Emergency 2.0 Wiki

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wiki launches accessibility toolkit to empower people with disabilities to use social media in emergencies

People with a disability in the community will now be empowered to use social media for disaster preparedness, response and recovery due to the launch today of the Emergency 2.0 Wiki Accessibility Toolkit.

The online toolkit provides tips, resources and apps to assist people with a disability to overcome accessibility challenges of social media. The kit also includes guidelines for emergency agencies and government.

"We've witnessed from recent disasters that social media has the potential to save lives, but people with disabilities often have difficulty accessing important messages as the social media platforms are inaccessible," Emergency 2.0 Wiki Accessibility Reference Group Member Dr Scott Hollier said.

"For example, the main Twitter website can't be easily read with a screen reader, the device that reads out information on a screen for people who are blind, but important emergency information can be accessed by using an alternative site such as Easy Chirp to read tweets," he said.

"As people tweet in real time, an accessible app such as Easy Chirp can provide people who are blind with immediate notification of when a fire starts or when flash floods hit a town," said Dr Hollier.

The kit also includes emergency preparation tools such as an app for people who are Deaf or hearing impaired which vibrates and flashes when sending emergency alerts, and YouTube videos that either use sign language or are captioned.

For emergency services the kit also has tips on how to use social media to include people with a disability, such as using apps to add captioning on YouTube Videos for people who are Deaf or hearing impaired.

The Emergency 2.0 Wiki is a free volunteer based resource which aims to build resilience by empowering all sectors of the community with the knowledge to use social media and networks in emergencies. It aims to facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing and crowdsourcing locally and globally.

Emergency 2.0 Wiki

In a whole of community approach, content was 'crowdsourced' globally using social media by a volunteer accessibility reference group of professionals drawn from the emergency, government, NGO and business sectors in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. The reference group's aim is to build the resilience of people with disabilities through encouraging the use of social media in emergency preparation, response and recovery.

"It is important that people with disabilities, who are the most vulnerable in our communities during emergencies, are empowered to access instant, lifesaving messages through social media and the accessibility toolkit enables this," Dr Hollier said.

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Visit Emergency 2.0 Wiki for more information.

Contact information

For media enquiries, contact Eileen Culleton, Founder & CEO (voluntary) on +61 405 748 025 or via email.

Reference Group Member Spokespeople:

- Australia – Dr Scott Hollier, Manager, Major Projects & Western Australia Manager for Media Access Australia; W3C Advisory Committee representative

- NZ – Caroline Milligan, Consultant, SMEM NZ; Team leader, NZ VOST - Virtual Operations Support Team

- USA – Stephanie Jo Kent, Working Group on Emergency Interpreting at Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc; Founder, Learning Labs for Resiliency

Emergency 2.0 Wiki Background

- The Emergency 2.0 Wiki is a free global resource for using social media and new technology in emergencies

- Accessibility Resources on the wiki include:

    o Tips and guides for people with disabilities on how to access social media

    o Emergency smartphone apps for people with a disability

    o Apps and assistive technologies to access social media

- Emergency Preparedness YouTube videos that are either captioned or use sign language for the deaf and hearing impaired

- Practical guidelines to assist the emergency sector, government, community and business to make social media messages more accessible

- The wiki serves a global hub for emergency agencies, government, community agencies and NGOs, business, education, health, media and the public to use social media to better prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

- The vision of the Wiki is to help build resilient communities empowered with the knowledge to use social media and networks in emergencies.

- Information provided includes tips, guides, apps, mapping tools, videos and an international directory of social media contacts for emergency services.

- Practical guidelines, policies and procedures and case studies assist the emergency sector, government, NGO sector and business to use social networks, crowdsourcing and crisis mapping for emergency management and business continuity planning.

- The Emergency 2.0 Wiki facilitates collaboration, knowledge sharing and crowdsourcing across the industry sectors to provide users around the world with the latest information, best practices and resources.

- A number of reference groups, made up of professionals working in the emergency, government, community, ICT, business, education and media sectors from across the globe, oversee the development of content posted to the wiki.

- The wiki is a voluntary initiative of the Gov 2.0 QLD Community of Practice in Australia, launched in December 2011. Its impetus was to leverage the learnings from the use of social media during the devastating floods and Cyclone Yasi that swept across Queensland early in 2011.

- While driven from Australia, the development of the wiki is a global collaborative approach, steered by Reference Groups consisting of members from all over the world.