# Social Media Command Center Would Prove to Be Valuable Asset during Times of Crisis

Conor Cusack, MPA

Digital Strategist and Entrepreneur

Rochester, New York, USA

This past October I had the privilege of attending Cloudforce New York 2012 at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City. There, I was able to witness first-hand the power and seamless cross-platform communication of the Salesforce.com Social Media Command Center for business. The Center was a fantastic blend of media platforms designed to curate, organize and disseminate real-time information including text messaging, tweets, and imagery in high-definition visual display. At Cloudforce, topics addressed by the Command Center included "gender breakdown, geographic breakdown, volume of conversations, most talked about speakers, and most mentioned brands."

I watched in awe and imagined the impact that this tool could have upon government agencies and school districts, particularly in time of crisis or emergency response. I have several years of my career working in crisis prevention/mitigation, intervention, response and recovery. I

pondered how this tool might be deployed and utilized by federal government agencies, schools, police and fire departments. I left Cloudforce convinced that Social Media Command Centers could unequivocally benefit the aforementioned organizations in their emergency prepared and response efforts.   Social Media Command Centers can significantly enhance interagency communication and planning.  Virtual tabletop training simulations for all types of emergency or disaster could be rehearsed, recorded, and published using the Command Center.

I recalled incidents including Hurricane Sandy, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, and Boston Marathon bombings, I cannot help but think of how critical information updates and communication would be distributed in seconds to concerned family member, law enforcement personnel, and media.  A command center would provide detailed and streamlined information for deployment at with clicks of a mouse or strokes on a keyboard.

Given today's technology operational opportunities for a Social Media Command Center within local, state, and federal governments are limitless. Agencies now have the agility to share and process critical information and communications like never before.  Mobile Social Media Command Centers can be deployed at close proximity to targeted areas. Smartphones have are becoming faster and more precise, which allows for accurate exchange of critical content between the handheld device and Social Media Command Center.

I envision police departments electronically tracking and geospatially mapping arrests and crime patterns, and getting this information to officers in real-time. Aerial video and thermal imaging projections of suspects at large or victims trapped in a building could be distributed and shared among the rank and file as soon it was captured digitally.

The same applies to fire departments; only instead of arrests and patterns of criminal behavior, firefighters would be able to download locations of fires, hazardous materials incidents, traffic accidents and EMT victim transport. The shortage routes of triage for victims between injury and the closest medical centers could be made available.

School districts would also benefit via Social Media Command Centers. In addition to crisis response, centers could be used for internal communications including attendance rates, truancy, and locations of student bullying. If a need arose for shelter-in-place or lockdown, administrators could communicate with the necessary community stakeholders more effectively and efficiently than ever.

A Social Media Command Center could be relied upon to triage information and updates during an emergency to traditional media outlets including television and radio stations.  Social Media Command Centers would prove extremely valuable in terms of dynamic interagency communication and planning.  Virtual tabletop training simulations for many types of emergency or incident could be rehearsed using the Command Center.

Electronic simulations would not, of course, supplant the necessity for real training or actual intervention in the field, but I am confident that they could reinforce and perhaps refine existing tactics, protocol, policies, and procedures already in place for crisis prevention and response.

Now that social media is ubiquitous, and its involvement in mass casualty incidents more prevalent, I believe this incredible tool adopted by business could be modified for government agencies and might help prevent injuries or loss of life as a result.  More people depend on the Internet and Social Media platforms as their primary sources of information.  It only makes sense

that agencies like the American Red Cross saw the value of a Digital Command Center and partnered with Dell Computers to make this concept come alive.

The American Red Cross is now capitalizing on the power of a Social Media Command Center for its emergency and disaster response operations. The following American Red Cross Video describes and depicts operational enhancements the Red Cross has made as a result of its Digital Operations Command Center.  According to Gail McGovern, Chief Executive Officer of the American Red Cross, a Digital Operations Command Center provides "critical information to those on the ground and who need our help the most". The Red Cross Model is one that that could easily be replicated and modified to meet the needs of other organizations charged with crisis and emergency prevention, intervention, and response.  As Michael Dell explained, the Red Cross Center "will hopefully be a blueprint" as command centers continued to evolve.

Contributing factors that make Social Media Command Centers attractive include their ability to capture and curate massive amounts of information and distribute it to those who need it most. Command Centers make sense from a cost-benefit analysis. The increased chance of preventing loss of life is well worth an investment of a few large LCD screens, a portable generator, current software, computers, and well-trained staff.  Command Centers create the capacity to make sharing information between and among first responders more seamless.

Command Centers also have the ability to share video and imagery, which is important because the Internet is becoming more visual.  There is an increased reliance on infographics, digital imagery, and video.

As someone who can speak from personal experience, during crisis and emergency situations there is nothing more valuable to a first responder or concerned family member than accurate,

coherent, and organized information stream that can be accessed as quickly as possible.  In fact, there is nothing more valuable than information during a crisis or emergency.  I can safely say that from and organizational standpoint, investing in Social Media Command Centers is a wise investment.

References

1.  American Red Cross Digital Operations Center Opens, YouTube, March 8, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKMyBGbnBQ8

2.  How the UN Used Social Media in Response to Typhoon Pablo, iRevolution, December 8, 2012. Retrieved from http://irevolution.net/2012/12/08/digital-response-typhoon-pablo/

3.  Maclean, Heather-Anne, The Power of the Salesforce Social Media Command Center at CES, Marketing Cloud, January8, 2013. Retrieved from http://blogs.salesforce.com/company/2013/01/insights-behind-the-salesforce-marketing-cloud-social-media-command-center-at-ces.html

4.  marketingcloud@salesforce.com, Salesforce,  10 Examples of Social Media Command Centers: Retrieved from http://www.salesforcemarketingcloud.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/10-Examples-of-Social-Media-Command-Centers.pdf?1763e5

5.  Pictured: The high-achieving senior who shot female student, 15, and killed himself after taking Molotov cocktails and shotgun to school 'to take revenge on debate coach who demoted him'.  Retrieved from: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2523414/Gunman-Karl-Pierson-shoots-injures-2-Colorado-Arapahoe-high-school.html

6. Timely Crime Data that is Easy to Interpret Leads to Better Law Enforcement Decisions July 17, 2013. Retrieved from: http://www.publicengines.com/blog/tag/crime-mapping

7. Technology aids public safety workers, MASC Uptown, Municipal Association of South Carolina. Retrieved from:

http://www.masc.sc/newsroom/uptown/September2011/Pages/Technology-aids-public-safety-workers.aspx