

# Social media – good, bad or ugly?



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We all know that in tough freight rate times such as these, spending money on a media team by the company is understandably a low priority.



A competent crew member or diligent member of the shoreside team will know that on receiving a call from the media during an incident in which your ship may be involved, he will need to be careful not to comment and to pass the enquiry on to the company's incident team or key spokesman.

However, what about when crew members are sitting in their cabin or out of hours checking on their mobile device for the latest Facebook posting or Twitter feed and they see critical or disparaging comments online?

Sometimes the red mist will descend and a short, sharp, pithy message with a personal retort may seem like a good idea at the time. Or perhaps, more dangerously, responding to an innocent looking question posed to the company may cause significant problems later on. That simple question and answer may seem harmless until they get published, and extra damage control is then needed by the company. What happens if this goes 'viral' on the internet?

It is therefore important that all on-board crew members and shoreside staff are trained on how to handle social and mainstream media in every sense.

Each and every company employee is a public relations representative and thereby a crisis manager for your company – whether you want them to be or not. Any word from any employee can become the voice of the company in stressful times.

In this age of 24-hour media and social media, we recommend the following:

- Establish guidelines for what can and cannot be said during a crisis. This should apply to both traditional and social media
- Identify under what circumstances staff or crew are allowed to respond to enquiries and what types of questions they are permitted to answer – even when the enquiries come from a member of their own social network or inner family and circle of friends, who could pass it on innocently to the media
- Make sure crew and shoreside staff have easy access to the company's media management guidelines so that they know where and to whom they should refer potential enquiries, such as to a visible member of the communications team, incident response team or a dedicated web page. Make sure they know who is looking after your digital media for the awkward questions.

Consider possible worst case scenarios. Work out what the consequences might be for breaching these media management guidelines for you, your commercial partners and the individual. Remember that it is now far easier for the media to approach any one of your crew members or employees than ever before in a crisis. It is up to the responsible company to make sure that all staff understand what their particular role is within a crisis, as well as what is expected of them.