

# Damage control



By [Matthew Stone](#)

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In [part one](#), we talked about Nestlé's mishandling of its Facebook wall. In part two, we look at how social media, Twitter in particular, has been used for damage control.

Sometimes problems can come from bad use of social media sites, such as the Nestlé example. Sometimes social media itself causes problems for the brand: Domino's Pizza in the US had a similar problem when two employees uploaded YouTube videos of themselves doing disgusting things in a Domino's kitchen.



More often than not, however, it is the means by which people share their feelings about something a brand has done elsewhere. It is a continuing real-time online conversation about your brand.

## A chance to respond

The benefit of this is that it gives you a chance to respond. Previously, a dissatisfied customer would damage a brand via word-of-mouth and you could not even know. These days, when a customer complains on Twitter, it gives you the chance to intervene and repair the damage.

During the BP oil spill, for example, the flood of negative tweets and status updates was staggering. Although such a massive disaster can never be smoothed over by any number of well-worded and apologetic tweets, the reaction from the company can either serve to ameliorate or exacerbate the situation.

In BP's case, it was definitely the latter. While it was generally guilty of bad PR in the wake of the disaster, its Internet PR was horrific - the lowest point being the images it released of the cleanup effort that had been extensively photoshopped to make BP appear more competent and in control of the situation.

It even led to the formation of a fake BP Twitter account ([@BPGlobalPR](#)), which tweets clever sarcastic remarks "from" BP PR. Tweets such as "It's not our oil, it's America's oil! In the meantime, if you'd like to help us clean up go to [www.bp.org](#)" and "I'm sorry you're so upset. DM me your address and we'll send you a free BP t-shirt." and my personal favourite: "I'm sorry, are you people mad at us for drilling in the ocean?!? Maybe God shouldn't have put oil there in the first place. DUH".

## Smart enough to avoid disaster

While BP probably suffered the wrath of social media more than anyone else, there are many examples of those who have been smart enough with it to avoid possible disasters.

When TechCrunch blogger Michael Arrington found himself plagued by Internet connectivity problems from his ISP Comcast, he found that Comcast was less than helpful. So he tweeted about it... to his 12 000 followers who are in the tech industry.

Needless to say, this was quite a problem for Comcast. Within 20 minutes of it being up on Twitter, Comcast contacted Arrington and worked the problem out. Simply by being aware of the situation and dealing with it quickly, Comcast turned a PR disaster into a success story, with Arrington then tweeting about how quickly the problem was resolved.

More than simply negating the bad juju that would have been created, Comcast actually received positive feedback.

## Anecdote of good PR

Even better than simply the positive tweets from Arrington, the story of Comcast's quick reaction transformed into what I've just written: an anecdote of good PR, spread on blogs and in articles worldwide. One response and resolution has, for next to no cost, given it better advertising than money can buy.

So how can you make sure that you are Comcast and not BP in this example? Well, step one is not launching tonnes of oil into the Gulf of Mexico... and step two is reading the next article in this series.

[Part three](#) explains how you can make sure that your brand avoids the pitfalls and takes advantage of the opportunities that social media allows.

## ABOUT MATTHEW STONE

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