

Why Pausing the Pizza Post Might Be the Most Important Decision in a Lockdown

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In a crisis, the difference between order and chaos often comes down to a single, unglamorous truth: people crave reliable information more than they realize. College crisis communications plans aren't about the glossy, proactive storytelling that fills campus brochures and social feeds. They're raw, reactive, and built for speed, yet they must feel thoughtful and deeply compassionate, because fear has a way of turning facts into fuel for panic. The public information officer is the person who will be the voice of the college during a crisis. They craft timely warnings, pre-written templates for the most probable threats, such as severe weather, data breaches, and active shooter situations, with their stark "run, hide, fight" guidance. Without a plan, those first chaotic minutes become a vacuum that fills itself with rumor and misinformation.

The best practice is brutally simple: **become the primary source of truth before anyone else can spin a narrative.** When wildfires raged near Pepperdine University, repetitive updates with little information left room for social media to invent its own version of events. Contrast that with Carleton College during flooding, where administrators shared live photos, drone footage, and sandbagging efforts that framed the ordeal as a shared community effort; news outlets simply amplified the college's own clear, human messages. Some institutions, like Blackhawk College, build in rhythmic emergency alerts followed by structured updates at 15 and 30 minutes to stay relevant and calm the information hunger. Collaboration helps too: aligning language with law enforcement so their posts can be echoed or amplified without contradiction.

Common missteps compound the damage. Marketing schedules don't pause themselves; an ill-timed post about pizza or alumni events landing amid a lockdown can feel tone-deaf or worse. Monitoring social channels becomes essential, as does resisting the urge to flood every platform with unvetted details. Instead, thoughtful plans funnel information through controlled channels.

One powerful tool is a "sleeping site," a dedicated emergency webpage that activates during incidents, taking over the homepage and directing worried families and community members to accurate, centralized updates. It prevents the frantic digging for random phone numbers, instructor contacts, or dean offices that inevitably follows when information feels scarce. In larger events, partnering with services like Empathia can help manage the surge, but even smaller crises benefit from this single funnel. It reduces the spillage of misinformation and gives people something concrete to hold onto. All college communication should have the same updated messaging, such as their [Family and Campus Community Assistance Center](#), where support, resources, and answers converge in one compassionate place.

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Ultimately, crisis communication isn't about looking polished under pressure. It's about respecting the human need for clarity when the ground shifts. Colleges that prepare templates, rehearse scenarios, and prioritize steady, empathetic flow don't just comply with rules; they protect trust, reduce unnecessary fear, and help their communities endure what comes next. The plan may never win design awards, but in the moment that matters, it can save far more than appearances.

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