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# Critchlow Emergency Management and Business Continuity Management Blog

Communication nation: When crisis hits, technology is your greatest ally.

Posted by Caitlin McDougall on 30-May-2018 12:22:19

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Organisation forecasts that severe weather events will continue to worsen as climate change intensifies. Heatwaves, drought, bushfires, extreme rainfall, the potential for higher-impact tropical

2016 was the hottest year on record, globally, and the World Meteorological

cyclones, increased coastal flooding, damage to council-owned assets, roads, footpaths, parks and tree reserves are all likely impacts of weather-related events on local communities. Storm impacts can be catastrophic for people, property and the overall economy.

The Queensland floods in 2011 forced the evacuation of thousands of people from at least 70 towns and cities, including the capital city Brisbane. Over 200,000 people were affected, the damage initially was estimated at around A\$1 billion, and the estimated reduction in Australia's GDP reached about A\$30 billion.

That same year, more than fifty communities in western and central Victoria were also

significantly impacted by the flooding that affected large parts of Victoria.

Victoria floods, 2011. Image credit: Bendigo Advertiser

incidents like cyber-attacks, industrial disasters, and man-made attacks like violence

Local governments also need to be constantly vigilant in preparing for non-weather

and terrorism. The amount of information circulating during any extreme event means conventional methods like manual call trees and spreadsheets of contacts aren't enough to coordinate an effective response, or supply the community and responders all the

information they now expect. Fortunately, modern communications technology can equip local responders with highly sophisticated tools for monitoring and managing emergency situations, and keeping all stakeholders updated with real time, 2-way information flows.

A framework for effective crisis planning Start with the plan A written plan should be in place, which includes specific actions that will be taken in

the event of a crisis. The key objectives during any crisis are to protect any individual (employee or public) who may be at risk, ensure that all stakeholders are kept

## informed, and that ultimately the community survives.

Proactive planning is the cornerstone of crisis response, so seek advice from external specialists, as needed, to ensure that threat scenarios are adequately mapped, and the right tools and resources are in place for an effective response. The full impact of severe events can't always be forecast, but as wide a range as

possible should be modelled in the planning process. Central stakeholder coordination As the trusted centre of your community, local government needs to take responsibility

for coordinating information flow and response with all stakeholders, including residents, emergency responders, state and federal government, and the media.

Identify a spokesperson

A key spokesperson needs to be identified, prepared and kept as up to date as possible to ensure that the media, staff, customers and the public are kept informed with a clear, consistent message.

responsibility may be better suited to the chief responders, such the CFA, SES or Police,

This doesn't mean the Mayor or Councillors need to front news conferences. This

but council should have a close stake in coordinating the what, when, how and why of information being released.



# negative statements.

Don't forget to keep suppliers and customers updated as well, so that the business of local government can keep functioning with as much relevant information as available. Update early and often Be proactive and early with sharing news, even when the whole picture isn't clear. It is

better to over-communicate than to allow rumours to fill the void. Start with summary statements on whatever is initially known, and provide updated action plans and new

developments as early and as often as possible to stay ahead of the 24/7 news cycle.

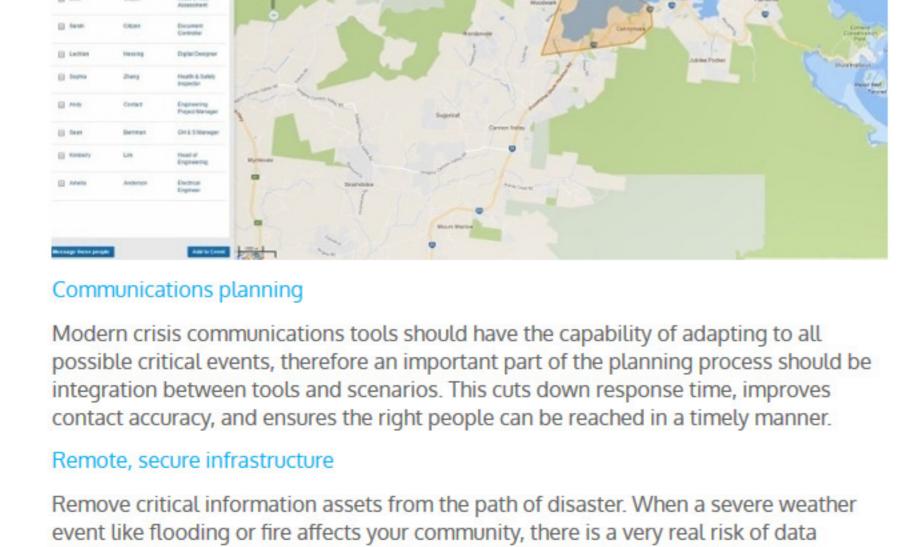
## Social media Ensure that all the channels that your stakeholders may be using are covered, not just

the traditional areas in which critical statements are released, such as press releases or shire websites. Nothing's more damaging than incorrect information being live tweeted without your ability to see and respond with facts and the appropriate damage control. Thorough planning is the baseline of effective crisis preparation. Responding effectively requires these plans to be executed with communications tools purpose-

built to securely and accurately coordinate the response, and manage the vast amount

of information that needs to be captured, shared and acted upon.

State-of-the-art Crisis Communications Technology Q M M Q C + Dyla



distributed, cloud hosted platforms will allow you to keep communicating even in the worst case local damage scenarios. Multi-channel message streams

Messages should be sent on the appropriate channels needed to make sure the entire

team is reached, including SMS, Voice, On demand HTML5 Micro Apps, RSS, social

You need to be able to continue to communicate without disruption. Secure,

centres and communications infrastructure being impacted.

Message templates should be prepared with specifics which can be rapidly altered during incidents, thereby saving time by providing pre-defined communication and response options.

### Where possible, communications platforms should be integrated with monitoring systems, allowing details to be auto-populated into message templates. Response requests can be raised automatically and sent directly to the resolution team members. 2-way conversation flow

Message automation

media, or email.

Message templates

receipt, allow the receiver to respond as needed, and escalate when required. Make use of an integrated communications platform Best practice crisis communications programs are built around cross channel

communications platforms, which provide interactive, responsive communications,

comprehensive reporting and message delivery status transparency for key staff and

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It's not enough to just send messages, there needs to be a system in place to track

## senior stakeholders. 0

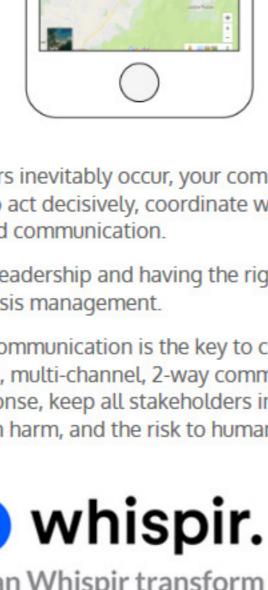
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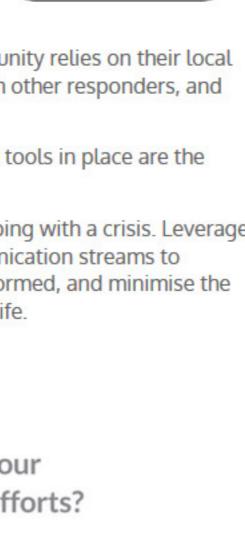


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NB: This blog was originally written and posted by Dennis Adonis of Whispir on the Whispir

website. Critchlow is a proud partner of Whispir and provider of the solution in New Zealand.

Topics: Incident Management Software, Incident Management, Appiture<sup>o</sup>, Whispir, Crisis



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