

Free white paper available for download from  
Interactive Springboard:  
[www.interactivspringboard.com/downloads/IS-White-Paper.pdf](http://www.interactivspringboard.com/downloads/IS-White-Paper.pdf)

View Interactive Springboard's crisis discussion video:  
[www.interactivspringboard.com/vid/crisis-communications.flv](http://www.interactivspringboard.com/vid/crisis-communications.flv)



For Immediate Release  
Oct. 6, 2010

For more information contact:  
Amy Schwinge, 865/982-6626 or amy@marybethwest.com  
Tyra Haag, 865/982-6626 or tyra@marybethwest.com

## Social Media a Vital Tool in Crisis Planning

### *Interactive Springboard Provides Solutions to Integrate Social Media in Crisis Preparedness and Communications Plans*

**Knoxville, Tenn.** — According to a recent survey of Tennessee professional communicators, 77 percent say it is “very true” that social media is an integral part of crisis communications planning, but those same professionals say a large gap exists between social media’s importance and how well their own organizations are using it for crisis communications.

Interactive Springboard – a joint venture between Tennessee-based Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC and Blue Media Boutique, LLC – conducted the study of social media attitudes and utilization by Tennessee members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), with research provided by Bryant Research.

The survey reflected wide gaps between the important role professional communicators think social media plays in a variety of ways and how well organizations are actually using social media – from product testing to employee training and comment monitoring.

However, no greater gap existed in importance versus actual usage than of social media in crisis communications. Crisis communications plans are critical for companies and organizations to have in place to manage emergencies such as natural disasters, facility or site-based accidents, product failures or recalls, and sabotage and terrorist attacks, to name just some of the situations that can arise.

“We found survey respondents indicated a high degree of general uncertainty about many aspects of social media – how to use it in relation to traditional media, how to measure ROI, and whether government regulations are a consideration, for example,” said Mary Beth West, a public relations agency consultant.

“But among all the hot issues in how to apply social media effectively, crisis communications proved to be the biggest stand-out,” West said. “In short, Tennessee communicators know social media in crisis planning is very important, but they may not have all the experience, tools or resources at hand to apply it effectively.”

Interactive Springboard recommends three steps organizations should take to apply social media in their crisis planning: **research, integrate and update.**

The research step involves taking an assessment of all the ways social media can provide faster, more effective lines of communication in a crisis scenario – from alerting team members internally about steps needed to contain a crisis to broadcasting updates to outside audiences like media or community members about necessary safety precautions.

“You have to involve all members of your management team – from the CEO to marketing and communications, technology, human resources and operations,” said Tori Rose of interactive firm Blue Media Boutique, LLC. “Gathering the team’s collective input and understanding about social media’s potential role is a major part of the research process, just as it’s important to understand key audiences, their concerns in the crisis and how social media can help them.”

The next step – integration – involves applying social media tools throughout every logical piece of the crisis response plan and making sure the full potential of social media is used both to contain the crisis itself and to keep all impacted audiences informed to safeguard lives and property.

For example, developing an action plan to engage a Twitter feed to broadcast situational updates can be a key part of keeping employees and family members, communities and media reporters in-the-know and to prevent the spread of rumor and false reports. Accurate, timely information flow is also a critical factor in preserving as much of the organization’s reputational equity as possible during the crisis and in its aftermath.

The third step – update – is an essential, ongoing process of making sure that the organization keeps the most up-to-date communications technology involved as part of its crisis plan, particularly as social media tools and applications continue to evolve so quickly.

“We recommend organizations revisit their crisis plan at least every six months for the express purpose of making sure the selected social media tools and applications for its plan are still as relevant as possible,” Rose said.

“This review process also helps keep the other pieces of the plan – general procedures and action steps, chain of command and all of the who’s-doing-what – fresh and top-of-mind,” West said. “The last thing you want in a crisis situation is a plan that nobody has really even looked at in several years.”

The public can access a free downloadable white paper on the Interactive Springboard study of Tennessee communicators at [www.interactivespringboard.com](http://www.interactivespringboard.com).

# # #

#### **About the Survey Methodology**

This census survey of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members from across the state of Tennessee was conducted online from June 16 to Aug. 6, 2010. Members from the following chapters participated in the study: Nashville, Knoxville/Volunteer, Chattanooga/Lookout, Memphis and the Tri-Cities. In addition to the core questions highlighted in this release, each chapter had the option of appending proprietary questions of specific interest to the local membership. The survey achieved an overall response rate of 24 percent and provides unique insight into the opinions of those whose day-to-day responsibilities include managing all manner of media, including social media.

#### **About Interactive Springboard**

Interactive Springboard is a joint venture between women-owned firms Blue Media Boutique, LLC and Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC, providing an integrated, research-based approach to social media, supporting client communications and business objectives. [www.interactivespringboard.com](http://www.interactivespringboard.com)

#### **About Blue Media Boutique, LLC**

Based in Knoxville, Tenn., Blue Media Boutique provides creative, technology and marketing services, including design, development, animation, video, illustration, branding, print, e-commerce, database, CMS, search optimization, copywriting, promotions, events and campaigns. [www.bluemediaboutique.com](http://www.bluemediaboutique.com)

#### **About Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC**

Based in Maryville, Tenn., Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC advances clients’ communications, relationships and reputations to meet business and organizational objectives. The firm’s services include research strategy, integrated marketing communications campaigns; media, community and employee relations programs; interactive media strategy and program management; crisis preparedness; and special events. [www.marybethwest.com](http://www.marybethwest.com)

#### **About Bryant Research**

Based in Knoxville, Tenn., Bryant Research managed the Interactive Springboard study. The company provides custom, proprietary research to clients across a number of industries. Bryant Research has produced award-winning market research counsel, employing a custom blend of quantitative and qualitative methods to inform clients’ marketing communications programs and to facilitate the best business decisions. [www.bryant-research.com](http://www.bryant-research.com)