

Media Training Joins Technology Training for Emergency Managers, Emergency Operations Centers & Public Information Officers

Hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and forest fires have Emergency Managers, Emergency Operations Centers and Public Information Officers in high demand for telephone interviews with the Weather Channel, CNN and other media outlets.

So why is it, with the wealth of official knowledge available from Emergency Operations Centers and Public Information Officers, the Weather Channel suddenly cuts away during Tropical Storm Lee to interview some yahoo resident standing in flood waters at his home in Mandeville, Louisiana?

The answer? Because I'm the yahoo, I'm in rising floodwaters, and I have an iPad with Skype and Wi-Fi. In short, they picked me because I'm more visual in person on the scene than you are in your command center on the phone.

Times are changing and Emergency Managers and Public Information Officers need to take action now to change with the times.

This means you should take these 3 steps:

- 1) Get the right technology now.
- 2) Get training on how to use the new technology.
- 3) Schedule a Media Training class to help you better answer questions from the news anchors during your interview.

Doing one without the others is dangerous. You must do all three because operating and holding the technology while being a spokesperson is a daunting, multitasking event that goes beyond anything you've done before. There is no camera crew. You are the camera crew. There is no producer. You are the producer.

Technology

iPhones, iPads and laptops, with a built in video camera, top the list of the technology you need. Using these for a live interview means you need to be connected to the Internet and you need the free Skype application available at skype.com. Under the right conditions, you can also Skype from your smart phone with a cellular phone signal.

Skype works just like a telephone, except it allows your voice call to become a video call. A network producer will phone you, you answer, switch on the video feature and you are ready for your live broadcast.

During Tropical Storm Lee, Lake Pontchartrain, north of New Orleans, pushed 3 feet of water into my lakefront yard. From my front porch 10 feet above the water you could see spectacular 5-10 foot waves crashing over the sea wall. Using my iPad, with Wi-Fi and Skype, I was able to take television viewers to the heart of the story. I held the iPad

at arm's length, and to the television audience, the scene was as good as the one being provided by the Weather Channel's own correspondent, who was tethered to a million dollar satellite truck and \$60,000 digital video camera. Producers even put me first on the broadcast, ahead of their own reporter in New Orleans, because nothing was happening where he was, while I had crashing waves and flooding.

Wi-Fi, Skype and iPads can be temperamental. On one live shot I strayed too far from the Wi-Fi and Skype froze live on the air. Keeping the iPad dry is another challenge in rain. Then, when the wind started howling and drowning out the voice of the anchors, I switched to my laptop, with a built in web cam and USB Skype headphones with an attached microphone. I could hear them better and they could hear me better.

Depending upon weather conditions, you may wish to give up the Wi-Fi and use a direct wire to the Internet for a stronger signal.



Periodically between the live interviews, I used my iPhone and iPad to take video of the flooding, walking well beyond the range of my Wi-Fi. I then used the Internet to upload the footage, making me a triple threat: I had great video; I had a great on-the-

scene location; and I had the technology and information to communicate effectively at a critical time.

Technology Training

There are two parts to the technology training. Part one is learning which keys to push and what applications to use. Part two is having the talent to manage the technology, while holding the technology and conducting an intelligent interview with the news anchors. This can be tricky.

You have no margin for error when you are both managing the technology and the interview on live network television. For that reason you need to combine the training to practice using the equipment, while holding it yourself, while talking.

The technology training needs to also include how to shoot additional video at the scenes of your worst events. That means learning how to hold your camera phone or iPad perfectly still, as well as knowing when to "pan" or turn the camera to enhance the video that you provide to the network. These days, the media will use even well composed still photos from a smart phone. Just remember, the more professional it looks, the better your chances are that it will get used over the stuff from the yahoo on his front porch.

Media Training

Annual Media Training should be standard operating procedure for every Emergency Manager and Public Information Officer. Talking to the media is a skill much like playing sports; you must practice on a regular basis and increase the intensity each time in order to master it.

When you combine it with technology training, you will learn how to hold the iPad, iPhone or laptop at the proper distance so your arms don't show. Next, you need to learn how to "frame the shot" so that the television network sees both you and what is going on behind you. Then, you need to learn where to look, since the web cam on these devices usually tends to be off to one side or the top or bottom. Looking good goes hand in hand with looking intelligent and sounding intelligent. Likewise, saying what is most important upfront is critical, because your live shot will likely last only 90 seconds.

In the world of crisis communications, expect live interviews on the scene via Skype to become the norm. Soon you'll see television stations interviewing police officers from crime scenes and first responders being interviewed from the scene of disasters.

This technology shouldn't stop with just the media. It also lets you post videos and interviews to YouTube, Facebook and your own website, so your public, your employees, and the media all have access to the best, up-to-date information.

Powerful communications before a crisis and rapid communications during a crisis has the ability to move people out of harm's way. This type of life savings critical communications depends upon you learning to do your part.

About the author:

Gerard Braud (Jared Bro) is known as the guy to call when "it" hits the fan. He is an expert in media training and crisis communications plans, as well as the author of *Don't Talk to the Media Until... 29 Secrets You Need to Know Before You Open Your Mouth to the Media*. Organizations on five continents have called on him to help them master effective communications in critical times. He can be reached at www.braudcommunications.com To view his Tropical Storm reports, do a Google Search for Gerard Braud Tropical Storm Lee.