

THE INFORMATION AGE



We live in the [Information Age](#) and, like it or lump it, information technology has now become the driving force of our daily social life and our ongoing social evolution with both good and bad applications. Nowhere is this more evident than on social media.

Last week there was an armed offenders' operation in Kaitiāia that had the potential to be dangerous to everyone in the neighbourhood. During it, I was able to access and share on social media accurate information that people needed to know in order to be and stay safe throughout.

Kaitiāia Crime Watch (KCW) is a facebook platform set up in 2014 to help the public and the police address crime in our town. Local police have administration rights on it so they can remove posts or turn off comments at any time. Knowing this, I contacted local police and then posted the following messages to the KCW page during the operation:

7.31pm: I live on Matthews Ave where there is a major police operation underway. Best advice is to stay indoors until the operation is over.

8.15pm: The incident is not yet over. Please stay indoors and let police do their mahi. I will advise when the roads are reopened.

9.23pm: The incident is now over, and the roads are reopened.

However, by the time I made that final post, I knew things could and should have been handled better by the police in every aspect, some of which I will address separately. Today, I address their communication strategy, or lack thereof.

In this Information Age, people turn to social media. Police know this and run their own facebook page. But at no point during the operation did they use it to communicate with us. And before anyone objects that they don't have time during an operation – poppycock! The same facts communicated to and then by me to KCW could just as easily and more authoritatively have been communicated directly to the public by the police.

KCW members have always supported good policing in our town. So, it was both galling and ironic to see, within 24 hours of the operation ending, KCW cop flak from police via the local media for 'scaremongering' about the operation because of some misinformed comments on my post.

Yes, some commenters got things wrong. But, given that public safety was at stake and public fear was already high, it was important that someone post factual information so that people could then sift through any dross and drama to work out what they needed to know to be and stay safe.

As we all reflect on how and what we communicate on social media, police and media need to do the same. Because if they aren't willing and able to quickly communicate important safety messages to the public, then they ought not be surprised or upset when the silence is filled by social media.

In this Information Age, more than ever, good policing requires communication.

