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**Abstract:**

WVU Integrated Marketing Communications instructor Karen Freberg examines ways that the new Google+ platform may be helpful to crisis communication professionals.

**Is Crisis+ the Future?: Implementing Google+ in Crisis Communications (Benefits & Challenges)**

It seems like the entire world (or social media world at that) is discussing the new launch of Google+, which is the social networking site that is the answer to Facebook. Some say that it is going to be the site that will transform how we search for information and how it truly encompasses the social life as we know it, but there are others that still say that there are some issues with the site that need to be explored further in development.

Of course, PR professionals are actively discussing how Google+ can be used in traditional PR and marketing roles. However, the question that comes to mind with this new platform are the benefits and challenges for those practicing in crisis communications. After reviewing the site as well as several articles, here are a few things that I have seen that Google+ can be helpful for crisis communication professionals:

**Monitoring discussions to detect early warning signs:** Understanding what is being said through the friends and followers in the various circles would be necessary to look at to see if there are any issues or concerns that could manifest into potential crises for both individuals and companies (even though companies do not have the power to have a presence on Google+ yet).

**Crowdsourcing ideas, suggestions, and strategies in real-time chat (video):** What a great way to get others together in the circles involved in the company or crisis communication team to discuss and brainstorm ideas on how to handle a crisis or potential issue all at once. Designing a hangout (term from Google+) where you can schedule regular chat sessions in real-time and face-to-face.

**Establishing individual presence online and engaging in conversations with circles during, before, and after a crisis hits:** In order to create transparency and trustworthiness, consistent interaction through networking with friends in these various circles is good. The more interaction you can create, the better.

**Centralized source of social search and transformation of news information:** A one-stop shop to see what others in your circles are saying before, during and after a crisis. Gauging the main perceptions and attitudes emerging during a crisis would be key to understanding and formulating effective and strategic key messages to manage the crisis.

There are some things that should be looked into further, especially when formulating this new platform for crisis communication professionals:

**Integrate crowdsourcing and mapping capabilities:** While social networking is great, it would be useful for the circles to have more of a visual component. Mapping capabilities in real-time would be interesting and useful in sharing with others in a crisis situation.

**Addressing new technologies and formats with changing expectations:** Facebook and Twitter have been both used in various ways in crisis situations – from engaging and answering questions during a crisis or sharing visual updates (TwitPic or YouTube links to video) through Twitter – but what will Google+ do that is unique and helpful for crisis communication professionals?

**Establish platform like Hootsuite to manage multiple platforms:** One of the challenges for crisis communication professionals is how to manage multiple accounts and profiles not only in normal circumstances, but more so during a crisis standpoint. If there was a platform where individuals were able to update not only their information in these Circles, but if they were able to share this information across to other profiles and platforms, that might be useful.

**Challenge for business and agency pages:** While businesses and agencies are not able to have a Google+ account yet, there are some challenges ahead of them and how they would have to address some of these compared to their Facebook pages.

**Google+ Guides and Handbooks:** Both Facebook and Twitter have guidebooks and best practices to how to use the site, but I have not seen one yet for how to implement and use Google+ in various capacities. It would be very useful to develop best practices or a guidebook for crisis communicators using Google+. Training and education will be needed to better understand this new platform and what would be the challenges and benefits in using this platform compared to others in traditional crisis communication practices.

In summary, Google+ is still at the early stages in its implementation and testing – it will continue to evolve as more individuals are joining and businesses (and government agencies) join on board. There are many challenges and opportunities with emerging technologies for crisis communications professionals, and it is important to make sure that we are aware of both and have a balanced perspective.