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# *ACRP WebResource 8* Overview

## The Need for and Value of Social Media in Emergency Management

No longer can anyone ignore the prolific use of and vast opportunities presented by social media (SM). From the rise of social networking to the mobile social web, and the transition to messaging apps, SM has transcended its role as an entertaining pastime and become a vital part of our lives. With this ever-present ability to reach the world, we are finding that the mobile social web is both ubiquitous and powerful as a communication tool.

In this connected culture, individuals and organizations widely accept that SM is an important, if not crucial, tool for disseminating and promoting information, and airports are no exception. In light of the reach of SM and its ability to connect with the public and airport stakeholders, SM managers are becoming invaluable to *emergency managers* in information gathering and sharing. SM has proved highly useful during incidents, emergencies, and irregular operations.

For example, during a bomb threat at one airport, emergency responders were alerted by the SM team that the passenger tram was still moving passengers through the evacuation zone. The SM team was able then to coordinate messaging to passengers to keep them updated on the tram and the public safety incident. In another incident, a passenger indicated on an SM channel that if he received a certain number of SM “likes,” he would shout “bomb” at the security screening checkpoint. Because they were actively listening, members of the airport’s SM team saw this post and were able to work with public safety staff to thwart the individual’s attempt and use SM to update passengers on the event status.

Emergencies at an airport can have a wide-ranging impact on the airport and the community in which it is located. Aircraft accidents, weather events, public safety emergencies (such as active shooters), and communications network outages can have a significant impact on airline operations, tenants and concessionaires, and federal agencies operating at the airport (Federal Aviation Administration, Transportation Security Administration, and Customs and Border Protection). These incidents also impact passengers, family and friends, local traffic, off-airport transportation, and businesses that rely on the airport. Using SM in emergency management (EM) leverages the reach and speed that SM provides for listening to and communicating with those impacted by an event. Step 2 of the WebResource describes how SM can be used across the EM phases.

## “I’m not on the Social Media Team or in Emergency Management, so why is this resource important to me?”

It takes more than just the SM and EM managers to effectively implement a program for integrating social media with emergency management (SMEM); it takes all those who have a stake in a successful resolution. Every group has a role, as shown below:

**Airport Executives**: The use of SM prior to and during an event can help provide a quicker resolution and a faster return to normal operations. Properly used, SM can protect the airport’s image (as well as stakeholders) and be an effective channel in working with the media. Airport executive support is needed to ensure funding and company buy-in is achieved. Additionally, your direction is needed when establishing message approval processes.

**First Responders**: SM can provide awareness of issues that are building before they impact the airport. During an event, SM aids in providing better situational awareness by getting first-hand accounts by those directly impacted. It can also be used for providing safety directions or for warning others about a hazardous situation. Integrating SM into your intelligence gathering and public messaging can improve the effectiveness of your response and aid in recovery.

**Mutual Aid Partners**: The airport cannot succeed without the support of mutual aid partners; however, each organization has a unique role and responsibilities and its own reputation to maintain. Partnering with the airport’s SMEM program ensures a coordinated effort in communicating during an incident to minimize confusion and focus help where it is needed.

**Airport Support Staff**: There are multiple departments within the airport that are vital to the SMEM program being implemented:

Information Technology: For support of systems, network, and internet connectivity, along with cybersecurity and software support. Understanding how SM will be used can help you provide recommendations for configuring systems and providing critical support during incidents so that messaging is not hindered.

Operational Departments (Airfield Ops, Maintenance, Landside Ops, etc.): Provide critical information and field support to first responders who may use private/secure messaging tools to solicit information on terminal and landside conditions. Using these messaging tools, operational departments can provide important updates on the status of repairs, roadways, and the airfield that can be shared with stakeholders and customers.

**Airlines:** As an airline representative, you understand the importance of protecting your brand and managing customer expectations. Partnering with the airport during an event can ensure that you and the airport are speaking with one voice. Your customers will likely turn to you first; you can obtain event updates from the airport and share these with your followers, reaching target groups that the airport would be unable to reach on its own.

**Local, State, and Federal Agencies**: The airport SMEM team can be a valuable, trusted source of information during an event. Through its local network of stakeholders, the airport can provide situational updates and local contacts to regional and national command centers for coordinated response efforts. Conversely, the airport relies on these centers to provide SM messaging that the local office may not have the authority to issue.

**Concessionaires, Fixed-Base Operators, and Tenants**: SM messaging through the established processes of EM incident management can provide vital updates for your on-airport staff. During an incident, many passengers turn to badged employees for information; as such, you become a force multiplier in reaching travelers.

In this connected world, a strong SMEM program can provide a vital element of information for maintaining situational awareness and can be a valuable tool in communicating with the public and stakeholders. But the program can only be successful with the support and involvement of the whole community. Take the time to go through Part 1 of *ACRP WebResource 8* to gain a better understanding of how SMEM can be used at your airport.

Go to the ACRP’s Homepage (<http://www.trb.org/ACRP/ACRP.aspx>) and click on the WebResources icon. There you will find a listing of all WebResources, including *ACRP WebResource 8*.