

PR Practice in the Social Media Age

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When social media first stepped into the marketing mix, the world of PR experienced a healthy jolt. Public relations truly became public—any professional with internet access and a laptop could create meaningful content and connect directly with journalists or media outlets, or one-to-one with customers in a way that produced powerful results. Thanks to blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest and Instagram, there was a way to sidestep the common obstacle of having a minimal marketing/PR budget.

Not every PR professional, team and department embraced social media in the beginning. Many viewed social media as a lower-level marketing practice, some felt it wasn't reputable enough, some didn't think social media and PR went hand-in-hand, and some simply didn't want to learn new practices. Many PR pros were forced to pay attention to social media when their clients or companies experienced media crises. Slick press kits, savvy pitches and pretty press releases don't matter when complaints are pouring in through social media, non-company approved videos are going viral, or online reviews are going south. Social media were here to stay and PR started sinking its teeth in.

PR embraces web marketing

My own journey into PR was purely accidental. I sold online advertising in the dot-com boom...and bust. I transitioned into buying advertising and managing customer acquisition, and mastered web marketing through experience. At that time, PR was off-limits to web marketers, unless it was to add a press release to the press page of a website.

A few years into teaching web marketing courses, I was desperately searching for a new book for my students and stumbled upon David Meerman Scott's *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*. It opened my eyes to PR and solidified my evangelism for quality content. I started dabbling in PR, being transparent with my clients that I was not promising them media mentions, but was instead re-purposing work that was already done for more visibility, credibility and salability, like taking press releases and re-purposing them into blog posts and sharing the links as social media posts. I layered my search engine optimization (SEO) expertise over press releases before they went live to increase the chance that releases would be indexed by search engines.

PR professionals who worked for my clients began embracing me (instead of ignoring me) when they realized that my web work—optimizing press pages, blogging to show the client's expertise and frequently posting to social media—made their pitches more effective, as the writers being pitched search for the company to do their due diligence and saw they were truly walking the talk. I started testing online press release distribution companies and adding videos to releases for greater usability, and saw stellar results. I never looked at any of this as “PR”—I saw it as web marketing. My clients wanted more visibility and I used what they had (expertise, pre-written press releases, videos) to find new ways to broaden their web footprint.

We started investing in tools like Profnet (PR Newswire's expert-to-journalist connection tool) to help accelerate our client's credibility. I saw the journalist queries from Profnet (or the free alternative, HelpAReporter.com) as another web tool to respond to writers who needed expert insight to fuel stories. When our clients got a media mention, great. Even if they didn't, we re-purposed their expert advice into blog posts and social media posts for more visibility. It is so easy to pitch clients if they are active with social media. Often, my team and I respond to journalist queries without having to bother our client, answering queries with tips from our client's pre-written blog posts.

4 ways to combine PR and social media efforts

Experts and organizations of all shapes and sizes (large, small, for-profit, nonprofit) have the platform to elevate their credibility and visibility, thanks to the power of social media content publishing tools. Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, Pinterest and more are all content marketing outlets that experts can leverage to brand, build and boost business. Here are four ways to combine your PR and social media efforts:

1. Publish widely. Social media publishing is the key to becoming an authority. Journalists don't just search Google for experts, they go directly to Twitter, Instagram and YouTube too. Don't discount photos and videos as part of the content mix.

2. Nail the press release. Classic PR practices like writing pithy, powerful press releases still have a place as long as they are tied to current trends in social media. Well-written press releases with the “who, what, when, where, why, how” and most important, the “who cares?!” still serve as an amazingly useful asset, namely because it wrangles communication chaos. A press release helps communication professionals nail their message, gives PR professionals something to hand-deliver to journalists, provides content to add to a website press page and online press release wires.

3. Make your pitch mobile-friendly. Send a press release via a web link (preferably with a video) versus an old-school word document. This is a mobile world, and writers want to be able to read a release on a web page that is mobile-friendly and not have to take an extra step and download an attachment. Press releases published online have great reach. When they are published on websites and via online press release distribution channels, it can make the content searchable for years.

4. Show that you're interesting. The old “push” of PR is now a new “pull” marketing process since journalists are able to search and find the authorities they needed. Remember the old saying, “If you want to be interesting, be interested.” Well, if you want journalists, media outlets and influencers to be interested in you, you have to be interesting! Show what you know. Blog, be active on social media and get content marketing momentum going.

The future of PR practice looks nothing but promising when social media and PR multitask to support credibility, usability, visibility, salability and scalability.

The key to successful PR in today's social-centric marketing world begins by having a cohesive content marketing strategy. PR and social media must align to connect influencers, journalists and other media professionals and establish ongoing relationships.



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