

Top 5 Ways to Make PR Shine



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Over the past few years, the opportunities for PR to contribute to the success of an organization have grown. The Internet has created opportunities for PR to play a part in driving sales and raising the company's online visibility as well as getting your news in front of the media. Taking advantage of PR's potential can help advance many of the company's goals and gain a competitive advantage during these tough economic times.

But, doing great PR for your organization is not enough if you have not taken the time to do some PR for yourself. Demonstrating your PR achievements and impact on the company are just as vital as getting that all-important hit.

As the role of public relations has shifted away from its intense focus on the media, thanks in large part to the Internet and the rise of the new media, new opportunities to get value from your PR efforts have emerged. In today's world public relations is part of a more integrated company strategy and can be directly tied to the company's bottom line.

This paper will illustrate how to position your PR efforts to highlight bottom-line impact on the organization and showcase the value of PR in today's tight economy.

1) Don't Slow Down

"Companies can and do prosper during times of economic turmoil. Take a lesson from brands whose Depression-era advertising strategies were key to their survival."

Spending analysis of the 2001-2002 post-dot.com bubble showed companies which continued investing in public relations were better positioned when markets recovered than those that cut back. Most experts now agree that PR is one of the most cost-effective ways to promote your company. Fortunately, the latest technology can help PR professionals accelerate the impact of their initiatives while being budget conscious.

With tightening budgets, professionals are tasked with finding ways to cut back spending without sacrificing results. As PR has become a tool to not only reach journalists but to directly reach your prospects and gain a competitive advantage, the estimated value of PR is on the rise. With the current economy, it is important to continue to lead your organization's PR efforts forward.

Don't stop your PR efforts but find ways to maximize your budget and your resources. Learn how to do more with less. Make the most of every PR dollar by creating more traction and expanding your reach. Leverage traditional outreach strategies and social media to create a campaign that maximizes both the impact of your news and the dollars you put behind it.

Taking advantage of the free tools out there and incorporating social media into your PR strategy is a great way to enhance your current efforts to generate buzz and interest in your company. Using these tools to make the most out of your PR investment will help you create additional value without additional dollars.

Today's economy means every company must measure PR to highlight its contribution to the bottom line. Analytic capabilities within PR management technology can help industry-leading organizations better manage and measure their PR efforts. If you have not already established an effective PR management solution that incorporates metrics to increase and demonstrate your positive impact on the business, now is the time.

Most importantly, you need to create a PR strategy and commit to it. While you may alter and enhance your strategy along the way to better meet your goals, now is not the time to abandon PR. With today's technology and its cost effective nature, PR was one of the most powerful ways to emerge successfully from tough times.

2) Using News Monitoring to Gather Business Insight

Many of the traditional PR responsibilities provide strategic value to other departments as well. Sharing the information you are already gathering for your PR activities throughout the organization is a great way to demonstrate the additional value PR brings to the company's business goals.

Today's media landscape provides the means for a powerful assessment of your industry and your organization's place within it. Monitoring the news and current headlines keeps the company in-tune with the industry, the big players and the current trends.

Using the information gathered through the news, PR professionals can uncover new trends for product directors, gather market and competitive activity for the executive team, discover customer satisfaction blogs and messages for the head of customer service and demonstrate a value to the business beyond their traditional role.

While monitoring the news can seem like a daunting task, when applied to other areas of the business, it can not only boost the impact of your public relations campaign but actually help the organization gain an understanding of the industry position of the business. By sharing that information among other departments, they are able to help give the organization a strategic advantage in its future planning to stay ahead of the competition.

Sifting through articles and postings can sometimes lead to more questions than answers without clearly defined values and an understanding of what is most important for your organization.

- **News by Source-** Most PR professionals are familiar with the general tactics for monitoring traditional media such as print and broadcast, as well as the complications with each. However, monitoring online publications and blogs presents a new challenge. With thousands of new outlets appearing online, it is increasingly overwhelming to monitor and evaluate each. Get started with a small subset of blogs that are important to the company and/or industry. As new blogs are discovered in the company's industry, determine the impact on the business and therefore, the impact on your strategy.
- **Announcements to Monitor-** Look for insight into the industry as well as into the competition's strategy. As new products are unveiled and launched, evaluate their effects on the industry and gauge the reaction. This information will serve as reference points for future development for the organization as new services and upgrades are evaluated. Additionally, monitoring the organization's news will also provide a gauge of the messages in the market. Has the company's message resonated? Is the organization gaining momentum with the media? Are your spokespeople seen as authorities?
- **Monitoring Frequency-** The online shift has turned the media into a 24/7 source of information. How frequently you monitor the news depends on your resources and priorities. While monitoring in real-time is ideal for the most accurate picture, it is important to set a system that works for your organization. Print and broadcast will appear with less frequency and follow a schedule but online news can happen at any time. Doing a thorough media check each morning and distributing a report to the executives and other interested parties is a good start. Using readily available technologies, PR professionals are able to check throughout the day to stay on top of breaking news that may affect the company.

Monitoring the different mediums using the available tools provides companies with the information they need to stand out from the competition and stay in-tune with the industry, the big players and the current trends. By sharing that information among other departments, they are able to help give the organization a strategic advantage in its future planning to stay ahead of the competition.

3) Expanding your Reach

As PR has grown over the past few years, so has its potential to become a key part of the organization's marketing function. The Internet has created opportunities for PR to not only grow a brand and generate publicity but to play a part in driving sales and raising the company's online visibility. With virtually unlimited space and restrictions, the Internet has opened up a new avenue for you to get your story out to a much wider audience.

In many cases online channels also serve as an avenue to get in front of the media by putting your story directly where they search for news and information. The media's role in Internet-based communications has shifted to include news consumption as well as distribution. In fact, according to the Arketi Web Watch Survey, 74 percent of journalists report finding story ideas from websites and 54 percent report blogs spark story ideas.

Consumers and journalists are increasingly going online to find news and information about products and services. According to recent studies, the influence and power the Internet holds is evident:

- 81% of Internet users worldwide used search engines to find information (TNS "Digital World, Digital Life", December 2008)
- 76% looked up news (TNS "Digital World, Digital Life", December 2008)
- 89% of Internet users use a search engine to find information. (Pew Internet & American Life Project, May 2008)

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- 73% of Internet users use the Internet to get news. (Pew Internet & American Life Project May 2008)

Search engines such as Google, Yahoo! and MSN are the principal channels by which most Internet searchers find news and information on products and services, so it is vital that your news receives higher rankings on these sites. Search Engine Optimized press releases are a decisive way to increase your company's web presence and brand visibility by making it easy for those search engines to find you.

Search Engine Optimization is designed to help your news stand out amid all of the cyber clutter. Online news distribution services, such as PRWeb, have become increasingly useful in keeping the company highly ranked in organic search results and enhancing the success of the online marketing team. With coordination, press releases can now enhance the effectiveness of company messaging, drive customers to the organization's website and, ultimately, lead to an increase in sales and revenue. In addition, SEO helps extend the "life" of your press release by keeping them in the long tail of the web.

Online press releases also offer multimedia support. Companies are able to include elements, such as images, audio and video to effectively create a richer, more engaging reader experience. In fact, studies show that people are more likely to take some form of action, such as purchasing a product, after watching a video about that product. To truly reap the rewards of the online press releases and search engine indexing, you need to keep a few things in mind when writing your release:

- **Keywords**—Headlines should contain keywords related to major themes in your news. The headline is not only extremely important for SEO but is also your first opportunity to engage your consumer and will generate the title tag of your release. Additional keywords should be strategically placed in the release to create rich content that is easily retrievable.
- **Enhanced URL**—Search engines look at the keywords used in a hyperlink to a website to determine its ranking. If a hyperlink has keywords included and points to your website, then when a person does a search for those keywords, they are going to be more likely to find you among their results.
- **Anchor Text/Embedded Keywords**—Embedding hyperlinks into your release is another way to increase your ranking and drive traffic to your website. However, hyperlinks should not exceed one for every 100 words of content.
- **Multimedia Content**—Adding a news image, video or audio to your release will not only make your press release more consumable, graphically pleasing and likely to be read, but it will also ensure your news is indexed in image search engines and create more visibility for your message.

As the objectives of Public Relations are shifting to generate interest not just among journalists but consumers, investors and other audiences, PR professionals have a chance to directly impact sales.

Personally reaching out to targeted journalists has always been the cornerstone of public relations and today's PR software can provide you with basic information on reporters and their coverage areas. In the case of Vocus, you are able to get the basic information as well as more in-depth background to help target the appropriate media to create a well thought out pitch to send directly to journalists.

But as PR has grown over the past few years, so has its potential. The Internet has created opportunities for PR to play a part in driving sales and raising the company's online visibility as well as get your news in front of the media. The media's role in Internet-based communications has shifted to include news consumption as well as distribution. In fact, according to the 2007 Arketi Web Watch Survey, 74 percent of journalists report finding story ideas from websites and 54 percent report blogs spark story ideas. With virtually unlimited space and restrictions, the Internet has opened up a new avenue for you to get your story out to a much wider audience.

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Basic SEO Tips (sidebar)

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Popular sites such as Facebook and Twitter have emerged as a great way to share your news but, like all forms of social media, they are about dialogue. Post your latest company announcement for your Twitter or Facebook followers to see or engage in conversations regarding your brand but do not simply market your company. The viral effect social media sites have on your message can help distribute it throughout the web and extend the reach of your news and the ultimate value of your news.

As PR tools advance, it is becoming easier to incorporate social media into your strategy. Many online news distribution sites allow you to easily include your news in blogs or create social media bookmarks. For example PRWeb, allows you to distribute your news through the online distribution service while simultaneously updating your existing Twitter account with a "tweet" and link to the release.

4) Evaluating and Showcasing Return On Investment

Even if you are not being asked to measure and evaluate your campaigns, you need to proactively provide your results to highlight your success. After all, your results are the ultimate judge of your impact and success.

Every company has different criteria for success and it's critical to focus on what is ultimately important to your organization. Evaluate your results based on the goals on the company.

As PR continues to grow and change, make sure your method gives you an accurate assessment of all the factors that are affecting your coverage and media perception.

- **Get Results**—While all results are great for your own sense of accomplishment, they are not all equally beneficial to the company. Make sure the results you are getting are those that will equal success for the organization. The latest PR software provides PR professionals with the ability to not only keep track of their clips but also the messages of each. Monitoring and tracking the messages within the articles themselves will ensure you are getting the right results for the organization.
- **Learn from Success**—Discover which campaigns have had the greatest impact and who they have influenced. By tracking and comparing your activity and efforts against results, PR professionals can gauge what activities are most effective in helping land those messages in stories and subsequently adjust all their strategies to mimic the results and maximize impact. News monitoring is an integral component to determine where your message has penetrated. By looking at the outlets and Designated Market Areas (DMA), you can see where you have succeeded and more importantly where you need to focus.
- **Identify Quality Coverage**—Gauging PR success means looking at the quality of news not just the quantity. Not all outlets and articles are created equal and each should be evaluated on their ability to get your message to the correct audience. With the sophisticated measurement functionality available in leading PR management tools, companies can now track where and how often their news appears in an article, rank or score the impact of the outlet by assigning a weight based on importance to the organization and determine if the stories are positive, negative or neutral.

- **Drive Revenue**—PR professionals are now in a position to increase traffic to their website, directly influence buyer behavior and demonstrate how press releases can drive revenue. With online services getting your news in front of millions of potential customers searching every day, you can use press releases to highlight new products, seasonal promotions or even new content, such as whitepapers, to attract new customers. Whether you are a Business-to-Business or Business-to-Consumer company, it is time to rethink the traditional press release and demonstrate to management that PR can not just drive awareness, but revenue as well.

Make sure you are following the rules of good measurement to evaluate the effectiveness of your PR campaign and to increase its impact. Remembering each organization's needs are as different as the companies themselves, make sure you meet your own goals and not the industry's perceived goals! Look at the strengths and weaknesses to find out what is working for your organization so you know what can be improved.

PR analytic tools should deliver the real-time results that matter most to you and your organization so you can effectively evaluate success in relation to your company, product and spokesperson mentions; issue response; and competitive edge.

By integrating measurement across PR programs, PR professionals are able to optimize their campaigns, maximize their results and cut back on costs, all while simultaneously proving their value to the business.

5) Selling PR to the C-Suite

Getting executive support for your PR program starts with a well-organized report. What should you look at to determine your own success? And what will others look at to determine it?

Gathering the clips for the month, detailing the efforts in carefully worded prose and conveying the strategy and planning behind the efforts are sufficient to show the amount and results of your activity but can't be included in a bottom line spreadsheet and do not produce a complete picture of the impact of PR nor the type of measurable Return on Investment (ROI) that C-level executives use to determine budgets.

Showing numbers is essential to highlighting the value of PR and putting them into context is the key. The right analysis will provide a quantifiable contribution to the organization.

- **One Size Does Not Fit All** - Just as with preparing a pitch, it is important to understand your audience's needs when distributing your reports. While the PR team will be interested in specifics of the coverage, it is less likely that your CEO will be as interested in where the article appears as what it means to the business. Remember, reporting not only demonstrates your value but also highlights your understanding of the business.
- **Put it in Perspective**- Packaging and sharing your results correctly will help the C-suite gain insight into your PR success. While it may be easier to simply forward results, providing commentary adds context for the news and gives others an understanding of the media landscape allowing them to put the results in perspective.
- **Quick Reference Graph and Charts**- A picture is worth a thousand words... and saves a lot of time. Using charts when possible to illustrate your points in the report will provide a quick reference for the results. Graphs and charts also offer powerful reinforcement to the text you provide.
- **How Often to Send**-Daily reports are great and will offer insight, but are not always necessary. In fact, deluging your audience with emails can have a negative effect and lead people to begin ignoring valuable content.
- **Customized Dashboard**- Provide your executives with a dashboard so they can immediately see just how much of an impact PR has had on their business. Include statistics that link your results to the business, for example, public companies, you can link the stock performance directly to the news coverage and announcements.

Today's tools can create professional-looking reports in seconds, including executive briefing documents that highlight your results and impact to the organization. Choose a report structure that works for you and use the tools to automate the process. Many systems offer charts to measure a variety of things such as your organization's share of voice, coverage momentum, ad value and more. Systems, such as Vocus, can even provide an instant assessment of the quality of coverage, including the prominence of your organization and the positive or negative tone of your news.

Selling management on the success of the PR program is about presenting results that are right on message and will positively influence the success of the company.

Conclusion

With effective measurements in place to better gauge impact, PR professionals can not only improve the overall success of the programs they are running, but they can also prove their increasing contribution to the bottom-line.

The effect of a successful PR campaign on the company can be in both awareness and sales. In today's business environment, it is important that PR departments can express that effectiveness in dollar value. Today's economy means every company must measure PR to highlight its contribution to the bottom-line. Analytic capabilities within PR management technology can help industry-leading organizations better manage and measure their PR efforts. If you have not already established an effective PR management solution that incorporates metrics to increase and demonstrate your positive impact on the business, now is the time.

Nothing helps keep your budget intact like great results but if no one knows about them, it won't matter. Measure your results, package them appropriately and deliver them to your boss—even if they haven't asked for them. The better you present your results, the easier it is for them to share the analysis with their boss.

Fortunately, with the growing adoption of public relations software, professionals are not only able to automate and manage communication processes more easily but demonstrate measurable results from their efforts to management.

About Vocus

Founded in 1992 by two entrepreneurs and best friends, Vocus (NASDAQ: VOCS) has grown into one of the world's largest and fastest growing public software companies. The Lanham, MD-based company has achieved 37 consecutive quarters of growth and has been named one of the fastest growing technology companies by leading organizations including the Washington Business Journal, Deloitte and Forbes Magazine.

More than 3,300 organizations around the world, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to one-person start-ups, use Vocus products and services to generate publicity and grow their businesses. Vocus software was awarded the prestigious SIIA's CODiE for "Best Business Productivity Software" and has been featured in The Wall Street Journal and Fortune. Our on demand software addresses the critical functions of public relations including media relations, news distribution and news monitoring.

Vocus has offices in North America, Europe, and Asia. For more information please visit www.vocus.com or call 800.345.5572.