

# Changing the way we deal with communication: social media and the Icelandic volcano

How a crisis led to a demonstration of the right way to use social media.



Brussels, 23rd June 2010: Recently, many in Europe have felt the effects of Eyjafjallajökull's eruption. During this, social media proved itself to be useful outside of letting people send information home. It saved weddings from disaster, sent news stories around the world, and got a selection of stranded passengers a free breakfast in Bangkok.

Aurelie Valtat of [Eurocontrol](#) maintains that social media's "human touch" is essential in a crisis. "People are happy to know that you're listening to them. Be human: it doesn't hurt to be a normal person. Be in tune... show that you care." She dealt information out to stranded passengers every two minutes, watching the organisation's number of followers grow from 300 to 7,000 in a few days.

[ZN](#) founder Philip Weiss, who used Facebook to rally passengers stranded with him in Bangkok to demand treatment according to their rights, agrees.

"The key is to know who you're talking to, and give them the information that they need. Eurocontrol's efforts placed them in comparison with other organisations, like some airlines and the European Commission, which face big challenges in forming similar strategies for similarly effective communication."

Both Philip and Aurelie were speaking at an event hosted by ZN, which took place on 22nd June 2010 in the striking surroundings of the Brussels Air Museum. They discussed how the eruption had an impact on social media, with Simon McDermott, co-founder of [Attentio](#), and the European Commission's Gilles Gantelet.

The emphasis of Eurocontrol's Tweeting was on crisis management rather than a communications revolution: "normal", pre-volcano service has since resumed, in case the organisation is seen as a "super travel agency... there is a detailed plan in place, but every ash cloud is different." Simon McDermott's advice for organisations yet to embrace social media was simple: "Use it: learn it!"

Gilles Gantelet said that "[the Commission has] been impressed by Eurocontrol... we are also aware that there were some things that we were unable to organise in terms of communication."

Photos, videos (of the event and of interviews with the speakers) and discussions will be added to the IABC community. In the spirit of social media, questions and comments were Tweeted live into the event: you can find them under [#ashcloudbxl](#) on Twitter. For more information, please contact Philip Weiss on [phil@zn.be](mailto:phil@zn.be) and check out the discussions on <http://be-iabc.ning.com/>