



WHAT IF YOU'RE TARGETED BY A 'WORST OF' LIST?

It was once easy to think of social and digital media as a nice sidelight to “real” information sources, but they are now a firmly established part of life. A basic tenet of crisis communications is a recognition that a crisis can hit at any time, from anywhere – and odds are that when it does, it will either be caused or fueled by online media.

And, yes, it can happen to you. The internet can turn every citizen into a “publisher,” so no municipality is immune to the political gadfly or unhappy citizen who decides to create a website dedicated to personal attacks on the city or individual officials.

So what do you do if your city ends up in the crosshairs of a disgruntled blogger or finds itself on one of those “Top 10 Worst (Whatever)” lists that seem to be everywhere?

The key is to have a crisis communications plan already in place – one that’s specific enough to provide meaningful guidance yet nimble enough to help you through even the most unlikely kind of crisis.

The FLCityGuard.com website, available to all Florida League of Cities members, offers effective tools that can help you navigate a communications storm. But here are some basic guidelines to consider:

1. Don't ignore the problem.

That doesn't always mean you need to respond publicly – sometimes, simply reaching out to an unhappy citizen can turn a foe into a friend (or at least a more reasonable foe).

2. Don't be afraid to push back.

Correct inaccuracies and untruths, and explain your position. But don't get personal in response, even if the criticism has been highly personal.

3. Meet your critics where they are.

If the attack is on Facebook or Twitter, respond there. If the criticism is in a blog article, respond in the comment section of that article. Don't, for example, use Facebook to respond to a blog article because you might inadvertently introduce the criticism to an audience that hadn't seen it before.

4. Show your humanity.

Don't be bureaucratic in your response, instead expressing your position in a simple but straightforward manner. Don't be overly emotional, but show it matters to you that people understand your actions.

5. Have a plan.

Your city should have a broad crisis communications plan in place, and your response to social media attacks should reflect the overall strategies embodied in that plan.

Learn more about crisis communications, including examples of how to develop a crisis communications plan, at FLCityGuard.com.

FLCityGuard Crisis Communication Workshop – Central Florida May 27 in Lake Mary

Half-Day Event – recommended for city managers, police chiefs, public information officers, and city attorneys

Registration is open for this FREE interactive workshop! This hands-on training is designed to help city leaders across Central Florida effectively communicate with the media and key audiences when bad news breaks. Our expert guidance may just help you protect your city's most important asset – its hard-earned reputation and good name. You can watch attendees of a similar workshop in February discuss what they learned in [this video](#). Register online by [clicking here](#).

For more crisis information, visit FLCityGuard.com.

FLCityGuard.com requires login credentials. To access the site, use this formula:
Username: (enter the name of your city, ex. Port St Joe)
Password: (enter flc followed by your city hall zip code, ex. flc32399)
For assistance logging in, please contact Jenna Tala at Jtala@flcities.com

