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The Use of Social Media for Disaster Recovery

Lessons learned while creating and managing "Joplin Tornado Info" (2011) on Facebook and further implemented with "Branson Tornado Info" (2012), Missouri Flood Info (2011-2012) and others.

JOPLIN TORNADO.INFO

No One is a Stranger

www.facebook.com/JoplinTornadoInfo

Missouri Flood Info

www.facebook.com/ MissouriFloodInfo

Branson Tornado Info

www.facebook.com/ MissouriFloodInfo

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Genevieve Williams is a Social Media and Web Marketing Strategist, and has worked in Marketing and Advertising for the past 7 years. She is the creator and Project Manager of Joplin Tornado Info, a Mashable Award Finalist and Google Adwords Certified Professional. Genevieve is the founder and owner of Your Net Working, a marketing agency based in Neosho Missouri. Genevieve studied Alternative Energy at Crowder College and participated in three DOE Solar Decathlons.

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The Use of Social Media for Disaster Recovery

INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, do not even attempt to set up a disaster recovery site unless you are fully prepared to devote yourself 24/7 to the effort.

Secondly, do not undertake this project unless you have reliable help. Social Media in a major disaster should not be taken on by a single individual. It is not a 9 to 5, Monday thru Friday task because these sites do not manage themselves. Collectively, the five person core team for Joplin Tornado Info was experienced in professional social media management, marketing, PR, crisis intervention, IT, journalism, copywriting, construction, logistics, nursing, and meteorology. *No one person could have covered all of this effectively*. As soon as it was possible, administrators from utility companies, city officials, and other official groups were added. Social media for disaster recovery requires many hands, with one or two dedicated "supervisors" of the Facebook page. Do not undertake a project of this scope unless you are certain you can follow through as long as it takes. Chances are, you will be signing on to do this for several months. It is impossible to know at the beginning of a disaster, the scope of the situation.

First and foremost, do not even attempt to set up a disaster recovery site unless you are fully prepared to devote yourself 24/7 to the effort.

If you don't have what you need to run a site, **DON'T START ONE**. JTI was created on an iPhone and largely run using an HP mini. Do not ask your community for your supplies. If you need something you don't have to function, tap a volunteer that has the needed equipment and move on. Avoid cluttering the disaster relief effort with you own needs.

Our administrators were entirely volunteer. *Self-promotion was strictly prohibited. We endorsed no specific church, charity, organization or entity.* We encouraged JTI community members to "give of your time, talents, energy, and monetary donations to the group of your choice".

Our mission was to be a clearing house for information, aid communication, and to "connect the dots" between needs and resources, not to champion any specific organization. JTI did not have any affiliations, rarely censored community posts, was unbiased, and encouraged honest dialogue in the community.

We found that faith based organizations, groups and individuals were the lifeblood of the JTI community and the recovery efforts. We linked up and cooperated with, and followed, as many government agencies and entities as were available but in no way relied on them. Help with the Joplin effort came from outside the region, including help with the JTI page. Through the internet, social media disaster volunteers can do tasks effectively from hundreds of miles away.

We believe that in order for a page like this to be successful, it must be participated in by all organizations working toward disaster recovery.

We believe that in order for a page to be successful, it must be participated in by all organizations working toward disaster recovery. With one source that is dedicated to the disaster, not only is it easier to find, it is unbiased and gains user trust. This source has no other purpose than to be a "go between" from individuals (fans, followers) to organizations, this should be managed by someone that has no other purpose. No other sources for this exist, as media outlets are commercial, and all other groups are heavily tasked during this time.

There will be no calls for monetary donations to specific organizations (although general calls for donations with a list of trusted groups included in the post are acceptable and encouraged). All organizations will be treated equally, they are all part of a larger system to be treated as a whole. This type of page must be citizen/volunteer run. Although many of the guidelines provided are helpful when running any page focusing on disaster relief and recovery.

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BEST PRACTICES:

- **Don't be afraid to make mistakes because you will.**

- **Save contact info for everyone** you contact in a meaningful way that works for you. Many people will find an Excel spreadsheet works well. We found it is best to have at least two copies.

- **Always refer to an official source**. Find multiple Facebook page administrators from multiple agencies (We had around 30 at our peak). Have administrators claim ownership of their posts with an initial, first name, or group identifier.

- **Create a Facebook Group** and include all page administrators. This creates a dialogue between administrative volunteers. Monitor all administrative posts for accuracy and scandal. If correction of an administrator is necessary do it via private message or phone call.

- **Staff the page 24/7 until rescues are complete, basic needs are met, utilities and communication are restored.** This will take about 96 hours with a typical natural disaster. Tap night owls to staff the page overnight. Disasters don't rest, neither will you.

- Remember to include **who, what, when, where, how, and why** in your posts and verify all the information you post. Call phone numbers to make sure you have the correct numbers posted. This is key to success and building trust.

- **Strive to do your best**, but don't be too concerned about grammar. Getting the information out there is more important than getting it out perfectly.

- **Watch the speed of your "timeline."** You may need to repost vital information frequently so it isn't lost in the shuffle. Timelines move fast so reposting the same information during the day is a good idea. Social media sites dedicated to disaster recovery attract all demographics including those totally unfamiliar with the use of social media, so be patient. Of course, there is such a thing as too many posts. Pace yourself when possible.

- **Check your ego at the door.** Seriously. Not everyone will understand what you are doing or want to be part of it. Move on to someone that does.

- **Never speak ill of other organizations**, even when they deserve it.

- **This is a crisis not a contest.** Don't be afraid to borrow from other groups and don't be upset when you are borrowed from. Fan all pertinent pages, repost and share. Also, follow what fans are posting. Give shout outs to groups both official and unofficial that are on the ground operating and accomplishing something. Reach out to other groups and promote their pages if they seem legitimate. Ask them to promote your page. If you sense something fishy cut ties ASAP.

Remember, you are a resource for those affected first … for their families second … for the surrounding area third.

- **Check every group or person offering help before posting it.** Some groups will offer resources that are idiot-loops and a waste of time. If a person is on a cell phone with a dying battery at ground zero, minutes are crucial when seeking help.

- **Use and encourage the use of common sense.** Avoid hearsay, clear up rumors and squelch know rumors. Avoid sensationalism. Refer to those affected as survivors instead of victims. Be sensitive, would you want to read that 20 bodies bags were being sent to the apartment complex your loved one lives in? Delete/ban (if necessary) inflammatory remarks, spam, self promotion, sensationalism and false or unverifiable information. We chose to hide all pages promising a monetary donation for each new like (such as $1 per like). No flying fairies on the pages either (i.e. pictures of cherubs, teddy bears playing guitar etc.). They don't contribute to recovery and waste vital space.

- A successful page is a team effort so volunteer administrators are needed. However, **don't give administrative privileges to someone you have not at least talked with in advance.** Make sure they understand the goals of your page and guidelines in advance.

- **It is always a good idea to be thinking about this type of community page in advance of an actual disaster.** Joplin was hit suddenly and the community page developed quickly over the next 12 hours. In the case of Branson, a page was already in place so when the tornado hit during the air morning hours, people were already using it as a way to communicate and share information.

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- **Remember, you are a resource for those affected first, a resource for their families second, a resource for the surrounding area third.**

TEMPLATE FOR FIRST 10 POSTS ON COMMUNITY DISASTER PAGE:

1. Official word of disaster occurrence.

2. If searching for a loved one or if you think someone is searching for you, please register at safeandwell.org this is a valid, trusted source.

3. First word of triage centers and shelters.

4. Evacuation details.

5. Ask for reports and photos. This is useful for organizations assessing the scope of the situation. Smart phones have made it easier to gather this information from the people most impacted.

6. Emergent needs from your community i.e. "there are limbs blocking main street and we can't get to the triage center".

7. Volunteer status should be shared over and over. Is the situation stable enough to allow volunteers? Volunteers are vital and can be of most help if they arrive prepared. Encourage them not to self deploy, instruct them to be self sufficient and make plans (work opportunities and lodging) in advance. Work gloves, work clothes, masks, goggles and other PPE often need to be supplied by the volunteer.

8. Ask your community to share your link and your info so it can reach the largest number of people and do the most good. Let your community know that you are dependent on them to post and respond to needs.

9. Post a disclaimer on a regular basis. In Joplin and Branson both, we regularly posted: "JTI endorses no particular church, charity or organization. We encourage you to give of your time, talents and money to the group of your choice as you are able". Include your contact info and intentions to be an information clearinghouse.

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10. List of needs: *Sample Chronological List after the Joplin Tornado*

- Rescue and Triage
- Reuniting survivors with their loved ones
- First aid supplies; Bandages, antiseptic, etc.
- Water and Food (including infant formula, baby food, diabetic & celiac meals)
- Communication aids
- Medication
- Feminine products, diapers, toilet paper, wet wipes and hand sanitizer paper towels and bleach
- Clothing/Shoes (This is an immediate need only and tends to be met quickly)
- Pet Shelters, pet food and supply distribution points
- Tarps, tools and PPE
- Tents and cots for those displaced (and sometimes for volunteers)
- Flash lights and batteries
- Shovels and rakes
- Hard hats (for those working on cleanup).
- Trash bags, buckets and large rubber maid tubs
- Storage containers, boxes, sharpies, duct tape & packing tape
- Emotional needs
- Can openers and food storage containers.
- Personal Hygiene, laundry facilities
- Donation logistics and storage
- Food lodging and transportation for disaster workers, non profit workers and volunteers
- Mobile device charging and wifi locations
- Once basic needs are met, utilities and communication are restored needs will change. *Generally basic infrastructure is well on its way to being restored within 96 hours.*
- Spray paint: In major disasters, when entire neighborhoods are destroyed/affected it is necessary to provide navigation aid to Search and Rescue (SAR) and for those affected. As much as one year after the Joplin tornado (May 22, 2011) street signs are still missing in the affected area due to the release of dedicated funds. Immediately after the storm, the public works department of Joplin marked the streets with names and block numbers to aid with navigation. Homeowners were/are encouraged to use spray paint to mark the street-facing sides of standing structures with street addresses, structures were also marked with messages for loved ones who may be searching for the occupants, it is important to note that homes may be marked with USAR circles, (a circle divided into four parts telling search and rescue crews vital information about the status of SAR efforts in that particular structure) these official markings should be avoided when making your own marks.

TOOLS WE SUGGEST YOU USE:

- Create a Gmail account to be used to access the other sites you will create.

- Use Google voice phone number for the page main contact number. DO NOT GIVE OUT YOUR PERSONAL NUMBER.

- **Twitter-use hashtags** to your advantage, employ a crowdmap type service to track needs and supplies. For example, after the Branson tornado, one hash tag ended up leading the way: #LeapDayTornado.

- Use Google documents (these can be edited by anyone). The spreadsheets we used had shelters, distribution points, triage centers, information lines, as well as what was going on at each organization, representatives from each center could access and edit this list in real time.

- Use USAF blog flowchart or a similar source. Use geolocation as much as possible, include Google places links in posts for new shelters and distribution centers.

- **Use Wikis and other open source applications**.

- **Use Flickr.com** for posting, sharing and tagging photos with ease.

- Sign up for Google alerts, use this to keep up to speed on what is happening via traditional news sources. For example, a Google alert for "Branson tornado" still generates links to three or four online items a day, even three months after the storm.

- **Spreadsheets.** If you have enough volunteers, designate a spread sheet whiz to create a spread sheet as soon as possible. Resources and needs are easy to lose track of in the frenzy of disaster. Create a method to manage information early. Remember you are creating an historical document about the disaster, your community and its recovery.

- **Save early posts in a Word document** since Facebook timeline currently does need show the first few days of a new page.

- **An accompanying website is essential for static info**. Joel Clark created and maintains our website joplintornado.info and can be contacted at joelclark@joelclark.com .We were especially proud that joplintornado.info was comprehensive, listing general resources common after nearly all disasters as well as more specific resources such as AA/NA and other 12 step group information. After a major disaster addicts of all descriptions become cut off from their supply. One more reason strong focus on mental health and recovery resources are essential after a major disaster.

- **We also highly recommend www.recovers.org .** They provide comprehensive WYSIWYG (meaning there is no coding experience necessary) recovery website templates to disaster affected communities.

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BACKGROUND ON JOPLIN TORNADO INFO

Joplin Tornado Info has proven the usefulness of a central information hub as a tool for use in large scale disaster recovery. The subsequent Branson Tornado Info and Woodward Tornado Info pages showed the scalability of the JTI template. While the "Tornado Info" pages always work as closely with officials as the situation warrants, they have no agenda or affiliation other than the recovery of the community they serve. The page can be set up in advance and left in a pre-launch phase and used for basic weather updates etc. (as with Branson, Mo) or a "Tornado Info" page can be set up immediately following a tornado or other natural disaster using a basic template and standard operating procedures (as with Woodward, Ok).

The page then serves to facilitate early assessment and recovery and to "connect the dots" between needs and resources. 96 hours appears to be a benchmark for communication and logistic restoration after a tornado. If at some point before 96 hours an information infrastructure is well established, recovery can move forward at a much greater rate than it could without using the community as a resource via social media. After critical services are restored, the page moves into an information stage, answering questions and posting important notifications. During and after the recovery stage the page serves to promote preparedness and emergent weather news.

This photo is in the volunteer memorial at Cunningham Park It has "The Miracle of the Human Spirit" engraved on it.
Used with permission from ecography.com

Joplin Tornado Info (JTI) was founded less than two hours after an EF-5 tornado hit Joplin on May 22, 2011. Visit JTI's website joplintornado.info for more info (donated by Joel Clark). JTI and it's affiliates are staffed entirely by volunteers and accepted no donations. David Burton, with University of Missouri Extension, was among the first five administrative volunteers and provided MU Extension resources and information on a 24-hour basis. He worked with the website founders on additional technical and community development issues as the days unfolded and has remained an active administrator long after the storm.

When Branson was hit by a tornado on Feb. 29, 2012, it was Burton who had a page in place at the beginning and then started to enlist help from other volunteers. He turned to Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, founders of JTI, for their expertise and assistance. In the process of managing that page they agreed that the guidelines used with JTI needed to be written down and shared with others.

The guidelines for using social media for disaster recovery was written by Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, the founders of Joplin Tornado Info. Their first-hand experience caused them to keep information about lessons learned that led to this publication. This information was edited by David Burton, a community development specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

Do more, by joining U.S. Tornado Info

https://www.facebook.com/USTornadoInfo

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The Story of JOPLIN TORNADO INFO

BY REBECCA WILLIAMS

"ST. JOHN'S HAS BEEN HIT THAT'S ALL WE KNOW FOR SURE".

May 22, 2011 7:26 p.m.
First Joplin Tornado Info post

We heard the KSN news anchors beg people to take cover, and then take cover themselves. It was obvious Joplin was being hit by a tornado. Neosho and Joplin are close-knit communities and only 16 miles apart. How bad was it in Joplin? A friend that works at St. John's Hospital posted on Facebook it had been hit. How could we find accurate information about what was going on? We searched the internet and found virtually nothing of help. We don't remember for certain how it happened but within the hour, at my coffee table using an iPhone, Joplin Tornado Info was born. When the page was started we had no idea we had just signed on as a communication link for one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history. By sunrise the morning of the 23rd, the breadth and scope of what had happened became clear.

Across town, unbeknownst to us, an acquaintance Joel Clark had launched joplintornado.info website. None of us can remember exactly how we connected and merged JTI Facebook with joplintornado.info but it happened within the first 48 hours.

People ask what was different about the Joplin response and what led FEMA to applaud the rescue and recovery. I would say the can-do and help-your-neighbor attitude of the people of the area, the on the spot response of area faith based organizations, the overwhelming support of the people of the region and the nation, and the presence of social media were deciding factors. This is the story of one social media outlet: Joplin Tornado Info.

The tornado hit at 5:41 p.m. At 7:36 p.m. Joplin Tornado Info Facebook page made its first post, went viral, began connecting dots between needs, resources, transportation, storage and dispersal and become a trusted, timely news source.

This is the story of one social media outlet: Joplin Tornado Info.

The first days and even weeks after the tornado remain a blur, we have pulled out the worn legal pads that were JTI, (as it came to be called in those early days) and watched YouTube videos of the KSN tower cam footage and Red Cross volunteer Marie Colby's video among others and talked about how it was at JTI after the tornado, to remember. Almost a year has passed and there are still not words to express what happened during Joplin's early recovery. The dazed look on the faces of survivors is haunting.

We quickly reached over 49,000 fans. It all happened so fast and just as fast there were people helping us. Several groups and individuals such as the group of people that went to the computer lab at Crowder College and continuously posted critical information to JTI were unofficial administrators of the page and vital to our efforts.

From the beginning we relied on the JTI community to post and repost for the good of the Joplin effort. Jennifer and Michelle both reached out from Alabama that first night to help. David Burton from University of Missouri Extension contacted us and offered his time and resources online. Volunteer administrators signed on and others just took it upon themselves to help. JTI was a community page and early on people responded. Within hours we also had administrators and or points of contact from all of the utility companies.

Relief organizations, Churches and news sources began posting on our site as well. We made every effort to read and answer every post. JTI pages moved so fast at one time that it was necessary to repost vital information often or it became lost in the Facebook newsfeed. We monitored all available news sources and reposted to JTI.

We didn't sleep much during those first few weeks. We devoted every waking minute to JTI and coordinating efforts to connect the dots for the next two months. We were not alone in this; many people in our area put their lives and livelihoods on hold to do what they could for Joplin. There was such an overwhelming response to the need in Joplin and supplies came in so fast that FEMA the Red Cross, and other major organizations quickly became overwhelmed.

Through JTI overflow storage was coordinated by Royce at the Galena High School Football Field. Royce became a vital part of JTI as we routed donations to area storage and dispersal locations. Solace, a youth based church on the fringe of ground zero with an average age of 24 and attendance of less than that went from evening service to relief center in the blink of an eye. People of the area did what they could when they could. Back in the day, if your neighbor's barn was on fire you dropped what you were doing and ran to help your neighbor put the fire out. Joplin's barn was on fire and area people responded as they had for generations.

In the beginning many of the community posts were people searching for missing loved ones, asking about shelter and water. One memorable post was the joy we had notifying people that huge water trucks were pulling in to memorial hall, to bring containers and get what you need. Water was off throughout Joplin and these trucks were such a blessing. JTI was not about fluff. Many survivors were literally hand to mouth. As we posted, food, water, bandage, clothing locations people texted our posts to survivors at ground zero who relied on cell phones texts for all outside communication. We accepted no donations, endorsed no specific church, charity or organization. JTI is a community page with no affiliation or loyalty to any group or entity. JTI made every effort to post timely, concise, accurate, unbiased information.

My daughter, Genevieve and I came to realize that in this region none of us are more than a degree of separation from someone who lost their life in the tornado.

We all know someone who died personally or we know someone who knew someone.
When locals speak of the tornado now, we don't ask "were you affected"? We have come to realize that this was a regional tragedy we were all affected.

Our mourning for those we lost will go on as long as we do. Out of our grieve and necessity the tornado aftermath has given birth to change, innovation, invention, entrepreneurship, volunteerism and philanthropy that many of us were unaware was within us. Folks in the area take the tornado and recovery in stride and continue to look for ways to help those in need.

Wouldn't it be great if every municipality and county had a major disaster social media preparedness plan?

Joplin and area folks are reaching out today to our neighbors, Branson and the several other communities hit by the Leap Day Storm, doing what we can and lending our experience. David Burton from MU Extension, who has been an administrators on JTI since nearly the beginning, had the foresight to set up three tornado info Facebook pages in advance. One of these pages was Branson Tornado Info which by sad coincidence was put into use in the Leap Day Storm and quickly went viral with over 16,000 fans in 48 hrs.

Genevieve, David, Joel and I are working to make the story of JTI, our operating guidelines and tips available worldwide. Wouldn't it be great if every municipality and county had a Major disaster social media preparedness plan?

As of this writing, the beginning of meteorological spring March, 1, 2012, JTI has had---------- 87,112,786 post views from over 20 countries and languages. After peaking at just over 49,000 fans, JTI still retained 47,754 of its original fans 9 months after the tornado, despite continued multiple daily posts.

Biography: Joplin Tornado Info was created and managed by 23 year old Genevieve Williams, Neosho, Mo. less than two hours after the May 22nd tornado. JTI was honored as one of seven nominees for a 2011 Mashable Award in the Social Good Cause Campaign Category.

St. John's Hospital in Joplin only hours after being hit by a tornado in 2011.

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MU Extension Rushes to Respond to Branson Tornado with Facebook Community Called "Branson Tornado Info"

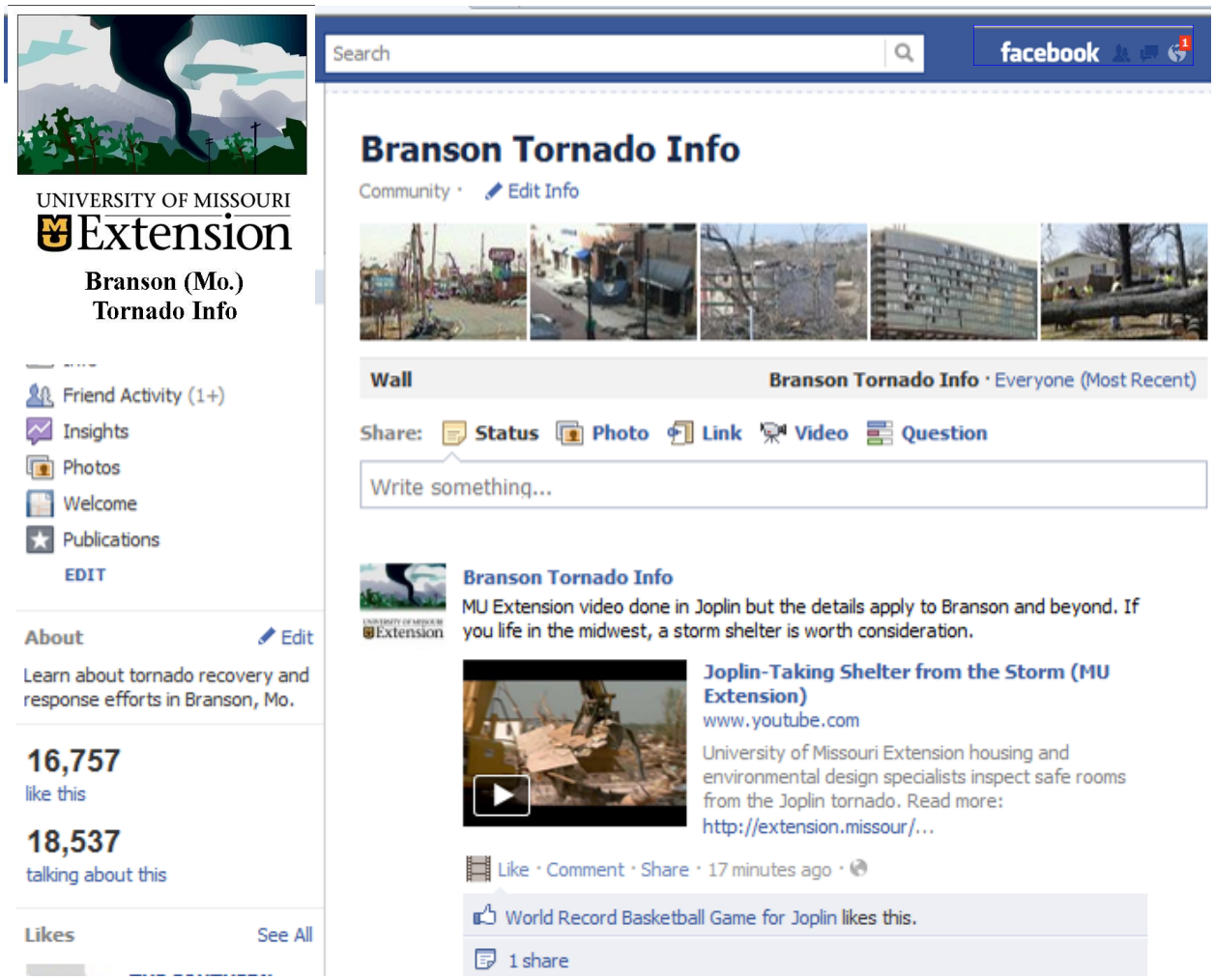
BY DAVID BURTON

A University of Missouri Extension storm recovery resource named "Branson Tornado Info" on Facebook grew to 14,000 followers just 12 hours after the tornado struck Branson on Feb. 28.

Actually, I put the page in place back in January of 2012. I created four new pages on Facebook at that time for Branson, Springfield, Republic and Greene County that were modeled after the success we had last year with the Joplin Tornado Info and Missouri Flooding Info pages.

Facebook users can "like" the Branson Tornado Info pages to find out how to help and to learn about emergency and cleanup work from the organizations and groups doing the work.

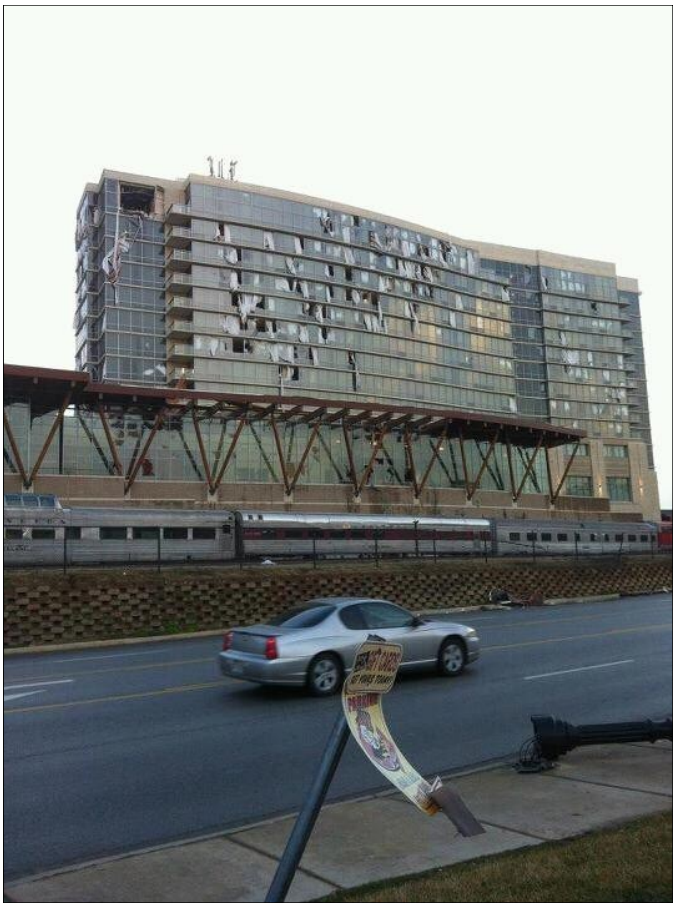
These pages are designed to be a collaboration of state, federal and local agencies and organizations involved in the affected areas. The pages are managed by MU Extension but public information officers from various organizations and community volunteers with media backgrounds can serve as co-administrators, following a model used after the Joplin tornado.



In fact, by March 2, the page had 11 volunteer administrators. The two most active volunteers have been Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, the mother and daughter team from Neosho, Mo. that were behind Joplin Tornado Info.

Persons willing to serve as administrators on these new pages should contact me after liking the Branson Tornado Info page. I will then send you the guidelines for the page and instructions on getting set up as an administrator. Having co-administrators who post information and check facts on what others post is important and was a key to the success of the Joplin Tornado Info page.

I logged in to Facebook at 5 a.m. on Feb. 28 and saw that this page had jumped from two fans to 50 before I even knew there had been a tornado hit Branson. I got the word out to the media via email and we got things rolling. Before the end of that first day we were up to 14,000 followers. As we saw in Joplin, social media is a great communication tool during disasters especially because of Smart phones.



The Hilton Hotel at the Branson Landing, just six hours after a tornado hit Branson on Feb. 29, 2012. This photo was taken by Amanda Smigiel, a nutrition assistant with MU Extension.

The goal of the site administrators is to make sure posts are official in nature and researched. In other words, the official information is unbiased and research based, in keeping with MU Extension's mission.

On Branson Tornado Info, we don't collect money for our own efforts and we shy away from organizations that are merely collecting money. We don't post links about fundraisers, or groups selling shirts, trinkets and such. Instead, we link to sites that have collected information in lists, tables or officials reports and we answer posted questions.

As of March 2, the page has nearly 17,000 followers and 12 administrators who have some clear goals and guidelines. Accolades for the page, and the quick response by MU Extension, continue even today. The news media showed a lot of interest in the effort. "Branson Tornado Info" was written about in an Associated Press story that was used nationwide, featured in an Associated Press radio story, and we had calls from media in Canada as well. However, the local resident who was impacted by the storm was always the primary focus of the site and local people appreciated that fact.

Next page

Posted on Facebook by Susie Michaels
"Facebook was great after the tornado for those of us without power and could only charge our cell phones while driving. I had no other source of news and was so grateful for those who got info posted here. ..."

Posted on Facebook by Andrew Long
"For the first few days after the storm, this Facebook page was our main source of information. Volunteers here answered our questions about where to go to get help, what resources were available and what we needed to do next ...."

Posted on Facebook by Dawn Davidson
""You guys have been indispensable through this disaster. You've given information, help, resources, contact names, stories, directed volunteers and given hope. Beautiful job all of you who gave their time and input to this site. ..."

University of Missouri Extension has a website that contains MU Extension resources that could be helpful to homeowners, landowners, business owners, emergency responders, volunteers, partnering organizations and others with a direct or indirect interest in emergency preparedness and response. The information on emergencies and disasters from MU Extension is available online from MU Extension at http://extension.missouri.edu. (Screen shot below).

University of Missouri Extension has a website containing MU Extension resources that could be helpful to homeowners, landowners, business owners, emergency responders, volunteers, partnering organizations and others with a direct or indirect interest in emergency preparedness and response. http://extension.missouri.edu.

FAQ: Creation and Purpose of Tornado Info Pages

BY DAVID BURTON

Amid all of the media coverage following the Branson tornado on Feb. 29, 2012, I answered a lot of the same media questions. They were good questions, the type that help explain why an effort is worth continuing or at all. That is why I decided to share my answers in this format.

1. Why was the Branson Tornado Info page created and when?

I created it back in January of 2012 as an MU Extension community development effort based on lessons we learned with a similar effort in Joplin. I was trying to be proactive. That is why I also created a Greene County (Mo.) Tornado Info page, a Springfield Tornado Info page and a Republic (Mo.) Tornado Info page at the same time. I was trying to get MU Extension in a position where we could respond quickly if one of the population centers in southwest Missouri was ever hit. At the same time, I was hoping the pages would never be needed.

2. The page had 2 "likes" prior to the tornado. That number jumped to 50 overnight, and it peaked at nearly 17,000. What are your thoughts on the page's exponential popularity?

The overnight jump was because the Branson tornado hit in the early morning hours and folks were using search engines to look for helpful pages. Luckily, I logged in to Facebook at 5 a.m. and was able to start getting some information out early and also get help from some folks with the Joplin Tornado Info page. The quick jump to 17,000 was fueled by online interest, content and the regional and national news coverage that the page received as a resource. People may only have smart phones in a disaster situation and they are looking for information resources. Facebook and other social media sites lend themselves to that type of emergency situation.

3. Why do you think the tornado page was important the days following the storm?

Obviously, people are living on social media and some are making it their preferred information source. It is a great resource for those impacted by the storm, family members and folks in the region that want to help. That has been a frequent request online: "How can we help?" The fact that our page has 10 volunteer administrators who are answering questions and posting content is another reason for the success. We answered questions with accurate information and posted fresh content during the rescue and recovery process. Area media outlets produced excellent content and we shared that with a larger audience. Some of those media outlets also used the questions posted on the Branson Tornado Info page story ideas so it was mutually beneficial.

4. Why do you think social media has played such a strong role with recent storms?

I think ease of access use and set up is one strong reason. Both ease of use by the person seeking information but also the ease of setting something like this up. It is a whole lot easier than creating a new website and getting people to visit it. Facebook keeps people engaged, and it is easy to give other volunteers access to help. Then the page spreads with word of mouth too. In the first days of operation, we had more people talking about the Branson Tornado Info than the people who are actual followers.

Next page

5. What do you think are the ongoing implications here?

Social media has a role to play and so do social media sites managed by volunteers. The Joplin page and this page have certainly gotten people in the Midwest talking. I think this is an important tool that is going to expand as a communication method used after disasters. Thanks to the founders of the Joplin Tornado Info page, Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, the Greene County Extension Center has been able to produce a new publication that provides guidelines and best practices for using social media in a disaster. We are working on getting some workshops set up in the region to get people engaged in getting a tool like this prepared. There has already nationwide interest in what we have done here in the Ozarks.

6. Have you faced any resistance to this pages?

The honest answer is yes and that was a surprise to me. But the resistance has not come from volunteers or people impacted by these storms and using these pages. The resistance has come from some organizations that would prefer to have people connecting with them on Facebook instead of a different resource like these tornado info pages. Some of the organizations that are very focused on getting donations have expressed a preference in having their site be the go-to-site but to be honest, we make it a practice to point users to those resources. I think a site like Branson Tornado Info is seen as unbiased because we are not affiliated with a group or agency and I think that is part of the success we have had. In some cases, emergency management people have been reluctant to embrace the use of social media. Keeping a page like this updated and fresh takes a lot of time and in the initial stages of a natural disaster, emergency management employees have other priorities. In most cases, when the emergency management professions see we have established guidelines and we are not dealing in rumors, they come around and see the value of pages, especially with recovery efforts. In one year, we have gone from officials asking the page be stopped to having this guide downloaded and referenced by FEMA and other emergency management groups in trainings on the subject of social media and disaster recovery.

In one year, we have gone from officials asking the page be stopped to having this guide downloaded and referenced by FEMA and other emergency management groups in trainings on the subject of social media and disaster recovery.

7. Does an effort like this also build social capital in a community?

Social capital is basically defined as the social networks in your life. Who do you know? What are you willing to do for them? What are others willing to do for you? I've personally made professional friendships with these networks but the work has also increased my social capital and that of other administrators. There are four key things to ask that help determine if your social media work is building social capital. Does the effort build trust among people or groups? Does the effort foster communication? Does the effort enhance connections? And does the effort (or Facebook page) make things happen. The answer to all four of those is a "definite yes."

Opinion: Social media shines in post-tornado efforts

By Geoff Pickle, Web Editor, Springfield Business Journal

It used to be that in the event of a natural disaster, people would tune in their radios. That may still hold true, but a newer form of technology proved a fruitful means of disseminating information after an EF-2 tornado skated across Branson on Feb. 29. As the morning wore on and little information was available from Branson city staff – they were quite busy – we at Springfield Business Journal turned to social media to seek out clues to build an article for SBJ.net.

The hash tag #LeapDayStorm became instantly popular on Twitter, and on Facebook, a Branson tornado information page set up by the University of Missouri Extension office in Greene County gained popularity quickly. The page's creator, David Burton, civic communication specialist for the extension, told me the page's "likes" had jumped from pre-tornado levels of two to 50 overnight. When I took a benchmark of the page at 10:39 a.m. for the article, that figure had shot up to more than 7,000. As of press time, the number of likes for Facebook.com/BransonTornadoInfo had moved to nearly 17,000.

That kind of Web popularity could take months, even years, to accomplish, but it has only taken this particular page about a week. It is certainly a commendable effort, and the thousands of people that have used the page would likely agree it has provided invaluable information – everything from damage assessments to business closings to the need for volunteers. Learning from a similar Joplin tornado Facebook page less than a year before, those behind the Branson version seem to be right on top of things.

One of our social media pages, Youtube.com/SBJOnline, also enjoyed increased visibility due to a video we posted of aerial footage showing Branson damage. Chopper Charter Branson filmed the clip and shared it with our newsroom, leading to more than 13,000 views for the video, the most any of our videos have received. Burton said the boom of smart phones probably was a big reason social media was leaned on so heavily during the recent storms. "People may only have smart phones in a disaster situation, and they are looking for information resources. Facebook and social media lend themselves to that type of emergency situation," he said.

"BransonTornadoInfo is ... a commendable effort, and … it has provided invaluable information.

With the kind of attention the page was getting, the crew running Branson Tornado Info seem to be employing a line from the first "Spider-Man" film: "With great power comes great responsibility." Burton said about 10 volunteer administrators have been working around the clock to answer questions and facilitate information for the page's followers. Burton, along with volunteers who managed the Joplin Facebook page, also built a document titled "The Use of Social Media for Disaster Recovery." The guide is available online at Extension.Missouri.edu/Greene. It is informative, and I would recommend it to anyone just looking to create a successful social media presence, as well.

Though he hopes they won't be needed, Burton also created tornado information Facebook pages for Greene County, Springfield and Republic in January, along with the Branson page.
It's telling how clearly the importance of technology shines through during times of tragedy. Many people use social media on a daily basis. It logically follows that useful information – beyond trivial tidbits about what your friend might currently be doing – also would be available through it. With an increasingly mobile and Web-savvy consumer base, technology likely will continue to evolve communication into the future, through all facets of life, including, unfortunate as they may be, our roughest times.

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Springfield Business Journal Web Editor Geoff Pickle can be reached at gpickle@sbj.net.

MISSOURI FLOOD INFO: FORMING PARTNERSHIPS FOR A FACEBOOK APPROACH TO DISASTERS

When the Dakotas experienced severe flooding in 2011, officials in Missouri knew that the flood waters would eventually impact the Missouri River. Community development and communication specialists with University of Missouri Extension decided to form some strategic statewide partners and use social media as a communication tool for this disaster, similar to what had been successfully implemented following the Joplin tornado (May 2011).

Over the course of a week or more, MU Extension specialists recruited co-administrators from various Missouri agencies that would have an interest in the Missouri flooding. MU Extension also built a traditional website with information relevant to floods in order to provide the very best information to homeowners, landowners and business owners impacted by the flood.

This page was a collaboration of state, federal and local agencies and organizations involved addressing flooding in Missouri, including the Partnership for Disaster Recovery. Managed by

A screen shot in May of 2012. Although the water has subsided the community remains active.

MU Extension. MoFloodInfo actually linked to 60 additional partner resource pages and the active partners included: MU Extension, United Way of Greater St. Joseph, Midland Empire American Red Cross, Extension Disaster Education Network, MO Department of Transportation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Kansas City District, Missouri National Guard, Atchison County (Mo.) 911/Emergency Management and Holt County, Mo., and many more.

The community page provides regularly updated information such as requests for volunteers; status reports on levees, road closings and river levels; evacuation announcements; and educational resources. As a Facebook community, Missouri Flood Info is not "owned" by any one organization. All agencies and organizations involved in flood preparedness, mitigation and recovery are invited to participate by making posts to the page.

"Social media is an effective communications tool during a disaster. This was demonstrated in Joplin and has been successfully used during other flood events," said Beverly Maltsberger, a community development specialist with MU Extension. "This was a team approach and really provided one more outlet for these agencies to reach people in an additional format."

Facebook users are welcome to contribute posts or comments. Agencies can join as page administrators by contacting the MU Extension Web Team at 573-882-0604 .

On the Web: http://www.facebook.com/MoFloodInfo and http://extension.missouri.edu/flood.

The Missouri River (shown above) swelled beyond its banks in northwest Missouri and impacted agriculture, major roads and the overall Missouri economy.

CASE STUDY: WOODWARD, OKLA AND WICHITA, KANAS

When the towns of Woodward, Oklahoma and Wichita, Kansas were hit by tornadoes in April 2012, both Rebecca and Genevieve Williams jumped into action to create pages and find community volunteers who would maintain the pages in a way similar to what was done in Joplin. Part of the motivation to act was the fact that residents in Joplin were eager to jump in and help other communities the way they had been helped. Both Woodward and Wichita have functioning pages on Facebook: Woodward Tornado Info and Wichita Tornado Info.

The town of Woodward was more directly impacted and Woodward Tornado Info had more involvement from the very beginning. These printed guidelines were used to develop the Facebook community for Woodward just hours after the April 15, 2012, tornado. The early hours of the page were incredibly vital as community members were able to post if they were missing someone and often get an immediate response from a neighbor, friend, etc. People from Woodward took over the page at the 110 hour mark.

Now, just two months after the storm, Woodward Tornado Info is run by the Woodward Community Foundation and sanctioned as the recovery page for Woodward by Woodward County OES.

Now, just two months after the storm, Woodward Tornado Info is run by the Woodward Community Foundation and sanctioned as the recovery page for Woodward by Woodward County OES. People from Woodward took over the page at the 110 hour mark.

"WWTI quickly became a central location for volunteer launching, donation coordination, damage assessment, and so much more. WWTI had a major influence on the fact that in 9 days our town was 90% clean. The Woodward Community Foundation and our Long Term Recovery Team have officially adopted WWTI as their media outlet," said Amber Wolanski, Woodward Tornado Info Project Manager.

Woodward Tornado Info was created and manned by Rebecca and Genevieve Williams of Joplin Tornado Info, and Crystal Wolfe and Charlie Brown of Homes of Hope Joplin for the first 119 hours post tornado. During that time Woodward Tornado Info served as an information clearinghouse connecting needs and resources throughout the region. Woodward Tornado Info is now in the hands of the Woodward Community Foundation via Amber Wolanski.

Wichita Tornado Info is more of a message board but it is launched and ready with 600 plus fans. The tornado that hit Wichita was less severe in 2012 and it impacted fewer people than what was first believed. Still, Wichita Tornado Info was created within the hour of the April 14, 2012 tornado. It continues to serve the WTI community with severe weather updates, recovery and preparedness information and stands ready should a tornado strike the Wichita area again.

Wichita Tornado Info is more of a message board but it is launched and ready with 600 plus fans. The tornado that hit Wichita was less severe in 2012 and it impacted fewer people than what was first believed.

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SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE DURING JOPLIN DISASTER

Reported on the one-year anniversary at OzarksFirst.com

*By: Laurie Patton * May 22, 2012 * Used with permission from KOLR-TV, Springfield, Mo.*

(Joplin, MO) -- As devastation tore through Joplin, social media became more important than ever.

"We made our first post within an hour and a half of the tornado," says Rebecca Williams, co-creator of the Joplin Tornado Info Facebook page. "The page was very busy in the first few hours, and we answered every single post."

"Once the power came on, it caught me up on everything that had happened," says Joplin resident Cate Cassel Loch. "I had no clue what was going on and when that was back up it caught me up. It was just so important."

The Joplin Tornado Info page was just one of several Facebook pages helpful during Joplin's tornado recovery.

"We had no idea the magnitude of the Joplin tornado when we started the page," Williams says. "We thought there was a lot of destruction, but we didn't know we were making a page for one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history."

With spotty to no power, cable or phone services, social media like Facebook and Twitter played a large role in helping tornado survivors and their family members in other areas of the world.

"It was comforting for them," Loch said. "It was a lifeline for I think all of us. I could see someone calling, but I couldn't answer the phone."

"It's very interesting to go back to the beginning and see how the page was used in the very early hours," Williams says. "We used it to post triage locations, phone numbers to call to check on loved ones at area hospitals and very emergent crisis type needs. It's very chilling to go back and read those."

JOPLIN TORNADO FACTS

- **According to NWS statistics, there were 158 fatalities (some news outlets report 161 fatalities) around Joplin as a result of this tornado and over 1,000 people were injured.**
- **This EF-5 tornado is the deadliest tornado in the United States since 1950 and is ranked 7th among the deadliest tornadoes in American history.**
- **According to The Associated Press, the Joplin tornado has been ranked as the costliest in the U.S. since 1950 with total damage estimates topping almost $3 billion.**
- **The Joplin tornado had wind speeds that were estimated to be faster than 200 miles per hour and it had a path length of 22.1 miles, according to the NWS survey report. The path width was between 3/4 and one mile.**
- **The tornado began at 5:34 p.m. and ended at 6:12 -- a total time of 38 minutes.**
- **The NWS estimated that over 15,000 vehicles were tossed varying distances by this tornado -- from as little as 200 yards to several blocks.**

People in Joplin and other areas of the world were grateful to have a centrally located, easily accessible information clearing house.

"Text messages could get through when voice messages could not," Williams says. "We've been told that people's loved ones in Chicago would check our page and text people at ground zero because remember there was no power -- no nothing."

"The use of social media was immeasurable," Loch says. "How could we have done what we did? We couldn't call. We couldn't answer the phone. How would we have touched base?"

And the importance of social media didn't stop there. It played a vital role in helping volunteers find out what they could do to assist in recovery efforts. "It works so much better to meet the immediate need rather than waiting to look in the newspaper or even the news that night," Loch says. "If something happens now, within a minute it can be all over the place, and the good thing about social media is you can repost things. If you see someone needs help, you can re-post that and the need can be met."

More than 47,000 followers are still a part of the Joplin Tornado Info Facebook page, and Williams still posts up to 10-11 times a day. "It's done amazing things. The outpouring of support we got just brings tears to my eyes."

Groundbreaking for Irving Elementary in Joplin on one-year anniversary of the tornado there. Note the former St. Johns Hospital in the background which is in the process of being torn down.

Copyright 2012 * Rebecca and Genevieve Williams (Joplin Tornado Info) and David Burton (MU Extension)

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT IMPACT OF JTI

Joplin Tornado info has served as an information clearinghouse since 7:36 p.m. 5/22/11.

Posted on Joplin Tornado Info 5/4/12 by Joplin High School Senior Karie Freeman:
"After the may 22 tornado this is how we found out about things going on in our community and also how lots of people let other people know they were ok or not and what needs we had I definitely recommend pages like this where disaster strikes very valuable info we needed."

Posted by Cate Cassell Loch Scrubs:
"After the tornado struck much of the coverage found on the national news dealt with showing the hospital, the high school, iconic symbols. The local news did a much better job on letting us know the progress from hour to hour, day to day. *But, what JTI did was keep us updated on everything. It gave us a place to ask for help, offer aid, know what the greatest needs were at any given time.* Someone could post what they needed on JTI and within minutes they would have multiple responses. Volunteers could go there to find out what they could do to help. *It was a lifeline for the entire community, and beyond.* I suggested family and friends of mine living outside the Joplin area go to JTI for updated information. It was a lifeline for thousands!"

Posted on Joplin Tornado Info 5/5/12
"One of the Disaster Distress Helpline's favorite social media weather-related sites are grassroots, community-driven FB / Twitter groups such as ... Joplin Tornado Info! You all do so much in connecting everyone in Joplin and other towns hit by disaster with important resources and information in the ongoing rebuilding and recovery."

Joplin Spirit tree.

Joplin Wall of Hope

MASHABLE AWARDS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA RECOGNIZE JOPLIN TORNADO INFO

From Oct. 11 to Nov. 18, the Mashable community submitted hundreds of thousands of nominations for the 2011 Mashable Awards, the fifth annual community-focused competition rewarding the best of digital and social media.

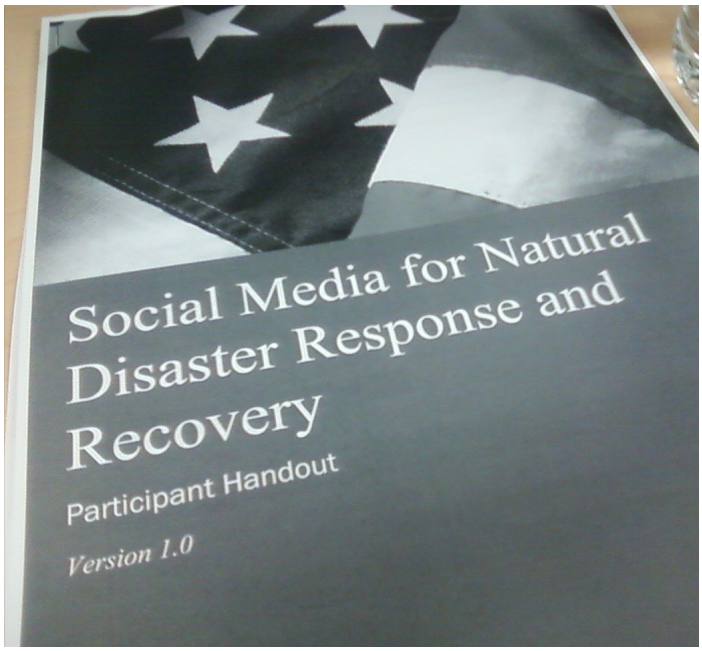
The 2011 Mashable Awards honored nominees and winners in 28 categories, covering four of Mashable's core content areas: Social Media, Tech, Business and Entertainment. Among the 2011 Mashable Award Finalists, was the Joplin Tornado Info community.

Best Social Good Cause Campaign. This category honors the readers' choice for the best use of digital or social media in a non-profit, philanthropic, cause-focused or corporate social responsibility campaign.

•Be a STAR Alliance
•Joplin Tornado Info
•Feed it Forward by Restaurant.com
•Your Man Reminder
•The Trevor Project
•AT&T Texting While Driving
•It Gets Better

EXPANDING SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN DISASTERS

This publication, and the initial efforts made with JoplinTornadoInfo, have pushed the use of social media in disaster recovery in to the mainstream. The topic has gained lots of national media attention and as of May 2012, this online guide had been downloaded or printed over 5,000 times. Perhaps most encouraging is that officials from many disaster recovery organizations have gone from reluctance toward social media to adoption in less than a year. In fact, officials with FEMA have gone from being "concerned" about the use of social media in Joplin to teaching a class nationwide in May 2012 entitled: "Social Media for Natural Disaster Response and Recovery."



Guide used as part of the FEMA class taught around the nation and attended by David Burton. Class discussion included copies of the guide you are holding.

The authors of this publication have learned new things too and have updated this publication since its first release in March of 2012. We acknowledge that you cannot reach everyone with social media but when it is used together with other types of communication, it can maximize the reach within a community. Both traditional and social media have their own place in disaster recovery but the whole community is served best when both are used and cooperate together.

The main message of the FEMA social media class: you cannot reach everyone with social media but when it is used together with other types of communication, it can maximize the reach within a community.

Social media has advantages in the area of speed and mobility and being low cost. Some have suggested that the two biggest reasons for the success of the JoplinTornadoInfo were as follows: dedication to answering posted questions and needs 24-hours a day during the first two weeks and a strong team effort

to verify posted information to ensure accuracy and to reduce rumors and misinformation. Fears about misinformation in social media have made some agencies and groups reluctant to adopt its use. *However, Joplin has shown that social media is going to be used in disaster recovery with or without these agencies so officials might as well join the party and help make sure information is accurate.*

We are attempting to take this effort national with the new USTornadoInfo page on Facebook. U.S. Tornado Info was created to share pertinent social media links and organizations for future disasters. It will work as a virtual VOAD so organizations have a central social media locale to share needs, resources and experiences.

One area that needs to be further explored is how social media can be used in disaster mitigation and preparedness. There is information online but not much of a following. How can that be improved? More attention also needs to be paid to data collection through social media during disasters which could help with responses. Social media — especially Twitter and Facebook — has expanded the role of citizen journalists during disasters. They are more empowered and certainly more valuable now than even one year ago.

Working closely with long-term recovery groups is another area that needs to be developed. Doing so can give these existing social media pages continued life and give long-term recovery groups a much larger audience than they would normally be able to reach.

In summary, we note that social media must be integrated in to an overall communications strategy for organizations. But in terms of a whole community approach to disaster recovery, social media sites run by volunteers certainly have a place. Twitter is faster paced but at this point, Facebook is the best tool for encouraging community and building discussion. There are lots of examples of how it can be used effectively (like this publication) and it is still a good idea to get involvement in volunteer led efforts from officials and community leaders. In some cases, official community groups can even end up taking over and leading a recovery page.

Partnerships are important for information sharing and for growing the reach of social media efforts. Even with multiple groups involved, social media can create one voice for a community and help reduce rumor by being monitored, quickly corrected and verified. When that happens, the reputation of the group improves and the entire community is better served.

Some officials from ... disaster recovery organizations have gone from reluctance toward social media to adoption in less than a year.

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EXTENSION PREPARDEDNESS AND RECOVERY RESOURCES

University of Missouri Extension has a special website (http://extension.missouri.edu/tornado) containing MU Extension resources that could be helpful to homeowners, landowners, business owners, emergency responders, volunteers, partnering organizations and others with a direct or indirect interest in tornado recovery.

The page includes publications and news articles as well a list of contacts and timely information from MU Extension relevant to the recovery process. During a natural disaster, MU Extension specialists also work with the news media and other organizations to make the expertise of Extension specialists available as communities, businesses, families and farms work on recovery. MU Extension is part of the Governor's Disaster Recovery Partnership and works with the State Emergency Management Agency and other organizations to assist in facilitation and coordination.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI Extension

http://extension.missouri.edu/tornado

This website has a number news releases dealing with topics that are important after a tornado strikes. Here is a sample of some of the news release available after Joplin was hit, and are still available now:

- Saving your food when the power goes off
- Tips for safe food preparation after a disaster
- Remedies exist for trees wounded by storm
- Take care using chain saws during storm recovery work
- Avoiding injury during post-disaster cleanup
- Protect yourself from contractor fraud
- Property loss from disasters may be tax deductible

The site also includes to relevant MU Extension publications and videos. For example:

- EMW1001, Statewide Disaster Response/Recovery Contact List
- EMW1011, Family Disaster Plan– A template to guide families through the process of developing a comprehensive disaster plan.
- EMW1012, Disaster Supplies Kit– A downloadable guide to gathering the supplies your family will need if a disaster strikes.
- EMW1015, Sizing and Safety Tips for Standby Power Generators
- EMW1016, Generator Safety Concerns Video
- EMW1019, Tornado Season: Are You Ready?
- EMW1021, Taking Shelter From the Storm: Safe Rooms Video
- EMW1022, Financial Recovery and Risk Management
- G1905, Is Your Family Prepared for an Earthquake?
- MP904, Resources for Your Flooded Home

For more information, visit one of these supportive websites as well.

- MU Extension Community Emergency Management Program (CEMP): http://extension.missouri.edu/cemp
- Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) resources: http://eden.lsu.edu

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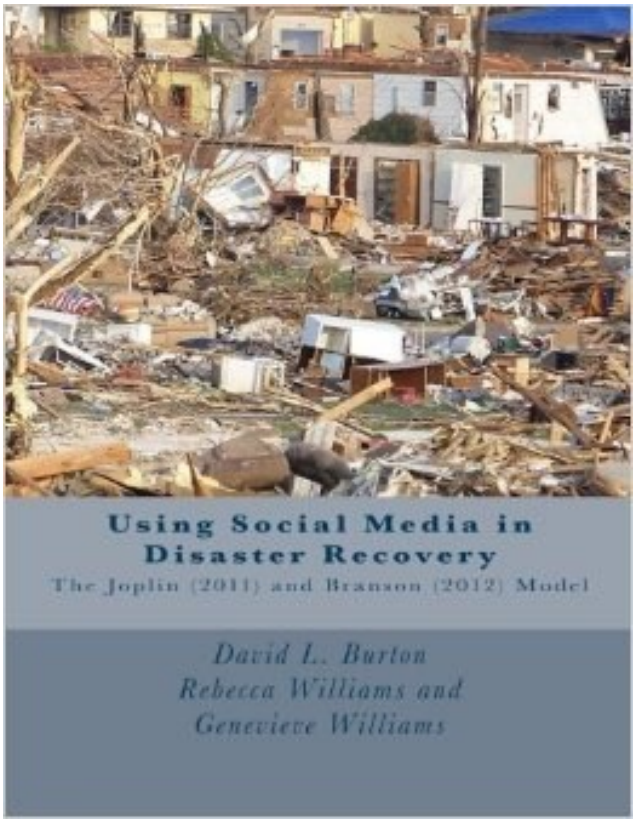

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Learn how Joplin Tornado Info started a national revolution in the use of social media during disaster recovery. It used to be that in the event of a natural disaster, people would tune in their radios. That may still hold true, but a newer form of technology proved a fruitful means of disseminating information after an EF-5 tornado hit Joplin, Mo. in May of 2011 and an EF-2 tornado skated across Branson on Feb. 29, 2012. Both events had something in common: a volunteer led effort to use social media to inform members of the public connect with needed resources and to help volunteers stay out of the way. This book also includes case studies of how what was learned was applied to Branson Tornado Info, Missouri Flood Info and others.