orchestrated social media presence due to their efforts during the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, when they provided up-to-the-minute information about what was happening downtown.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, during the first six games of the 2011 Stanley Cup playoffs, DVBIA gained followers as they reported on where people could watch the game downtown. When the riots broke out on the night of the game 7, the DVBIA immediately responded online.

Maureen Healy, DVBIA Associate Director, noted that their ability to respond quickly both during and after the Stanley Cup riot was made easier by pre-established protocols that had already been tested. There was a defined policy for who spoke for the organization and who updated the Twitter and Facebook feeds. A staff member in Richmond was able to update social media accounts from home outside of business hours, enabling DVBIA to provide immediate updates to followers about what was happening, where the riot was taking place, and when police had secured the area.

In the days following the riot, DVBIA worked with the support of a local PR and ad agency, to implement the highly successful 'Vanlover' social media Campaign (#vanlover) which helped businesses recover. People were encouraged to display Vanlover posters (a heart with Vanlover written inside) and to share positive stories and messages about doing things they love in downtown Vancouver, like shopping and dining.

As the campaign gained traction, businesses reported increases in business and daily pedestrian counts of visitors/employees returned to pre-riot levels.<sup>12</sup> For DVBIA, Facebook post views increased by close to 400 per cent and feedback rates skyrocketed by over 1,600 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

The Vanlover campaign illustrates that social media can be used to assist businesses in communication both during and after adverse events. The campaign also demonstrates the importance of having protocols in place so as to be able to respond immediately, and shows the importance of establishing an audience of followers prior to a crisis. Successful implementation of social media into BCM does not happen at the time of a crisis, but rather comes as the result of strategic planning and knowledge of social media networks, their capabilities, and the processes by which communication channels are established and maintained.

DRI CANADA offers training and certification in Business Continuity Planning and Disaster Recovery. More information is available at [www.dri.ca](http://www.dri.ca).

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<sup>11</sup> Maureen Healey, Associate Executive Director, DVBIA, interview, 15 Aug 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Maureen Healey, Associate Executive Director, DVBIA, interview, 15 Aug 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Maureen Healey, IABC BC Bronze Quill Awards Submission, 2012.

