

Michael Coyle
Coquitlam Search and Rescue

SOCIAL MEDIA & SAR OPERATIONS





Introduction

- SAR Manager with Coquitlam SAR
 - member for 13 years
- Software engineer
 - doesn't help me understand SM
- Founded Coquitlam SAR's technology committee
- Using SM for several years with the team
- Some insights and lessons




Social Media

- Social media seems simple
 - it's just another way to communicate
- However, it connects one person to thousands and more.
- It accelerates communication.
- The *consequences* are complicated
- “Old media” not sure how to treat it sometimes
- Source of information, and misinformation




What problem does Social Media Solve?

- Communicate with public
 - Communicate with traditional media
 - Inform, educate, promote,
- 




Goals

- It helps to set some goals for your SM presence
 - Something to guide you
- 




Operationally

- Public information about a missing person
 - Help the SAR team find them
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Organizationally


- Public safety messaging
 - Educating public on role of SAR
 - Informing public about ongoing tasks
 - Participating as a member of the community
 - Fundraising
 - Interacting with other SAR agencies
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Example 1

- Lost person on Eagle Ridge
 - No family in town
- Media and SM alerted friend of missing
- Attended task and took care of subject's dog




Example 2

- 2 missing developmentally disabled women
 - Possibly on transit
 - Alert via Twitter & Facebook
 - on radio in 25-30 minutes
 - On the evening news
 - Continued to update on search progress
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Example 2 cont'd


- First subject found after a few hours
 - Second operational period
 - Lots of media attention
 - National news by that evening
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Example 2 cont'd


- After 76 hours, second subject located
- A tweet from outside the search
 - Monitoring radio
 - "Subject found, alive and well"
- In fact, this was not clear.
 - Medical condition needed to be assessed
 - Parents were not near command to be informed
 - Possibility of good news/bad news situation
- Tweet caused media frenzy
- Close to losing control of the situation

Example 3

- Trail runner, could have left area on bus
- Released image via media
 - under direction of RCMP
- Located at top of *spectacular* cliff
- **Non Coquitlam SAR members tweeted multiple pictures of subject from the field**
- Command & RCMP had made explicit decision not to release images of precarious position *prior to successful rescue.*




Example 3 cont'd

- Violation of command structure
 - Violation of subject's right to privacy
 - Did not serve an operational need
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Lessons

- If you don't "get in front" as the lead agency, media will relay on any source, no matter how ill informed.
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Lessons

- Social media policy can guide and inform members of their responsibilities toward the subject and the search effort
- Social Media goals go beyond an individual SAR group
- Legal implications
- RCMP investigation



Policy

- Coquitlam SAR has been guided by a SM policy in development since 2011
- Based on similar policies from law enforcement agencies, common sense, and a general understanding of privacy law
- Decision to make this a public document for the benefit of the community and transparency to the community.



Coquitlam SAR Social Media Policy



[http://www.coquitlam-sar.bc.ca
/initiatives
/social-media](http://www.coquitlam-sar.bc.ca/initiatives/social-media)



Summary

- Use social media to appear competent and professional by adhering to the law and principles of professionalism.
 - NOT A SOURCE OF BREAKING NEWS
 - Stay in front of the story especially when near large population centres
 - Have clear goals for use of SM to guide your agency.
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