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Alyssa Moyer

Binghamton University--SUNY, amoyer1@binghamton.edu

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IMPLEMENTING A SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT PLAN AT THE ONONDAGA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Alyssa Moyer, Binghamton University, College of Community and Public Affairs

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BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

State University of New York

Core Capstone Question: How can the Onondaga County Department of Emergency Management (OCDEM) better educate and prepare the public for emergency situations?



Several conversations with the OCDEM's Commissioner, Emergency Planner, and the County's Public Information Officer (PIO) led to the conclusion that the OCDEM needed a stronger social media presence and the best way to do this was to help the Onondaga County residents become more knowledgeable and prepared in the event of an emergency or disaster. The National Seasonal Preparedness Messaging Calendar is an excellent means to educate the public on how to best be prepared for emergencies. The ready.gov "Ready" Campaign is a national public service advertising (PSA) campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to provide Americans with information in regards to numerous common emergencies and hazards, and strategies to prepare and educate the public on these topics. The calendar follows the twelve-month cycle of the year with different topics that pertain to that specific season. Essentially, the goal of the campaign is to "get the public involved and ultimately to increase the level of basic preparedness across the nation" (Ready.gov, 2016). The creation of a social media engagement plan that follows the National Seasonal Preparedness Messaging Calendar provides the most useful preparedness information in educating Onondaga County residents.

Why target the citizens of Onondaga County?

Educating the public, as well as motivating a population who are largely underprepared for an emergency are huge issues that lie within updating the County Human Needs plans. The issue lies in finding out how to reach the public on sheltering/food/general information when it is a low priority. It is a low priority because incidents are few and far between in Onondaga County; thus, reaching out to the public and motivating them to better prepare themselves for an emergency becomes a difficult task. The use of a social media engagement plan will aid in educating the public to be appropriately responsive in the event of an emergency. Providing articles, informational images, and safety tips on an easy to use, accessible platform should increase the traffic on the OCDEM social media accounts and in return, create a more engaged, knowledgeable community.

Why use social media as a tool of engagement?

Social media has become increasingly popular and is used by millions worldwide. Social media is a tool that allows one to engage with others through the use of posts that may include text or pictures. Sharing information with others has never been easier and has become an increasingly useful tool in the field of Emergency Management. By "providing community members with tools to engage in crisis preparedness, response, and recovery, social media may have a role to play in building community resilience- a measure of a community's ability to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations" (Hughes et. al, 2014, p.350). Residents of Onondaga County do not experience many emergencies or disasters. Thus, they tend to lack the knowledge and willingness to be prepared for such events. However, it is still extremely important to have the proper knowledge on what is happening in your area and how to best respond to any event that may occur. Because social media is already so popular and used by the majority of the population, this would be the best method in reaching and engaging Onondaga County residents. Essentially, "social media tools allow emergency managers to disseminate information to wider audiences, interact with the public, monitor social media networks to get a better sense of what's happening on the ground during a crisis, get better situational awareness, and improve collaboration for sharing information during an emergency and sharing of best practices and lessons learned" (Yasin, 2010, p.1). Using social media as a means of connecting with the residents would be the best method for OCDEM to share information. Ultimately, the increased use and presence on social media will allow OCDEM to better understand the "big picture" and to make better, more informed decisions.

Benchmarking Engagement

The use of a social media plan will allow them to better engage with their residents, provide useful information all year round, and help to build community disaster resilience to any weather or disaster-related events in the future. However, upon the implementation of a social media plan, the OCDEM must benchmark their progress to assess the success of the plan.

Indicators of Engagement:

The metrics used in the implementation of the social media engagement plan on the OCDEM social media accounts are as follows:

- 1 NUMBER OF LIKES
- 2 NUMBER OF SHARES
- 3 NUMBER OF COMMENTS
- 4 NUMBER OF PEOPLE REACHED

Currently, the Public Information Officer for the OCDEM posts to Facebook and Twitter approximately once every three days; according to FEMA (2016), when using social media, you should try to post daily to show you are active. Thus, the Public Information Officer should be posting three times more than the current amount of posting with the implementation of the social media plan. Therefore, if there will be three times the amount of information or posts posted to the accounts, there should be three times the amount of likes and number of people reached. After discussing benchmarking with the County Public Information Officer and where he would like to see the social media accounts progress after a year, the OCDEM social media accounts should have approximately 5,193 total page likes, 3,972 people reached per post, and roughly 24 likes per post, all of which are triple the amount of the current OCDEM analytics. Facebook Insights and Tweet Deck will provide the information necessary to track progress and convey whether these targets are being met by November 2017.

Purpose:

Motivate the Onondaga County residents to be appropriately responsive to emergency situations; equip them with the knowledge and tools to be self-sufficient and situationally aware.

Proposed Outcomes:

- Increased traffic on the OCDEM social media accounts
- Create a more educated and engaged community
- Facebook and Twitter accounts that provide useful citizen preparedness information following the National Seasonal Preparedness Messaging Calendar
- A platform for Onondaga County residents to build their relationships with one another and the OCDEM