

# The Use of Social Media for Disaster Recovery

*Lessons learned while creating and managing  
“Joplin Tornado Info” (2011) on Facebook and further  
implemented with “Branson Tornado Info” (2012)*



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**Guidelines written by Rebecca and Genevieve Williams of Neosho, Mo., the founders of Joplin Tornado Info. Publication edited and designed by David Burton, civic communication specialist, University of Missouri Extension.**

**This publication will be updated periodically. (3/7/12) Version 1.3 .**

# The Use of Social Media for Disaster Recovery

*Lessons learned while creating and managing “Joplin Tornado Info” (2011) on Facebook and further implemented with “Branson Tornado Info” (2012)*

## INTRODUCTION

**First and foremost**, do not even attempt to set up a disaster recovery site unless you are fully prepared to devote yourself 24/7 to the effort.

**Secondly**, do not undertake this project unless you have reliable help. Social Media in a major disaster should not be taken on by a single individual. It is not a 9 to 5, Monday thru Friday task because these sites do not manage themselves. Collectively, the five person core team for Joplin Tornado Info was experienced in professional social media management, marketing, PR, crisis intervention, IT, journalism, copywriting, construction, logistics, nursing, and meteorology, no one person could have covered all of this effectively.

As soon as it was possible, administrators from utility companies, city officials, and other official groups were added. Social Media for disaster recovery required many hands, with one or two dedicated “supervisors” of the Facebook page. Do not undertake a project of this scope unless you are certain you can follow through as long as it takes. Chances are, you will be signing on to do this for several months. It is impossible to know at the beginning of a disaster, the scope of the situation.

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If you don't have what you need to run a site, **DON'T START ONE**. JTI was created on an iPhone and largely run using an HP mini. Do not ask your community for your supplies. If you need something you don't have to function, tap a volunteer that has the needed equipment and move on. Avoid cluttering the disaster relief effort with you own needs.

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**Our administrators were entirely volunteer.** *Self-promotion was strictly prohibited. We endorsed no specific church, charity, organization or entity.* We encouraged JTI community members to “give of your time, talents, energy, and monetary donations to the group of your choice”.

**Our mission was to be a clearing house for information, aid communication, and ‘connect the dots’ between needs and resources, not to champion any specific organization.** JTI did not have any affiliations, rarely censored community posts, was unbiased, and encouraged honest dialogue within the community.

**We found that faith based organizations, groups and individuals were the lifeblood of the JTI community and the recovery efforts,** we linked up and cooperated with, and followed as many government agencies and entities as were available but in no way relied on them. Help with the Joplin effort came from outside the region, including help with the JTI page. Through the internet, social media disaster volunteers can do tasks effectively from hundreds of miles away.

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**We believe that in order for a page like this to be successful, it must be participated in by all organizations working toward disaster recovery.**

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We believe that in order for a page to be successful, it must be participated in by all organizations working toward disaster recovery. With one source that is dedicated to the disaster, not only is it easier to find, it is unbiased and gains user trust. This source has no other purpose than to be a “go between” from individuals (fans, followers) to organizations, this should be managed by someone that has no other purpose. No other sources for this exist, as media outlets are commercial, and all other groups are heavily tasked during this time.

There will be no calls for monetary donations to specific organizations (although general calls for donations with a list of trusted groups included in the post are acceptable and encouraged). All organizations will be treated equally, they are all part of a larger system to be treated as a whole. This page must be citizen/ volunteer run. Although many of the guidelines provided are helpful when running any page focusing on disaster relief and recovery.

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## BEST PRACTICES:

- **Don't be afraid to make mistakes because you will.**
- **Save contact info for everyone** you contact in a meaningful way, however it works for you. Many people will find an Excel spreadsheet works well. We found it is best to have at least two copies.
- **Always refer to an official source.** Find multiple Facebook page administrators from multiple agencies (We had around 30 at our peak). Have administrators claim ownership of their posts with an initial, first name, or group identifier.
- **Create a Facebook Group** and include all page administrators. This creates a dialogue between administrative volunteers. Monitor all administrative posts for accuracy and scandal. If correction of an administrator is necessary do it via private message, or phone call.
- **Staff the page 24/7 until rescues are complete, basic needs are met, utilities and communication are restored.** This will take about 96 hours with a typical natural disaster. Tap night owls to staff the page overnight. Disasters don't rest, neither will you.
- Remember to include **who, what, when, where, how, and why** in your posts and verify all the information you post. Call phone numbers to make sure you have the correct numbers posted.
- **Strive to do your best**, but don't be too concerned about grammar. Getting the information out there is more important than getting it out perfectly.



- **Watch the speed of your "timeline,"** you may need to repost vital information frequently so it isn't lost in the shuffle. Timelines move fast so reposting the same information during the day is a good idea. Social Media Sites dedicated with disaster recovery attract all demographics including those totally unfamiliar with the use of social media, be patient. Of course, there is such a thing as too many posts. Pace yourself when possible.

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- **Check your ego at the door.** Seriously. Not everyone will understand what you are doing or want to be part of it. Move on to someone that does.
- **Never speak ill of other organizations**, even when they deserve it.
- **This is a crisis not a contest.** Don't be afraid to borrow from other groups and don't be upset when you are borrowed from. Fan all pertinent pages, repost and share. Also, follow what fans are posting. Give shout outs to groups both official and unofficial that are on the ground operating and accomplishing something. Reach out to other groups and promote their pages if they seem legitimate. Ask them to promote your page. If you sense something fishy cut ties ASAP.
- **Check every group or person offering help before posting it.** Some groups will offer resources that are idiot-loops and a waste of time. If a person is on a cell phone with a dying battery at ground zero, minutes are crucial when seeking help.
- **Use and encourage the use of common sense.** Avoid hearsay and clear up rumors; address the BS head on. Squelch know rumors. Avoid sensationalism. Refer to those affected as survivors instead of victims. Be sensitive, would you want to read that 20 bodies bags were being sent to the apartment complex your loved one lives in? Delete/ban (if necessary) inflammatory remarks, spam, self promotion, sensationalism and false or unverifiable information. We chose to hide all pages promising a monetary donation for each new like (such as \$1 per like). No flying fairies on the pages either (ie pictures of cats, cherubs, teddy bears playing guitar etc). They don't contribute to recovery and waste vital space.
- A successful page is a team effort so volunteer administrators are needed. However, **don't give administrative privileges to someone you have not at least talked with in advance.** Make sure they understand the goals of your page and guidelines in advance.
- **It is always a good idea to be thinking about this type of community page in advance of an actual disaster.** Joplin was hit suddenly and the community page developed quickly over the next 12 hours. In the case of Branson, a page was

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**Remember, you are a resource for those affected first, a resource for their families second, a resource for the surrounding area third .**

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already in place so when the tornado hit during the air morning hours, people were already using it as a way to communicate and share information.

- **Remember, you are a resource for those affected first, a resource for their families second, a resource for the surrounding area third .**

### **Template for first ten posts on a community disaster page:**

1. Official word of disaster occurrence.
2. If searching for a loved one or if you think someone is searching for you, please register at [safeandwell.org](http://safeandwell.org) this is a valid, trusted source.
3. First word of triage centers and shelters.
4. Evacuation details.
5. Ask for reports and photos. This is useful for organizations assessing the scope of the situation. Smart phones have made it easier to gather this information from the people most impacted.
6. Emergent needs from your community ie “there are limbs blocking main street and we can’t get to the triage center”.
7. Volunteer status should be shared over and over. Is the situation stable enough to allow volunteers? Volunteers are vital and can be of most help if they arrive prepared. Encourage them not to self deploy, instruct them to be self sufficient and make plans (work opportunities and lodging) in advance. Work gloves, work clothes, masks, goggles and other PPE often need to be supplied by the volunteer.



8. Ask your community to share your link and your info so it can reach the largest number of people and do the most good. Let your community know that you are dependent on them to post, respond to needs.

9. Post a disclaimer on a regular basis. In Joplin and Branson both, we regularly posted: “JTI endorses no particular church, charity or organization. We encourage you to give of your time, tal-

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ents and money to the group of your choice as you are able”. Include your contact info and intentions to be an information clearinghouse.

10. List of needs: *Sample Chronological List after the Joplin Tornado*

- Rescue and Triage
- Reuniting survivors with their loved ones
- First aid supplies; Bandages, antiseptic, etc.
- Water and Food (including infant formula, baby food, diabetic & celiac meals)
- Communication aids
- Medication
- Feminine products, diapers, toilet paper, wet wipes and hand sanitizer paper towels and bleach
- Clothing/Shoes (This is an immediate need only and tends to be met quickly)
- Pet Shelters, pet food and supply distribution points
- Tarps, tools and PPE
- Storage containers, boxes, sharpies, duct tape & packing tape
- Emotional needs
- Can openers and food storage containers.
- Personal Hygiene, laundry facilities
- Donation logistics and storage
- Food lodging and transportation for disaster workers, non profit workers and volunteers
- Mobile device charging and wifi locations
- Once basic needs are met, utilities and communication are restored needs will change. *Generally basic infrastructure is well on its way to being restored within 96 hours.*

## **TOOLS WE SUGGEST YOU USE:**

- Create a [Gmail](#) account to be used to access the other sites you will create.
- Use [google voice](#) phone number for the page main contact number. DO NOT GIVE OUT YOUR PERSONAL NUMBER.
- Twitter-use hashtags to your advantage, employ a [crowdmap](#) type service to track needs and supplies.
- Use [google documents](#) (these can be edited by anyone). The spreadsheets we used had shelters, distribution points, triage centers, information lines, as well as what was going on at each organization, representatives from each center could access and edit this list in real time.
- Use USAF blog flowchart or a similar source. Use geolocation as much as possible, include [google places](#) links in posts for new shelters and distribution centers.
- Use Wikis and other open source applications.
- Use Flickr.com for posting, sharing and tagging photos with ease.
- Sign up for [google alerts](#), use this to keep up to speed on what is happening via traditional news sources.



## **BACKGROUND**

JOPLIN TORNAOD INFO (JTI) was founded less than two hours after an EF-5 tornado hit Joplin on May 22, 2011. Visit JTI's website [joplintornado.info](http://joplintornado.info) for more info (donated by Joel Clark). JTI and it's affiliates are staffed entirely by volunteers and accept no donations. David Burton, with University of Missouri Extension, was among the first five administrative volunteers and provided MU Extension resources and information on a 24-hour basis. He worked with the web-site founders on additional technical and community development issues as the days unfolded and has remained an active administrator long after the storm.

When Branson was hit by a tornado on Feb. 29, 2012, it was Burton who had a page in place at the beginning and then started to enlist help from other volunteers. He turned to Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, founders of JTI, for their expertise and assistance. In the process of managing that page they agreed that the guidelines used with JTI needed to be written down and shared with others.

The guidelines for using social media for disaster recovery was written by Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, the founders of Joplin Tornado Info. Their first-hand experience caused them to keep information about lessons learned that led to this publication. This information was edited by David Burton, a community development specialist with University of Missouri Extension. If you have questions or comments please email the authors at [joplintornadoinfo@gmail.com](mailto:joplintornadoinfo@gmail.com)

This publication will be updated periodically. (3/4/12) Version 1.1 .

About JTI

Offshoot of JTI Community Facebook page. Follow us for updates on the relief, recovery, and rebuilding efforts in Joplin, Mo following the devastation caused by the May, 22 2011 Tornado.



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# The Story of JOPLIN TORNADO INFO

BY REBECCA WILLIAMS

“ST. JOHN’S HAS BEEN HIT THAT’S ALL WE KNOW FOR SURE”.

**May 22, 2011 7:26 p.m.**  
**First Joplin Tornado Info post**

We heard the KSN news anchors beg people to take cover, and then take cover themselves. It was obvious Joplin was being hit by a tornado. Neosho and Joplin are close-knit communities and only 16 miles apart. How bad was it in Joplin? A friend that works at St. John's Hospital posted on Facebook it had been hit. How could we find accurate information about what was going on? We searched the internet and found virtually nothing of help. We don't remember for certain how it happened but within the hour, at my coffee table using an iPhone, Joplin Tornado Info was born. When the page was started we had no idea we had just signed on as a communication link for one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history. By sunrise the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the breadth and scope of what had happened became clear.

Across town, unbeknownst to us, an acquaintance Joel Clark had launched joplintornado.info website. None of us can remember exactly how we connected and merged JTI Facebook with joplintornado.info but it happened within the first 48 hours.

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People ask what was different about the Joplin response and what led FEMA to applaud the rescue and recovery. I would say the can-do and help-your-neighbor attitude of the people of the area, the on the spot response of area faith based organizations, the overwhelming support of the people of the region and the nation, and the presence of social media were deciding factors. This is the story of one social media outlet: Joplin Tornado Info.

The tornado hit at 5:41 p.m. At 7:36 p.m. Joplin Tornado Info Facebook page made its first post, went viral, began connecting dots between needs, resources, transportation, storage and dispersal and had become a trusted, timely news source.

The first days and even weeks after the tornado remain a blur, we have pulled out the worn legal pads that were JTI, (as it came to be called in those early days) and watched YouTube videos of the KSN tower cam footage and Red Cross volunteer Marie Colby's video among others and talked about how it was at JTI after the tornado, to remember. Almost a year has passed and there are still not words to express what happened during Joplin's early recovery. The dazed look on the faces of survivors is haunting.

We quickly reached over 49,000 fans. It all happened so fast and just as fast there were people helping us. Several groups and individuals such as the group of people that went to the computer lab at Crowder College and continuously posted critical information to JTI were unofficial administrators of the page and vital to our efforts.

From the beginning we relied on the JTI community to post and repost for the good of the Joplin effort. Jennifer and Michelle both reached out from Alabama that first night to help. David Burton from University of Missouri Extension contacted us and offered his time and resources online. Volunteer administrators signed on and others just took it upon themselves to help. JTI was a community page and early on people responded. Within hours we also had administrators and or points of contact from all of the utility companies.

Relief organizations, Churches and news sources began posting on our site as well. We made every effort to read and answer every post. JTI pages moved so fast at one time that it was necessary to repost vital information often or it became lost in the Facebook newsfeed. We monitored all available news sources and reposted to JTI.



We didn't sleep much during those first few weeks. We devoted every waking minute to JTI and coordinating efforts to connect the dots for the next two months. We were not alone in this; many people in our area put their lives and livelihoods on hold to do what they could for Joplin. There was such an overwhelming response to the need in Joplin and supplies came in so fast that FEMA the Red Cross, and other major organizations quickly became overwhelmed.

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## **This is the story of one social media outlet: Joplin Tornado Info.**

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Through JTI overflow storage was coordinated by Royce at the Galena High School Football Field. Royce became a vital part of JTI as we routed donations to area storage and dispersal locations. Solace, a youth based church on the fringe of ground zero with an average age of 24 and attendance of less than that went from evening service to relief center in the blink of an eye. People of the area did what they could when they could. Back in the day, if your neighbor's barn was on fire you dropped what you were doing and ran to help your neighbor put the fire out. Joplin's barn was on fire and area people responded as they had for generations.



In the beginning many of the community posts were people searching for missing loved ones, asking about shelter and water. One memorable post was the joy we had notifying people that huge water trucks were pulling in to memorial hall, to bring containers and get what you need. Water was off throughout Joplin and these trucks were such a blessing. JTI was not about fluff. Many survivors were literally hand to mouth. As we posted, food, water, bandage, clothing locations people texted our posts to survivors at ground zero who relied on cell phones texts for all outside communication. We accepted no donations, endorsed no specific church, charity or organization. JTI is a community page with no affiliation or loyalty to any group or entity. JTI made every effort to post timely, concise, accurate, unbiased information.

My daughter, Genevieve and I came to realize that in this region none of us are more than a degree of separation from someone who lost their life in the tornado.

We all know someone who died personally or we know someone who knew someone. When locals speak of the tornado now, we don't ask "were you affected"? We have come to realize that this was a regional tragedy we were all affected.

Our mourning for those we lost will go on as long as we do. Out of our grieve and necessity the tornado aftermath has given birth to change, innovation, invention, entrepreneurship, volunteerism and philanthropy that many of us were unaware was within us. Folks in the area take the tornado and recovery in stride and continue to look for ways to help those in need.

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**Wouldn't it be great if every municipality and county had a Major disaster social media preparedness plan?**

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Joplin and area folks are reaching out today to our neighbors, Branson and the several other communities hit by the Leap Day Storm, doing what we can and lending our experience. David Burton from MU Extension, who has been an administrator on JTI since nearly the beginning, had the foresight to set up three tornado info Facebook pages in advance. One of these pages was Branson Tornado Info which by sad coincidence was put

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into use in the Leap Day Storm and quickly went viral with over 16,000 fans in 48 hrs.

Genevieve, David, Joel and I are working to make the story of JTI, our operating guidelines and tips available worldwide. Wouldn't it be great if every municipality and county had a Major disaster social media preparedness plan?

As of this writing, the beginning of meteorological spring March, 1, 2012, JTI has had-----  
---- 87,112,786 post views from over 20 countries and languages. After peaking at just over 49,000 9 months after the tornado JTI retains 47,754 of its original fans despite continued multiple daily posts.

**Biography: Joplin Tornado Info was created and managed by 23 year old Genevieve Williams, Neosho, Mo. less than two hours after the May 22<sup>nd</sup> tornado. JTI was honored as one of seven nominees for a 2011 Mashable Award in the Social Good Cause Campaign Category.**



**St. John's Hospital in Joplin only hours after being hit by a tornado in 2011.**

# MU Extension Rushes to Respond to Branson Tornado with Facebook Community Called “Branson Tornado Info”

BY DAVID BURTON


A University of Missouri Extension storm recovery resource named “Branson Tornado Info” on Facebook grew to 14,000 followers just 12 hours after the tornado struck Branson on Feb. 28.

Actually, the page was put in place back January by David Burton, civic communication specialist for MU Extension in southwest Missouri. “I created three new pages on Facebook at that time for Branson, Springfield and Greene County that are modeled after the success we had last year with the Joplin Tornado Info and Missouri Flooding Info pages on Facebook,” Burton said. The Joplin Tornado Info page is still very active, with more than 48,000 fans.

Facebook users can “like” the Branson Tornado Info pages to find out how to help and to learn about emergency and cleanup work from the organizations and groups doing the work.

These pages are designed to be a collaboration of state, federal and local agencies and organizations involved in

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Wall

Hidden Posts

- Info
- Friend Activity (1+)
- Insights
- Photos
- Welcome
- Publications

EDIT

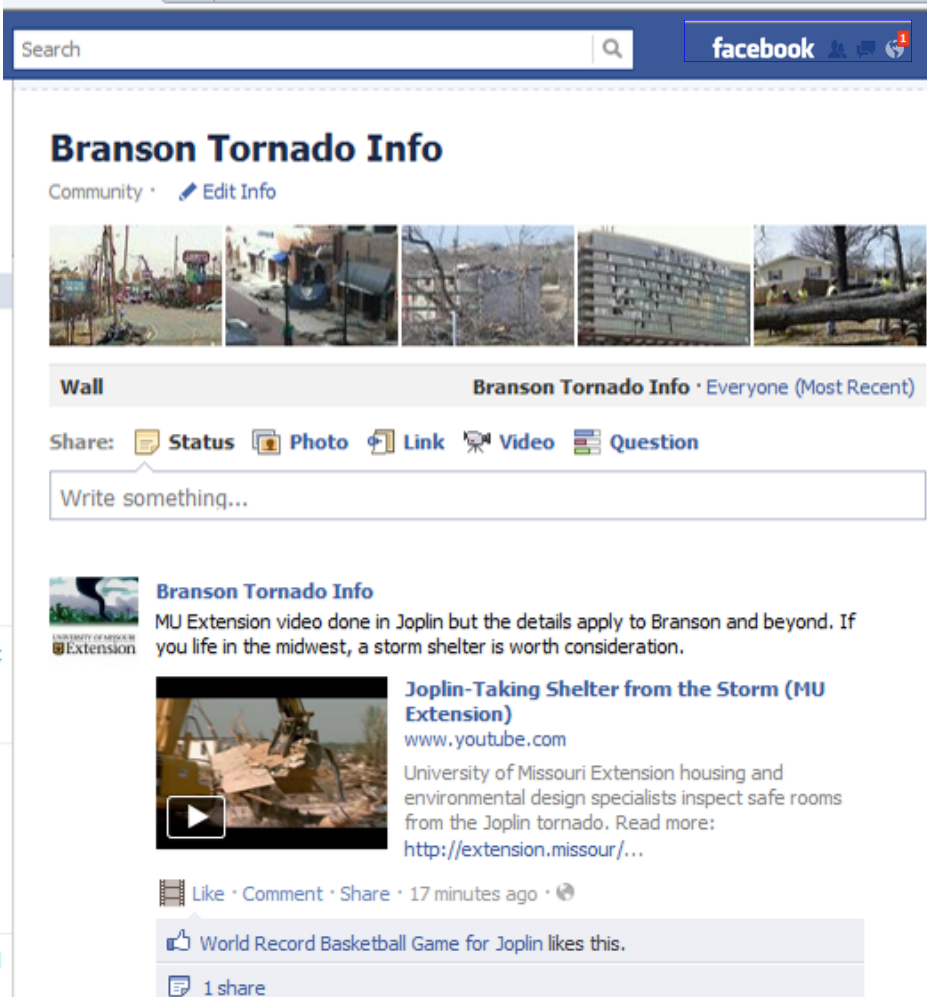
About [Edit](#)

Learn about tornado recovery and response efforts in Branson, Mo.

**16,757**  
like this

**18,537**  
talking about this

Likes [See All](#)




Search

facebook

## Branson Tornado Info


Community · [Edit Info](#)




Wall **Branson Tornado Info** · Everyone (Most Recent)

Share: [Status](#) [Photo](#) [Link](#) [Video](#) [Question](#)

Write something...

 **Branson Tornado Info**  
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI Extension  
MU Extension video done in Joplin but the details apply to Branson and beyond. If you life in the midwest, a storm shelter is worth consideration.

 **Joplin-Taking Shelter from the Storm (MU Extension)**  
[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)  
University of Missouri Extension housing and environmental design specialists inspect safe rooms from the Joplin tornado. Read more:  
<http://extension.missour/...>

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [Share](#) · 17 minutes ago · [Share](#)

[World Record Basketball Game for Joplin likes this.](#)

[1 share](#)

the affected areas. The pages are managed by MU Extension but public information officers from various organizations and community volunteers with media backgrounds can serve as co-administrators, following a model used after the Joplin tornado.

In fact, by March 2, the page had 11 volunteer administrators. The two most active volunteers have been Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, the mother and daughter team from Neosho, Mo. that were behind the establishment of Joplin Tornado Info.

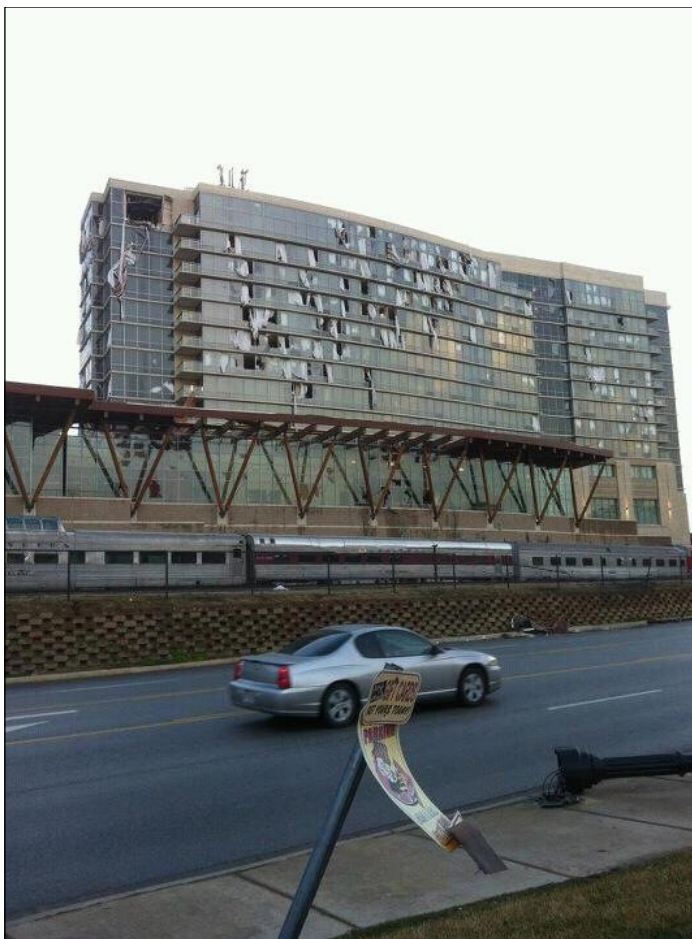
Persons willing to serve as administrators on these new pages should contact David Burton at [burtond@missouri.edu](mailto:burtond@missouri.edu) after liking the Branson Tornado Info page. He will then send you the guidelines for the page and instructions on getting set up as an administrator.

Having co-administrators who post information and check facts on what others post is important and was a key to the success of the Joplin Tornado Info page according to Burton.

“I logged in to Facebook at 5 a.m. on Feb. 28 and saw that this page had jumped from two fans to 50 before I even knew there had been a tornado hit Branson,” said Burton. “I got the word out to the media via email and we got things rolling. Before the end of that first day we were up to 14,000 followers. As we saw in Joplin, social media is a great communication tool during disasters especially because of Smart phones.”

The goal of the site administrators is to make sure posts are official in nature and researched. In other words, the official information is unbiased and research based, in keeping with MU Extension’s mission.

“On Branson Tornado Info, we don't collect money for our own efforts and we shy away from organizations that are merely collecting money. We don't post links about fundraisers, or groups selling shirts, trinkets and such. Instead, we link to sites that have collected information in lists, tables or officials reports and we answer posted questions. We learned in Joplin that if we are



**The Hilton Hotel at the Branson Landing, just six hours after a tornado hit Branson on Feb. 29, 2012. This photo was taken by Amanda Smigiel, a nutrition assistant with MU Extension.**

posting some new every five minutes the volume of the information will drive away followers and will unsubscribe. That defeats the purpose,” said Burton.

As of March 2, the page has nearly 17,000 followers and 12 administrators who have some clear goals and guidelines. Accolades for the page, and the quick response by MU Extension, continue even today. The news media has shown a lot of interest in the Branson page. “Branson Tornado Info” was written about in an Associated Press story that was used nation wide and also featured in an Associated Press radio story. Page administrators even had calls from reporters in Canada. But the local resident who was impacted by the storm was always the primary focus of the site and local people appreciated that fact.

### **Posted on Facebook by Susie Davidson**

*“Facebook was great after the tornado for those of us without power and could only charge our cell phones while driving. I had no other source of news and was so grateful for the City and others who got info posted here.”*

University of Missouri Extension has a website that containing MU Extension resources that could be helpful to homeowners, landowners, business owners, emergency responders, volunteers, partnering organizations and others with a direct or indirect interest in emergency preparedness and response. The information on emergencies and disasters from MU Extension is available online from MU Extension at <http://extension.missouri.edu>. (Screen shot below).



**University of Missouri Extension has a website containing MU Extension resources that could be helpful to homeowners, landowners, business owners, emergency responders, volunteers, partnering organizations and others with a direct or indirect interest in emergency preparedness and response. <http://extension.missouri.edu>.**



# **Answers to Some Commonly Asked Questions About the Creation and Purpose of Tornado Info Pages**

By David L. Burton

Amid all of the media coverage following the Branson tornado on Feb. 29, 2012, I answered a lot of the same questions. Local reporters, Associated Press reporters, even reporters from Canada and Reuters Press Service, had a lot of same questions. These are good questions. The type that help explain what an effort is worth continuing or worth doing at all. That is why I decided to share my answers in this format.

## **1. Why was the Branson Tornado Info page created and when?**

I created it back in January of 2012 as an MU Extension community development effort based on lessons we learned with a similar effort in Joplin. I was trying to be proactive. That is why I also created a Greene County (Mo.) Tornado Info page, a Springfield Tornado Info page and a Republic (Mo.) Tornado Info page at the same time. I was trying to get MU Extension in a position where we could respond quickly if one of the population centers in southwest Missouri was ever hit. At the same time, I was hoping the pages would never be needed.

## **2. The page had 2 "likes" prior to the tornado. That number jumped to 50 overnight, and it peaked at nearly 17,000. What are your thoughts on the page's exponential popularity?**

The overnight jump was because the Branson tornado hit in the early morning hours and folks were using search engines to look for helpful pages. Luckily, I logged in to Facebook at 5 a.m. and was able to start getting some information out early and also get help from some folks with the Joplin Tornado Info page. The quick jump to 17000 was fueled by online interest, content and the regional and national news coverage that the page received as a resource. The Joplin page had a similar type of jump in the first 48 hours. People may only have smart phones in a disaster situation and they are looking for information resources. Facebook and other social media sites really lend themselves to that type of emergency situation.

## **3. Why do you think the tornado page was important the day of the storm and the days following?**

It is a great resource for those impacted by the storm, family members and folks in the region that want to help. That has been a frequent request online: "how can we help?" The fact that our page has 10 volunteer administrators who are answering questions and posting content is another reason for the success. We answer questions and post fresh content and that is key during the rescue and recovery process. Obviously, people are living on social media and some are making it their preferred information source. But, to be fair, we didn't create a lot of new content for this page. We did answer posted questions with accurate information (and that is key). But area media outlets produced excellent content and we shared that with a larger audience. At the same time, some of those media outlets used the questions posted on the Branson Tornado Info page story ideas. I think it was mutually beneficial.

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#### **4. Why do you think social media has played such a strong role with recent storms?**

I think ease of access use and set up is one strong reason. Both ease of use by the person seeking information but also the ease of setting something like this up. It is a whole lot easier than creating a new website and getting people to visit it. Facebook, by its very nature, keeps people engaged and it is easy to give other volunteers access to help. Getting help from other people is a must and that is made easier on Facebook. Then the page spreads with word of mouth too. Right now, we have more people talking about the Branson Tornado Info than the people who are actual followers.

#### **5. What do you think are the ongoing implications here?**

Social media has a role to play and so do social media sites managed by volunteers. The Joplin page and this page have certainly gotten people in the Midwest talking. I think this is an important tool that is going to expand as a communication method used after disasters. Thanks to the founders of the Joplin Tornado Info page, Rebecca and Genevieve Williams, the Greene County Extension Center has been able to produce a new publication that provides guidelines and best practices for using social media in a disaster. We are working on getting some workshops set up in the region to get people engaged in getting a tool like this prepared. There has already nationwide interest in what we have done here in the Ozarks.

#### **6. Have you faced any resistance to this pages?**

The honest answer is yes and that was a surprise to me. But the resistance has not come from volunteers or people impacted by these storms and using these pages. The resistance has come from some organizations that would prefer to have people connecting with them on Facebook instead of a different resource like these tornado info pages. Some of the organizations that are very focused on getting donations have expressed a preference in having their site be the go-to-site but to be honest, we make it a practice to point users to those resources. I think a site like Branson Tornado Info is seen as unbiased because we are not affiliated with a group or agency and I think that is part of the success we have had. In some cases, emergency management people have been reluctant to embrace the use of social media. Face it, keeping a page like this updated and fresh takes a lot of time and in the initial stages of a natural disaster, emergency management employees should have other priorities. But in most cases, when the emergency management professions see we have established guidelines and we are not dealing in rumors, they come around and see the value of pages, especially with recovery efforts.

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**“You guys have been indispensable through this disaster. You've given information, help, resources, contact names, stories, directed volunteers and given hope. Beautiful job all of you who gave their time and input to this site. Great job.”**

**— Dawn Davidson**

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