

The social media gap in crisis communications



A survey reveals how more than 400 organizations view social media within the context of their overall crisis and emergency communications planning.

Executive Summary

Everbridge conducted a survey of over 400 organizations spanning a variety of public and private sectors to see how emergency and crisis communications planners incorporate social media as part of their communications strategy with key stakeholders such as employees, customers and the general public. Among the organizations surveyed were 125 corporate, 115 government and 84 healthcare entities.

Respondents were asked whether they include social media such as Facebook and Twitter within their emergency communications strategy, whether they plan to do so (also why or why not), and how social media fits in with their other tools such as landline phone, mobile phone and email. Respondents were also asked about the growing role of mobile versus landline channels and how social media fits into that trend.

Key takeaways are:

- + Judging from both their strategies and their social media experience, communications planners recognize social media's value even if they don't actually use it in emergencies.
- + The only "plan" that most organizations have regarding social media's use in a crisis or event is to not have a formal plan, i.e., 58% of respondents had no plan.
- + During an emergency, organizations are likely to use all means of communications, with social media playing a significant role.
- + For those organizations that do not plan on how to use social media, two predominant concerns account for over 80%.
- + Weather and natural disaster are the most commonly feared events and emergency plans need to be optimized for them.
- + More than 3 out of 4 crisis communications professionals view the ability to manage incident/emergency communications using mobile devices as a requirement.
- + Mobile devices are an important contact path, while many deem landline phones as increasingly unreliable for emergency communications.
- + As a real-time communications channel, social media is starting to catch up to email, phone and radio.
- + Social media should have a role in emergency and crisis communications, according to respondents.

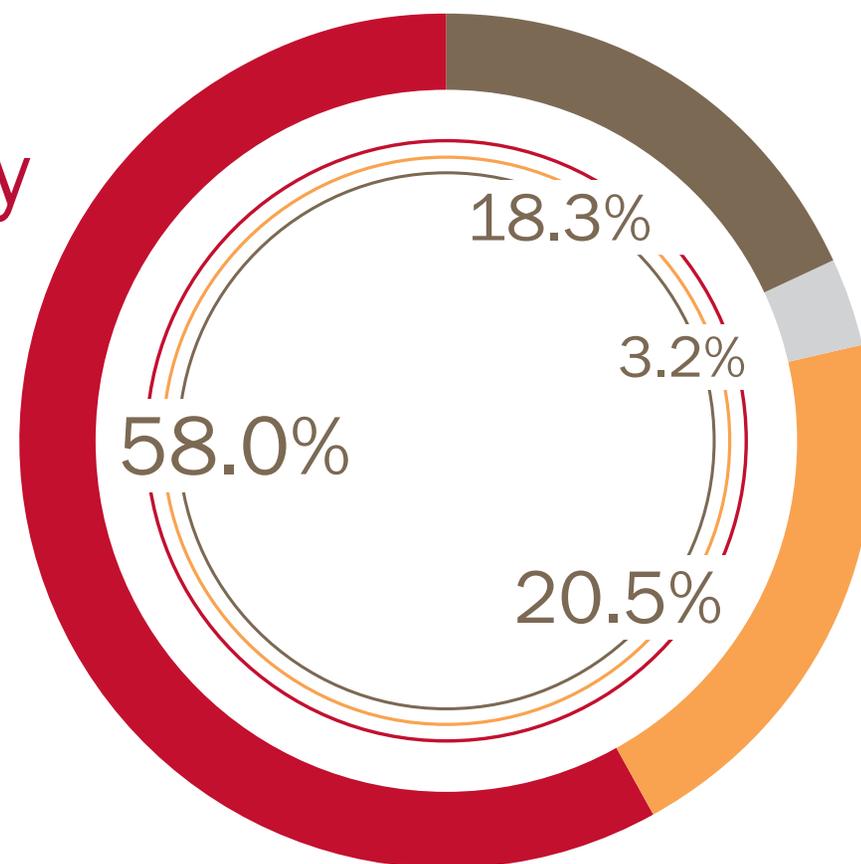
It is clear emergency communications planners value social media, particularly in a mobile world. Their challenge is to build a communications plan that includes the ability to gather intelligence and communicate with key stakeholders using social media and mobile technologies.

Table of Contents

- + Part 1: Social media use in an emergency 4
- + Part 2: Why is social media not in more crisis communications plans? 5
- + Part 3: Should social media be in your emergency communications plan? 6
- + Part 4: Channel usage in crisis communications – corporate vs. government..... 7
- + Part 5: Mobile’s importance for real-time emergency communications 8
- + Part 6: Real-time emergency communications channels used.....10
- + Part 7: What you want to tell your boss about social media.....11
- + Summary: Changing attitudes toward social media in crisis communications12

Social media use in an emergency

- No plans
- Just to communicate
- Just to gather information
- Both to communicate and gather information

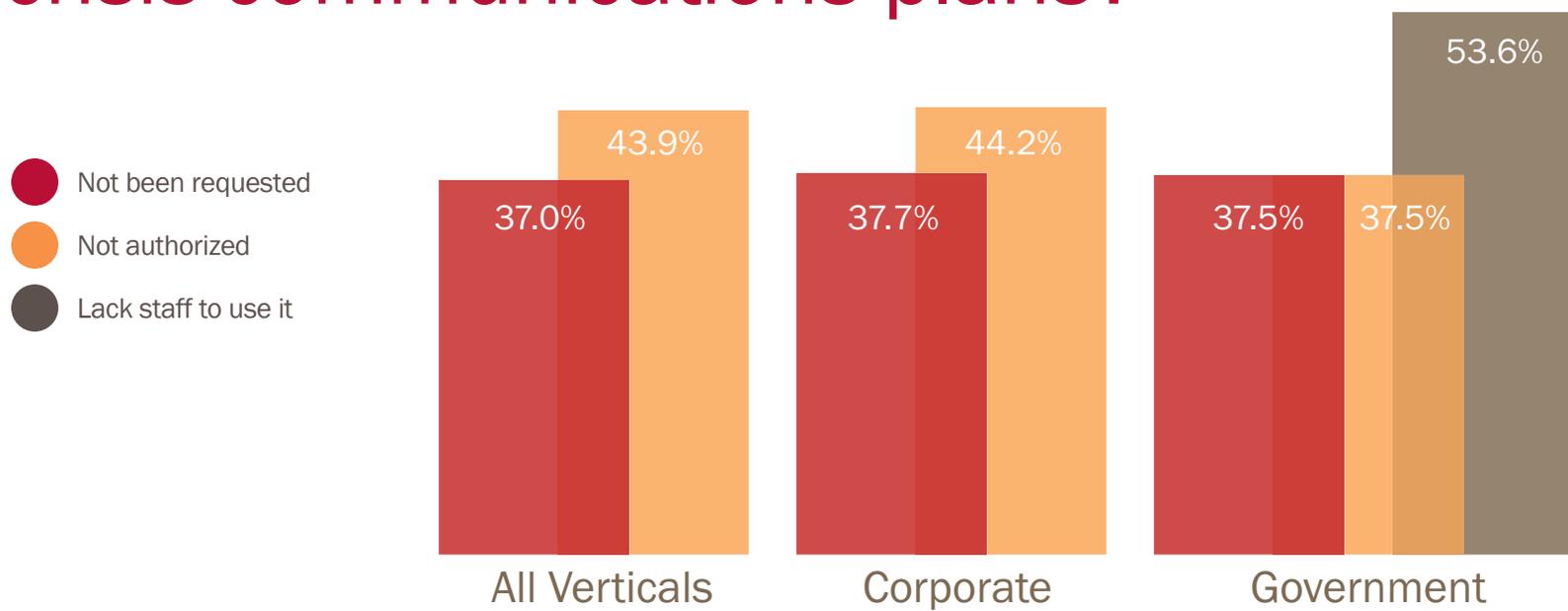


Most organizations (58%) surveyed across all industries do not have a plan for how to use social media during crises or events. About half of the remainder (20.5% of those surveyed) use it to both communicate information about an incident, such as to employees, customers and the public, as well as to gather information about the incident. A slightly smaller portion (18.3%) use social media just to communicate while only a few (3.2%) use it just to gather information.

Key takeaway:

The only “plan” that most organizations have regarding social media’s use in a crisis or event is to *not* have a formal plan.

Why is social media not in more crisis communications plans?



Of those organizations that said they did not have a plan to use social media during an event or crisis the two most frequently cited reasons across all industries were that emergency coordinators had: 1) not been authorized (43.9%) to communicate using social media, and 2) had not been asked (37.0%) to include social media in their planning. (Respondents could list multiple reasons.)

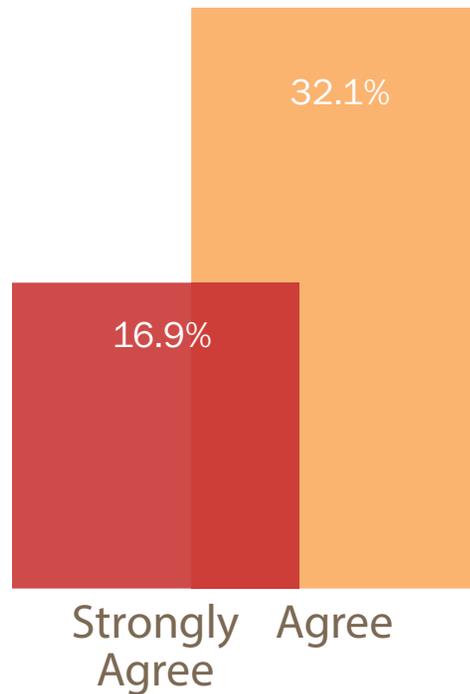
The responses were somewhat different for government. Here respondents cited “do not have the staff to use it” most often (53.6%) – with the number 2 reason a tie (at 37.5% each) between “not authorized and “not requested.”

Key takeaway:

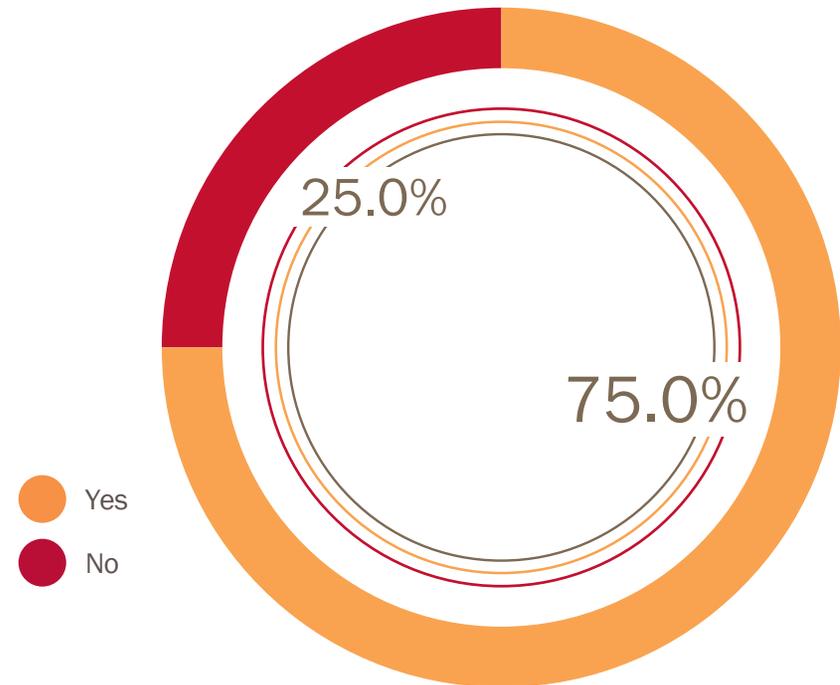
Across verticals, two factors (not authorized, not requested) account for over 80% of the reasons organizations cite for not planning to use social media in a disaster – except in government where staffing constraints are also cited as key reason by more than half respondents.

Should social media be in your emergency communications plan?

The ability to integrate social media into your incident/emergency communications strategy is a high priority.



Has your community/organization ever found helpful or surprising information on social media?



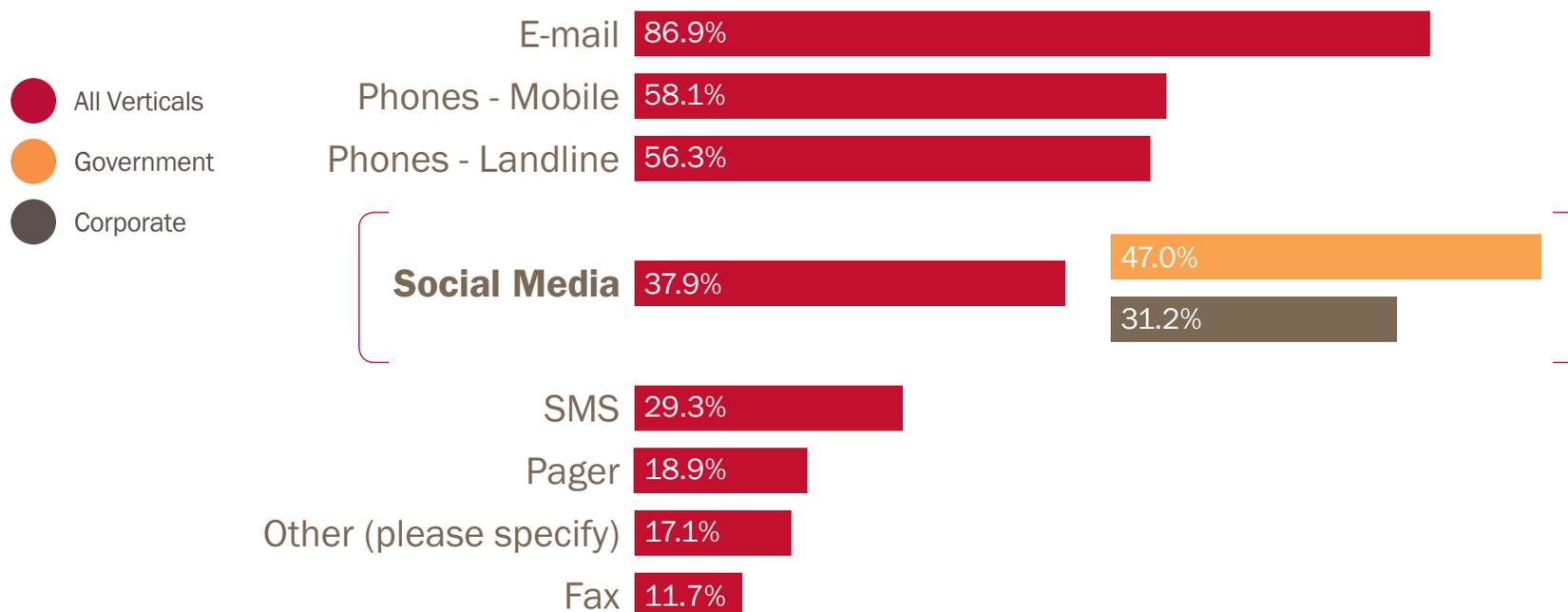
Almost half (49%) of surveyed organizations agree that social media is a necessary component in their emergency communications strategy. That's not surprising given that more than a third (39.2%) said they have learned about an incident or crisis from social media prior to learning about it from official sources while three quarters also said they have learned "helpful or surprising information on social media."

Key takeaway:

Judging from both their strategies and their social media experience, communications planners recognize social media's value even if they don't actually use it in emergencies.

Channel usage in crisis communications — corporate vs. government

Which of the following channels do you regularly use when communicating with your target audience(s)?



Emergency communications professionals use a wide variety of channels to reach out to their key constituents. Email, landline phone and mobile phone were the only channels that each get over 50% usage for both groups, with mobile phones slightly edging out landline phones. In both sectors, social media came in fourth, although the usage ranking was much higher for government (47%) than for corporate (31.2%).

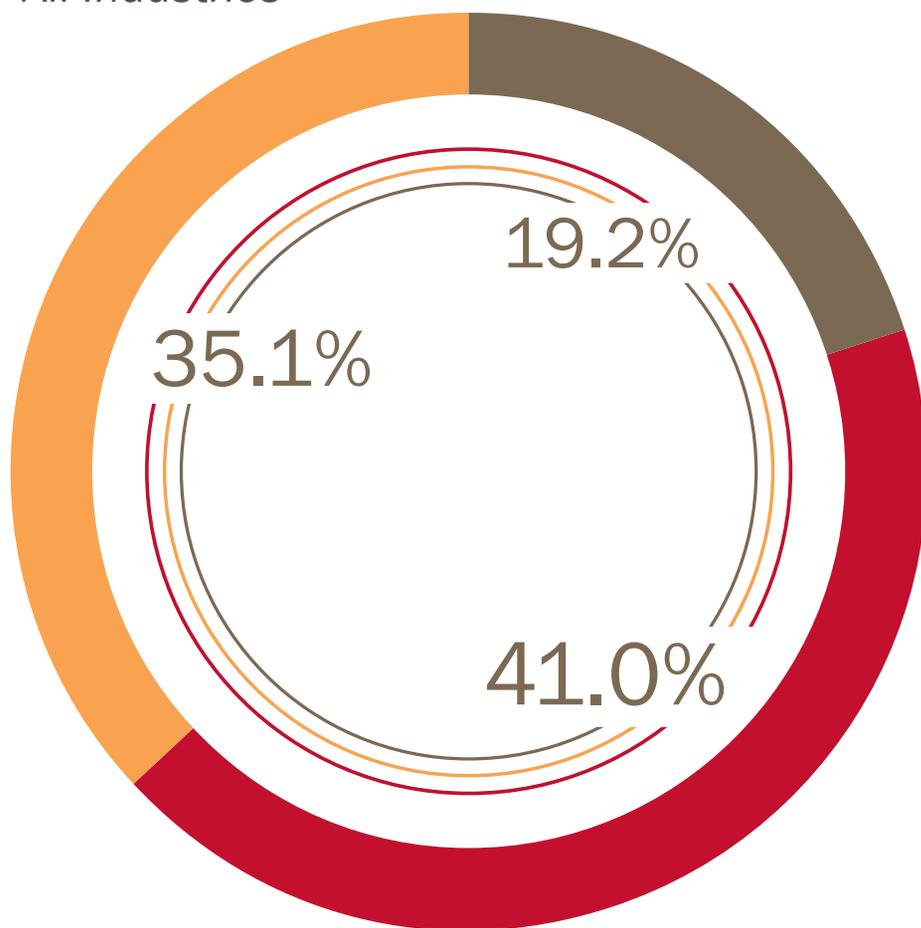
Key takeaway:

During an emergency, organizations utilize multiple paths to reach their audience, with social media playing a significant role.

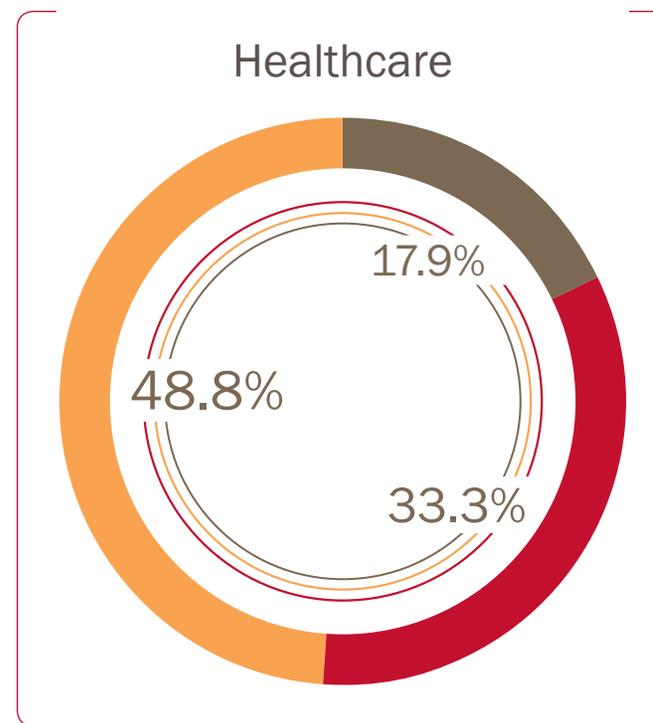
Mobile's importance for real-time emergency communications

In 2012, the ability to manage incident/emergency communications using mobile devices is a requirement.

All Industries



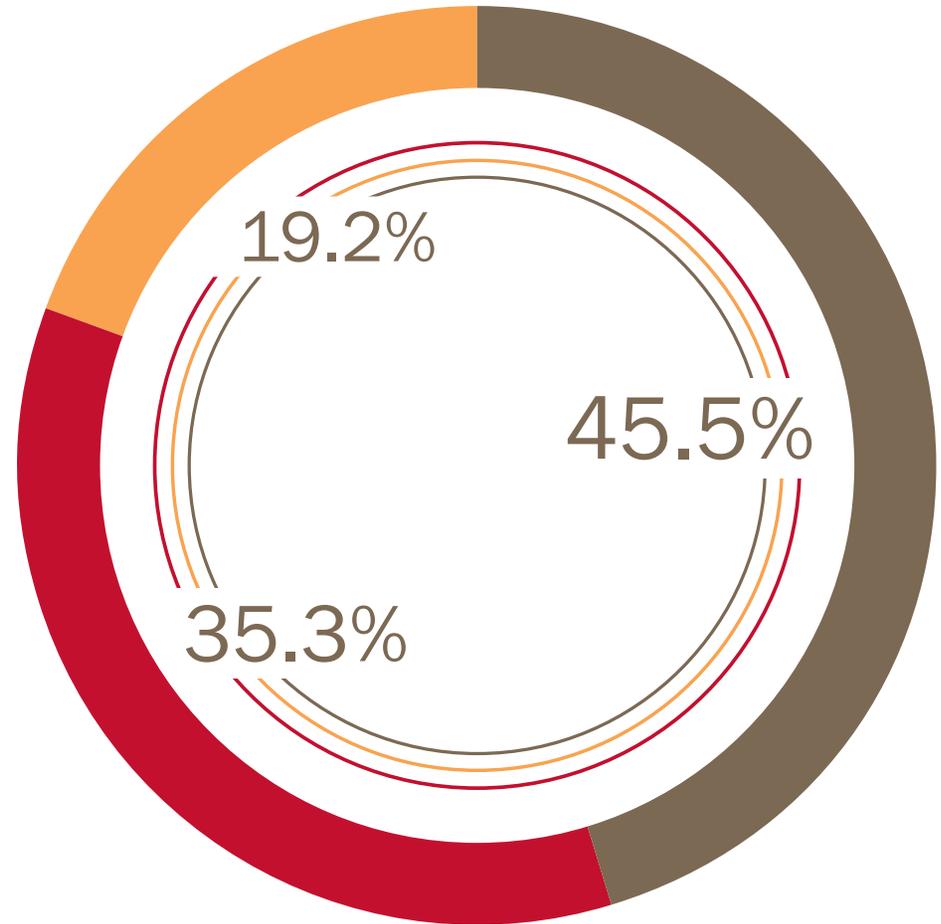
Healthcare



- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Disagree or No Opinion

Relying on landline phones to reach people during a crisis is not as reliable as it used to be

- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Disagree or No Opinion



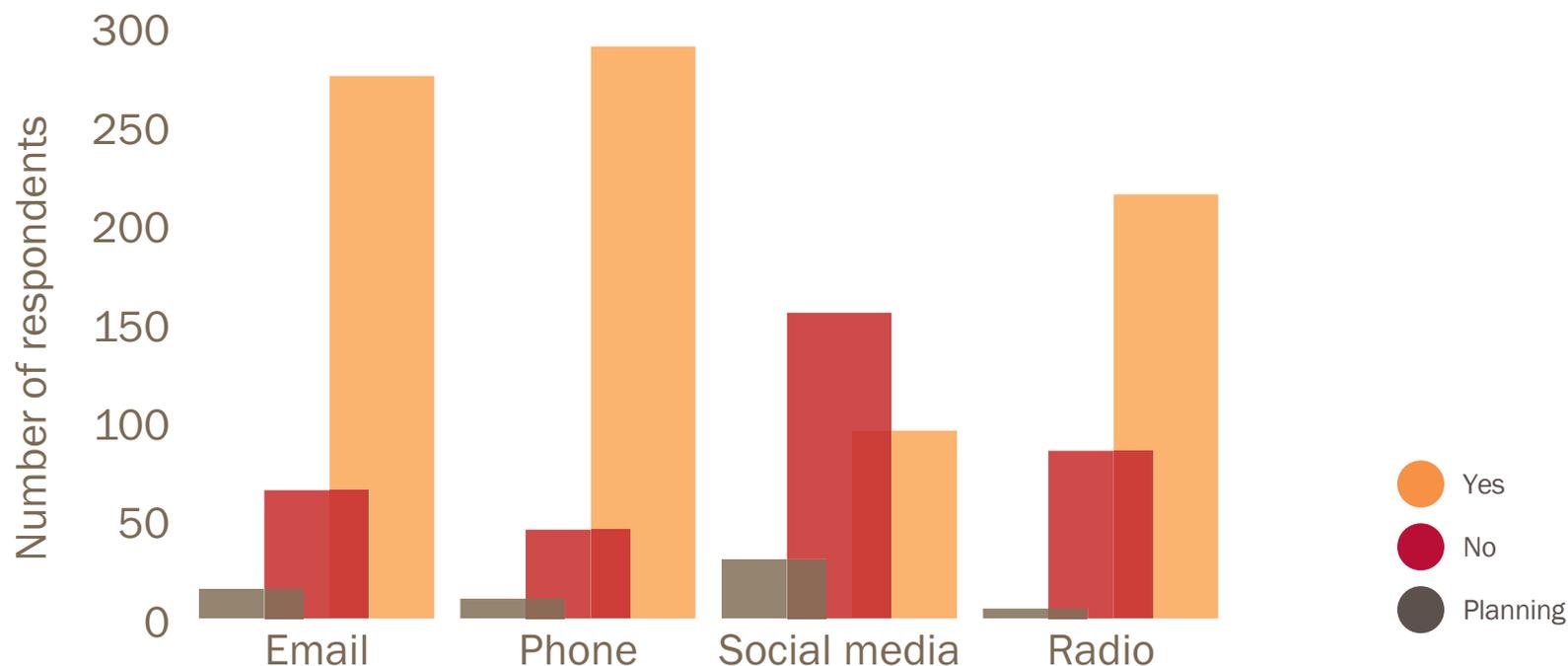
Three-quarters of respondents (76.1%) agree or strongly agree that mobile is a critical element of a crisis communications program — a figure that increases to over 80% for healthcare respondents. At the same time, most respondents (84.5%) question the reliability of landline phones during a crisis. Mobile devices are critical to the success of any emergency plan for both managing an emergency event and as a delivery contact path where respondents can access SMS, email, and voice calls.

Key takeaway:

Mobile is a necessary component for all emergency communications plan, while many deem landline phones as unreliable.

Real-time emergency communications channels used

Does your notification plan include using real-time two-way communications via...?



Emergency communications planners rely heavily on real-time communications channels to reach stakeholders during an incident, with email, phone and radio dominating. Social media is starting to gain adoption, and is the channel respondents most often described as “planning to adopt.”

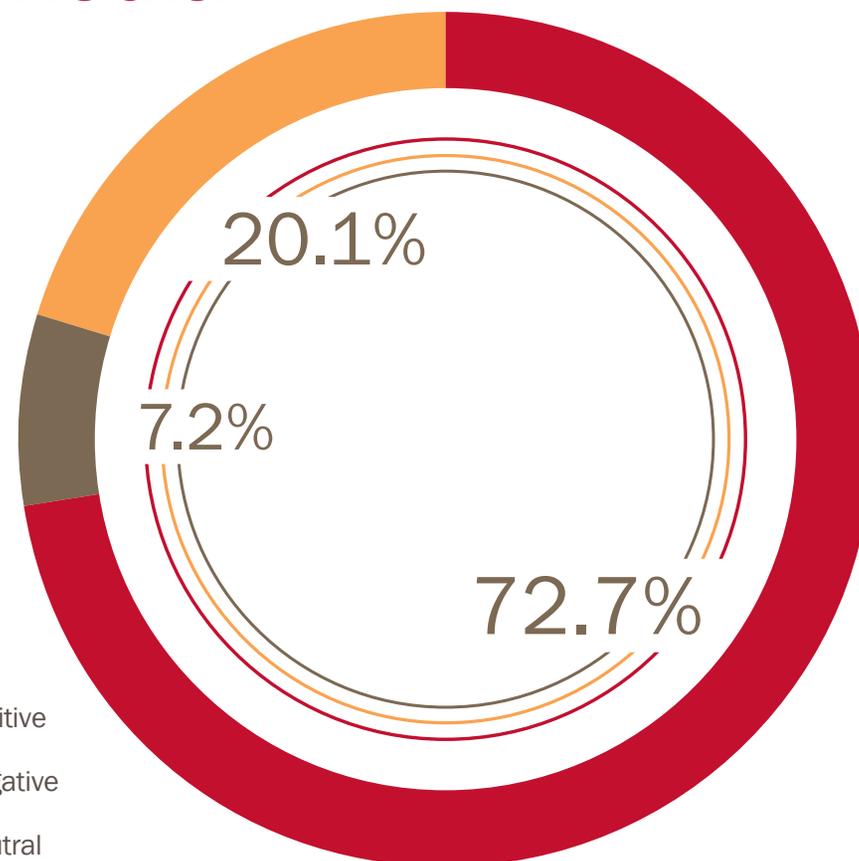
Key takeaway:

As a real-time communications channel, social media is emerging as a viable two-way communications path.

What you want to tell your boss about social media

Positive:

- + “We should be taking advantage of the use of social media for communicating with our customers.”
- + “This is something we should probably look into.”
- + “Looking at the usage of social media these days, the effectiveness of crisis communication using social media will be immense.”
- + “We should be deliberately pushing social media notifications as a part of our crisis communication protocol.”
- + “We need to invest. It’s not the future, it’s now.”
- + “It is a great tool to use to reach out and inform a wide range of people in a short amount of time about an incident.”



A solid majority of respondents (72.7%) would recommend that social media become part of the organization’s emergency response game plan, as indicated by their positive statements such as those listed here. Only a small fraction (7.2%) made statements that they oppose social media’s use in emergency communications. The remainder (20.1%) made statements that did not indicate a position or indicated a neutral position.

Key takeaway:

People see the value of social media and believe it should have a role in emergency and crisis communications.

Changing attitudes toward social media in crisis communications

The picture that emerges is that, when it comes to communicating with people during a crisis or incident, organizations are right now in the process of adjusting to a much different communications environment than the one that existed just a few years ago. Today, people with whom organizations need to connect are now much more reachable via mobile technology. Social media has also become a valuable source sharing and responding to news and information during a crisis. The fact that over half of surveyed organizations have not yet integrated social media into their emergency communications, despite the widespread interest, suggests a challenge with leadership understanding the evolution and applicability of technology and social media.

In order to help you incorporate social media into your communications strategy, we've pulled together this checklist to help you put in place a successful social media plan. If you don't have a plan for how to use social media in a crisis or event, use this checklist to build the support you need within your organization.

Your Checklist to Get Started with Social Media in Emergency Communications Planning

- + Have a plan for how you want to include social media in your emergency communications plans.
- + Bring together a team of people who already use social media in their personal lives to help.
- + Learn the rules and norms for each platform.
- + Establish connections with people, groups, local and national organizations to share information and help spread your communications.
- + Monitor keywords and entities that are most meaningful to your organization.
- + Collect intelligence from the 'field' using social media and mobile devices.
- + Build message maps for your top events that are specific to each social media channel before you need them.
- + Keep your social media messages brief, pertinent, and timely.
- + Remember that social media is an important 2-way channel, but it does not replace any of your other contact paths and should be used in concert with those.
- + Practice using social media before you need it in a crisis.

For more information on how to get started, get in touch with one of our solution experts at www.everbridge.com/contact-us.