Crisis Communications on the Web

Successes, challenges, lessons learned and tips from the Sept. 28, 2010 campus shooting

Nyleva Corley
Web Manager
University Communications

Chris Latham
Web Designer
University Operations
Follow along

www.utexas.edu/safety/webcrisis
#webcrisis
@nyleva   @lathamdesign
The crisis

- Tuesday, Sept. 28, shortly after 8 a.m.
- Reports of an armed subject made to 911
- A shooter was confirmed, and the campus went into lockdown
The crisis

- Colton Tooley, a 19-year-old math sophomore, brought an AK-47 to campus.

- He randomly fired shots into the ground and then ran into the Perry-Castañeda Library, where he turned his gun on himself.

- No one else on campus was physically harmed.
Timeline

See www.utexas.edu/safety/webcrisis/timeline

8:12 a.m.  First report of shooter (911 call)
8:19 a.m.  Text alert issued:
            armed subject reported last seen at (PERRY CASTANEDA LIBRARY on 09282010 details to follow)
8:20 a.m.  PIO takes press calls en route (in car)
8:22-8:25 a.m.  Sixth floor PCL swept, Colton Tooley’s body is found, law enforcement begin effort to rule out reports/descriptions of others
8:25 a.m.  Campus siren sounded (siren and loudspeaker announcements went every 10 minutes)
8:30 a.m. Social media post:

Armed subject reported: last seen at Perry Castaneda Library (PCL). More to follow.

8:35 a.m. Press briefing on scene

8:37 a.m. Campus-wide e-mail from VP for University Operations, who oversees UTPD:

Armed subject last seen at Perry Castaneda Library and UTC. Shelter in place. UTPD responding.

Emergency Web page posting:

Armed subject reported: last seen at Perry Castaneda Library (PCL). More to follow.
8:41 a.m. Second text alert issued:

armed subject reported last seen at PERRY CASTENEDA LIBRARY SHELTER IN PLACE STAY WHERE YOU ARE AT MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW

Social media alert:

Shots fired, UTPD responding. Stay in place.

More at www.utexas.edu/safety/webcrisis/timeline
The crisis

A community of about 80,000 people needed information during this emergency. And they needed it fast.

So did the world beyond the Forty Acres.
Before a crisis: Plans

Our Experience

- Emergency management plan already in place.
- As a team, we’d communicated about previous crises.
- Imagine what can go wrong: Message templates for every scenario.
- Education materials for the community.
Before a crisis: Plans

- Siren and loudspeaker system (Dispatch controls)
- Text messaging (Dispatch controls)
- E-mail
- University’s Web presence
- Emergency Information Web site
- Social media
- Public media
- Office telephones
- 1-800 phone line
- Cable TVs/flat screens
- Pagers
- AtHoc (desktop alerts)
- Public safety patrol car announcements
Questions for You

- What does an emergency management plan look like for your organization?
- What is your communications command chain?
- Do you have a public information officer available 24/7?
- Has your organization conducted active shooter training?
Before a crisis: People

**Our Experience**

- We had roles in place.
- And we were empowered by our supervisors to act.
- But there was still confusion on Sept. 28 about who would handle what.
Before a crisis: People

**Lessons Learned**

- Share credentials.
- Have redundancies.
- Divide and conquer.
- Practice, practice, practice ... and for all possible times.
Questions for You

- Do your PR, PIO, communicators, responders and Web/social media teams know each other?
- Do you use backup remote servers or services?
Before a crisis:
The home page

Our Experience

- No “lite mode” for the home page (minimal Web presence) was in place.
Before a crisis: The home page

**Lessons Learned**

- Align our Emergency Information Web site with home page.
- Dynamically trigger home page alerts and a switch to a minimal home page.
- Publish crafted messages on the home page, such as from the president, separately from emergency updates.
Questions for You

- What does a “lite mode” or minimal home page presence look like for your organization?

- What and who activates the switch?
During a crisis: Channels

Our Experience

- Social media combo of Twitter and Facebook.
- Accounts follow/like each other and others on campus.
- TweetDeck, HootSuite or a similar tool can help.
- Set up mobile versions at work and home.
During a crisis: Channels

**Lessons Learned**

- Enabling Facebook comments can be risky during a crisis.
- Use Facebook as a one-way channel, and alert community to that.
- Name a dedicated team member to monitor and respond to comments on social channels.
Questions for You

- Do you use social media platforms for emergency communications?
- If so, what are the procedures and policies around that? Who manages the channels?
- If not, why?
- Would you leave comments open?
During a crisis: (Lots of) things happen

Our Experience

- 911/call centers got overburdened; Police Department had to resort to mobile phones.
- Cell phones died.
- Server load shot through the roof.
- Crappy hash tag.
During a crisis: (Lots of) things happen

**Our Experience**

- Mass confusion
- SWAT team, mass law enforcement (multiple agencies)
- News media
- Some language/terms didn’t resonate: “lockdown,” “shelter in place” and “suspect”
Questions for You

- Have you had to interact closely with outside agencies/responders?

- Educate your community with safety terms, and don’t rely on specific terms, such as “shelter in place” versus a more common phrase “stay inside, lock doors.”
**EMERGENCY TERMS**

**EMERGENCY TERMS**

The directive “Lockdown” is used to protect occupants in proximity of an immediate threat by limiting access to buildings and rooms. If no specific locations are given, all buildings should initiate lockdown procedures.

If you discover that there is a violent or potentially violent person in your building or area, DO NOT CONFRONT THE PERSON UNLESS THERE IS NO OTHER OPTION TO SAVE YOUR LIFE.

If you are outside a building in lockdown:

1. DO NOT ENTER THE BUILDING. Move as far away as possible from the building under lockdown.
2. Await further instructions from law enforcement.
3. Check the university’s website and university social media sites for updates and further information as it becomes available.
4. DO NOT CALL THE LOCATION THAT IS IN LOCKDOWN. Phone calls to anyone inside the building that is in lockdown may endanger them.
5. DO NOT LEAVE YOUR SAFE AREA until law enforcement has opened the door.

**OUTDOOR WARNING SYSTEM SIREN**

One of the ways campus will be notified of an emergency is the Outdoor Warning System (Siren). If you hear the siren at a time other than the scheduled monthly test (11:50 a.m. on the first Wednesday of each month), you should immediately seek cover in the closest building or facility and await further instructions through other communication systems. The siren is NOT used to signal all clear.

If the threat is outside your building:

1. If the exterior doors are not electronic and it is safe to reach them, lock them.
2. If safe, leave a person at the door to let others (non-threatening) coming from outside into the building.
3. Close interior doors. Lock doors, if possible. Barricade the doors.
4. Follow Step 4 for “HIDE Out” listed below.
5. Follow Step 2 for “CALL Out” listed below.

If the threat is inside your building:

Follow the 5 OUTS
1. GET Out
   Get OUT OF THE FACILITY if possible.
2. CALL Out
   Use mobile devices to call emergency personnel at 911 or 471-4441 and provide relevant information. High mobile phone volume may interfere with emergency communications and should be limited to contact with emergency personnel only.
3. KEEP Out
   Do not lock exterior doors. Close, lock, and barricade interior doors, if possible.
4. HIDE Out
   Seek shelter in the nearest secured place, i.e. classroom or office. Turn off lights and any devices that may indicate that the room is occupied. If you are on the first floor, close any window blinds or curtains. Stay away from doors and try to keep out of the line of sight. Sit or lie on the floor or crouch behind or under desks. BE QUIET. Do not respond to anyone at the door.
5. TAKE Out
   Last resort. Use anything to distract or disable the suspect.

**REMEMBER**

Shelter in Place:

1. Get Low
   Go to the lowest level of the building, if possible.
2. Avoid Windows
   Stay away from the windows.
3. Go to Interior
   Go to interior rooms and hallways.
4. Protect Yourself
   Use arms to protect head and neck in a “drop and tuck” position.
5. Keep in the Know
   Monitor emergency communications for specific instructions: www.utexas.edu/emergency

**FOR VIOLENT THREAT IN YOUR BUILDING**

Follow the 5 OUTS for Lockdown:
1. GET Out
   Get out of the facility, if possible.
2. CALL Out
   Use mobile phone to call 911 or 471-4441.
3. KEEP Out
   Do not lock exterior doors. Close, lock, and barricade interior doors, if possible.
4. HIDE Out
   Seek shelter in nearest secured place. Turn off lights and any devices indicating that the room is occupied. Keep out of the line of sight. BE QUIET. Do not respond to anyone at the door.
5. TAKE Out
   Last resort. Use anything to distract or disable the suspect.

**AND STAY ALIVE**

FOR BAD WEATHER

If you are outside a building in lockdown:

1. DO NOT ENTER THE BUILDING. Move as far away as possible from the building under lockdown.
2. Await further instructions from law enforcement.
3. Check the university’s website and university social media sites for updates and further information as it becomes available.
4. DO NOT CALL THE LOCATION THAT IS IN LOCKDOWN. Phone calls to anyone inside the building that is in lockdown may endanger them.
5. DO NOT LEAVE YOUR SAFE AREA until law enforcement has opened the door.

**FOR BAD WEATHER**

Shelter in Place:

1. GET Out
   Get out of the facility, if possible.
2. CALL Out
   Use mobile phone to call 911 or 471-4441.
3. KEEP Out
   Do not lock exterior doors. Close, lock, and barricade interior doors, if possible.
4. HIDE Out
   Seek shelter in nearest secured place. Turn off lights and any devices indicating that the room is occupied. Keep out of the line of sight. BE QUIET. Do not respond to anyone at the door.
5. TAKE Out
   Last resort. Use anything to distract or disable the suspect.

**AND STAY ALIVE**

FOR BAD WEATHER
During a crisis: Where’s the (info) beef?

Our Experience

- An information black hole.
- Were we updating the community enough?
- Officials still figuring out what was going on.
- Sound vacuums in areas of campus when listening to the loudspeaker system for updates.
During a crisis: Where’s the (info) beef?

Lessons Learned

- Update regularly. Let people know that there isn’t a status change, every 15–20 minutes.
- Friends and families are worried and need reassurance.
- You may have to rely on news media reports.
- Students, parents and others will post their versions of what’s happening on social media channels.
During a crisis:
Ask and receive

Our Experience
There will be Freedom of Information requests.

Lessons Learned
Start documenting feeds and Web and social media communications immediately.
After a crisis: The long term

Our Experience
The Sept. 28 event was only a single day incident for us, and there weren’t fatalities beyond the shooter.

Lessons Learned
- What if it didn’t go as well?
- Plan for an extended campus closure; rotate shifts, and don’t get burned out.
After a crisis: The long term

**Lessons Learned**

If needed, plan ahead for

- vigil and memorial communications

- ongoing messages:
  - grief and mental health counseling
  - staff resources (leave time, etc.)
  - faculty/student services (missed classes, etc.)
After a crisis: Debrief

Our Experience

- We debriefed several times.
- We created a transcript, a log of events and a timeline.

Lessons Learned

- Document what happened and debrief, a few times.
- Make sure debriefing involves all your information technology, Web and social media staff.
- Make fixes and improvements. Share experiences and learn how other departments reacted.
After a crisis: Just tired

Our Experience
We were exhausted, emotionally and physically.

Lessons Learned
Fatigue is natural. Take time to decompress.
## Stats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>9/27</th>
<th>9/28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UT home page (unique)</td>
<td>114,448</td>
<td>267,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency page (unique)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>166,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Austin Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td>+1,000 new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@UTAustin</td>
<td></td>
<td>+600 new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTPD Facebook</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>9,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be Safe, Texas Facebook</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@besafetexas</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>635</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"From my kid who is a UT alumni and works at the Blanton, he was totally impressed with the warnings that were put out to include, sirens, and blocking off the campus. He called us right away to let us know he was okay. From a parent standpoint, thank you for prompt response to a tragic affair."

"I echo the sentiments of other parents of UT students in saying a big Thank You to the University staff and UT police and other law enforcement for their swift action and especially for keeping everyone informed. My daughter was in Gregory at the time. We’re all rattled but OK."
Feedback

Know: Emergency Alert page
54,020 pageviews, 44,579 unique

85 comments (including gun debate and thank yous)

“I am truly grateful to the University management and staff for their excellent emergency communications and procedures; and to both the UTPD and APD for their courageous and professional management of today’s situation. Again I am grateful to you all.”
"I am a graduate student at UT. The University runs practice sirens every month so we know what they are when they go off during an event like today. They also sent texts messages and email alerts that instructed us what to do. Myself, I was on the bus into campus and it turned around and wouldn’t let us off anywhere near UT. You will never be able to prevent this from happening 100%, but as a student I feel that the University and law enforcement took every reasonable action to keep me safe and most importantly kept me informed so I could keep myself safe."
Thank you.

Nyleva  
nacorley@mail.utexas.edu  
@nyleva

Chris  
chris.latham@austin.utexas.edu  
@lathamdesign

#webcrisis