

# Survive social media crises with the Cerebra handbook

 By Leigh Andrews

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Social media managers have it tough. In the space of a few seconds, things can go haywire. Tweeting from the wrong business account, or not responding fast enough to complaints on Facebook before they spread far and wide can doom your business brand. Luckily help is at hand with Cerebra's *Social Media Crisis Handbook*.



Mike Oelschig

Earlier this month, Cerebra launched its [The Social Media Crisis Handbook](#) based on research into SA businesses' ability to respond to a social media crisis. Cerebra's head of advisory and insights Mike Oelschig shares that Cerebra is renowned for being at the forefront of social business thinking, and takes 'walking the talk' very seriously in terms of sharing information. Crisis communications seemed the obvious choice for their next published piece as it's highly topical, with a new business in trouble for something every week, as well as a shocking lack of practical tools and information out there to help business navigate the space. They wanted to fill that gap. But it's not just for those that focus on managing social media for others.

Craig Rodney, managing director at Cerebra, explains that the handbook is aimed at "organisations that have any kind of online presence and is based upon the understanding that it is no longer a question of if you will experience a social media

crisis, it's a case of when."

Here Oelschig, who co-wrote the book with Rodney, sets the context for doing business in the social media space and what to do when things don't go to plan...

## 1. What does it mean to be a 'social business' in today's super-connected world?

**Oelschig:** I could talk for days about this question, but I'll do my best to be succinct. No one can deny that social media has had a profoundly disruptive effect on the relationship between businesses and their customers. The world customers now live in, as a result of social media – a world of connection, sharing, collaboration and open and authentic conversations across all pre-existing barriers – is fundamentally disparate from the way industrial-age businesses have been run for hundreds of years. Organisations cannot carry on living an industrial-age existence in an information-age reality.

“ An incredible 69% of companies have absolutely no social [#CrisisComms](#) plan. It's time you got one:

<https://t.co/0M0zXTGKY9> [pic.twitter.com/249yu4PN0C](https://t.co/0M0zXTGKY9)— cerebra (@cerebra) November 10, 2016 ”

Being a social business means embracing this new world. It means creating an organisation that is optimised to the benefit of all its stakeholders, from customers to employees, owners and partners, by breaking down physical and metaphorical silos and instilling a culture of collaboration, information-sharing and openness.

## 2. Tell us more about the recent 'Social Media Crisis Edition' 27dinner and why it's worrying that 71% of organisations have never audited their social media risk.

**Oelschig:** This edition of the 27dinner revolved primarily around the launch of Cerebra's newest editorial release, *The Social Media Crisis Handbook*. As part of the release, we surveyed 100 businesses in South Africa around this issue of crisis communication and the results were eye-opening to say the least - specifically to the stat you raised, which was probably the most worrying outtake. Every single one of the businesses we surveyed has a social media presence, yet over

two-thirds have never audited their risk. It's actually astounding. No business on the planet is immune to something going wrong at some point and social media shines a giant spotlight on those shortcomings. The fact that so many businesses haven't given themselves foresight on what could potentially go wrong is baffling. I think the issue is that many businesses have an "it won't happen to me" attitude. Until it does and they're left scrambling!

### 3. How does a communication crisis on social media differ from one that takes place off-screen?

**Oelschig:** Traditionally in a crisis type situation a business only had to take a "PR approach". They released a statement or two and engaged with key media people to get their message out there. They had time and space to manoeuvre on their side. Now, a business also has to engage with their customers one-on-one, in real time. And those customers can be in the hundreds of thousands, all throwing shade at you at the same time and all expecting a reply in rapid time. So the big difference is the sheer scope and speed of the required communication.

### 4. Scary. Share a few ways companies can better prepare for that inevitable social media crisis.

**Oelschig:** In the handbook we break down preparing for a crisis into a few key sections. Without going into too much detail, this involves firstly auditing where you are vulnerable. Identify where things could potentially go wrong from a business perspective, a marketing perspective and an 'employee saying something reckless' perspective and how you'd react to each. Secondly, having the right tools and resources in place to identify very early on when a potential crisis is brewing. Then having a triage system based on levels of risk and associated communication strategies in place to very quickly identify what level of crisis you're dealing with and who's responsible for driving the response. And finally, having reporting processes, templates and structures already in place so that in the midst of a crisis you can keep the relevant people informed at all stages. The idea is to get as close to a "paint-by-numbers" system as possible. You don't want to be thinking about any of this during a crisis, trust me!

### 5. When the worst happens, how can a business recover from a social media crisis?

**Oelschig:** In the book we refer to "closing the loop". Basically, you need to ensure that all the lessons learnt have been incorporated back into the business so that the same thing doesn't happen again. And more importantly, people need to see you do this. Apologies only go so far, making actual material and meaningful changes to your business practices is really the only thing that will get people back on your side.

Team Cerebra expands on all this and more in the handbook. [Click here](#) to purchase the handbook, [here](#) to download the crisis management survey results and other eBooks from Cerebra, and be sure to follow them [on Twitter](#) to stay up-to-date.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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