



Vocus White Paper

The Future of PR

How to Garner More Coverage and Stay Way Ahead of the Competition

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It's 9 a.m. Monday and you've just poured your morning cup of coffee. As you read your email, your VP of Sales drops by. The competition has just launched a new product. Can you come up with a new PR strategy to combat their launch? As you begin thinking through this urgent request, your CEO calls. He leaves tomorrow to speak at a major industry trade show. Can you prepare talking points by the end of the day? Taking the first sip of your now lukewarm coffee, you receive an email from your CFO. Can you prepare a report for this week's board meeting justifying the company's PR budget?

Similar scenarios are all too common in PR today. PR professionals must juggle an increasing number of demands within their organizations, while being asked to do it all more cost effectively.

For decades, the day-to-day practice of public relations stayed relatively the same. You built media relationships by phone or in-person, mailed or faxed your news releases, and relied on paper clipping services. Measurement was a matter of going back to the clip book or files to tally your coverage.

But beginning in the '90s, that all began to change. The emergence and popular use of the Internet gave PR professionals a whole new way to communicate. With e-mail and Web sites, they could distribute information to contacts immediately. Yet that was just the start of a dramatic evolution of PR in the technology age – an evolution that just keeps building momentum.

Technology Transforms the Present and Future of PR

Today, most PR professionals have embraced new technology to enhance the PR process. However, many only scratch the surface in the way they use technology, relying mainly on email, Web sites and various software applications. Yet powerful new technology exists that promises to transform the present and future of PR.

In fact, new applications of technology in the PR realm streamline every aspect of a PR professional's job, from list building to news distribution and monitoring to measuring results. As they automate once-manual tasks, those who embrace these new innovations discover nothing less than dramatic time savings, more communication among internal teams and with their outside agencies, enhanced media relations, and a higher quality and quantity of coverage.

So what is the future of PR? A key component of PR in the new age of digital communications is a centralized system for managing all your media contacts, correspondence, activities, news distribution, news monitoring and measurement. With companies expanding globally, the need for centralized PR management has become essential. With everything in a single location, accessible by everyone, you eliminate the time once spent calling and emailing to learn the status of a project or pitch. You no longer sort through filing cabinets and rolodexes searching for a clip or contact. Plus, you can measure and report on your efforts. Ultimately, this gives you essential information to shape and continuously improve your results, and frees you to focus on more strategic activities that will have a greater impact on the organization.

Following are some of the key capabilities that you need to move into the future of PR, and how some organizations are leveraging them to bring about dramatic changes in the way they do their jobs.

Media List Building

The future of PR starts with a whole new approach to media lists – one of the most essential parts of your PR. Traditionally, PR professionals have built media lists manually from hardcopy books or CDs that might already be out of date when they arrive. Often, if not with every release, they had to call media outlets to ensure they still had the right contacts on record.

American Healthways is one such organization. Until recently, the company, the nation's leading and largest provider of specialized, comprehensive disease management, care enhancement and high-risk health management services, created its media lists in Microsoft Excel. Having to update lists by hand, and calling media outlets to verify information that would soon be outdated, prevented the PR team from proactively pitching stories necessary to maintain its standing as the industry thought leader. "We had to find a way to be bigger without increasing our staff or having to rely heavily on external firms," explained Heath Shackleford, PR manager of American Healthways.

Maintaining a World-Class Media Database

Companies like American Healthways need access to a world-class, electronic media database to help them build targeted lists quickly, keep up with changing media contacts, reduce the manual hassles of managing lists and have more detailed insight about specific journalists. So, what do you look for in a media database?

- State-of-the art data center – Make sure your media database vendor staffs individuals with domain expertise covering all media areas – print, broadcast and Web – to ensure that information stays accurate and up-to-date and that the database contains the right contacts at each media outlet. With researchers tracking down current contact information for you, your PR team is freed from having to call contacts with each release and can focus on other responsibilities.
- Web-based format – Most media contact resources are available in hardcopy or CD format. However, only a Web-based format ensures that your list stays as current and accurate as possible. With each press release, you then build lists with contacts that have been verified as current.
- Pitch profiles – When pitching to the media, you need all the help you can get. Choose a media database that offers more detailed journalist profiles. Having a couple of paragraphs indicating each journalist's preference for delivery method, delivery days and times, and topics, provides valuable insight and enhances your media relations.
- Awards database – Awards represent a significant way to expand awareness about your company, products and services. The last thing you want is for your CEO to ask why your company did not win a certain award only to find out that you did not post for it. Your media database should include an extensive awards database, enabling you to search and find appropriate awards, their requirements and deadlines.
- Calls for Papers – PR professionals are constantly trying to find a way to gain more speaking opportunities for their organization. Having access to a searchable database that lists thousands of calls for papers from various groups, tradeshows, conferences and summits is critical to making sure you are posting for the appropriate speaking opportunities. Nothing quite works like lining up a great public speaking opportunity at a key tradeshow or conference for your executives.
- ProfNet Integration – Journalists, as well as PR professionals, have come to depend on ProfNet. Your media database is incomplete without this key piece, which will allow you to search by keywords for pitching opportunities, conferences and speaking opportunities in which to present your products or services.
- Editorial calendars – Additionally, your database should include access to thousands of editorial calendars and a way to search through them to identify opportunities that fit your company, product or service.

Most importantly, all this functionality should be integrated into one system to allow for easy searching in a single location.

Lists in "Half the Time, Twice the Accuracy"

American Healthways found its comprehensive media database in online software for public relations. The PR team now easily keeps up-to-date contact information for all media. Plus, it creates targeted media lists in minutes by using search and sort functionality in the software. It can narrow the list by geography or type of media outlet. "With online PR software, we're able to put together media lists in half the time with twice the accuracy," Shackleford said.

Software maker Cincom Systems took advantage of the media database capabilities in its online PR software when its newly formed PR team needed to build lists from scratch. The PR team had its work cut out for it handling PR for six different divisions or messaging campaigns.

With the online software, the team can tap into extensive, continuously updated information about reporters and media outlets. The level of detail about reporters allows it to tailor pitches and communications for each journalist. Drawing on the depth of the media database, the software lets PR know whether publications accept photos and the delivery methods they prefer.

With the database, Cincom PR created 13 different lists to date. With continuous access to current information about media contacts that are automatically updated, the team can easily revise lists to ensure they remain fresh.

CRM for PR

In recent years, CRM (customer relationship management) has become a hot business buzzword. Countless CRM applications now exist to help companies manage their sales and customer contacts. In PR, effective relationship management is just as essential, but many professionals still use basic email applications or Excel files to manage their many contacts and activities. Without a history of all activities, interaction and communication with journalists in one location – accessible by both you and your colleagues – your productivity and professionalism can suffer.

More than ever, PR professionals, whether they work independently or as part of a large team, need a centralized record of all activities and contacts. When a call comes in from a journalist, a contact management system allows you to look up that individual and immediately see the history of communication you had with him or her, what materials they have received, and even perform a Google search within the system to pull up everything that person has written on your organization. Your system should also allow you to set calendar reminders to follow-up with contacts or perform other activities, ensuring you never let an opportunity slip by.

American Healthways benefits from the CRM capabilities of its online PR system. With all email running through the software and a way to log all interaction with journalists, PR has a complete history of all interaction with each contact, allowing it to build better media relations and target pitches. "Having all the information on our contacts in one place, where it's manageable and searchable has made our department more organized and more effective," Shackleford said.

Keeping Teams, Agencies on the Same Page

For companies that work with external agencies, having a centralized, online PR system connects the various entities and keeps them on the same page about activities and results – eliminating duplicate efforts, and cutting down on calls and emails to get updates. This capability has proven essential at Bushnell Performance Optics, which works with a number of different agencies nationwide.

"I manage three agencies, four brands and 13 product lines," said Laura Olinger, public relations manager at Bushnell Performance Optics. "Online PR software is a much easier way to monitor and track results and integrate all our activities so that agencies in other parts of the country can easily track and monitor the activities taking place."

Interactive News Distribution

Many PR teams rely on wire services because they allow you to distribute news quickly. But then it's impossible to know which journalists received your news, making it tough to follow up appropriately.

Today, the releases that generate ink provide journalists with a clear and convenient way to obtain the information they need to craft stories. Direct distribution of news to key journalists, in the format and method they desire, as well as feedback on which contacts viewed your releases, helps support those relationships you work so hard to build.

PR software today gives you considerably more options when it comes to news distribution. With interactive news distribution integrated into your complete PR system, you can create electronic press releases containing buttons or links that direct recipients to the information they need. Links might take them to more information about an event, product, speech, company executives, or photos.

Interactive email also provides valuable feedback on your programs. It takes the guesswork out of message distribution by automatically keeping track of who received your email, who opened it, which documents they downloaded and which options they selected. In response, you can tailor your follow-ups based on recipients' actions. With feedback about each release, you can link actions with results and adjust campaigns to increase readership. Most importantly, as releases go out in your PR management system, they are tied to recipients' contact records, giving your team a complete record of all communication with contacts.

Increasing Event Attendance, Coverage

The PR team at Southwest Airlines recently combined its PR system's extensive media database and interactive emailing to publicize events surrounding the unveiling of its newest signature aircraft, "The Spirit of Hope." The special aircraft was dedicated to celebrate the 30th Birthday of the Ronald McDonald House Program, temporary lodging facilities for the families of seriously ill children being treated at nearby hospitals.

The team used interactive email to target media in each of the cities where the plane flew for festivities. With metrics from its PR system, the staff knew exactly who had seen the release, allowing them to follow up by phone only with those who did not open the release, thereby increasing event attendance.

Similarly, the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) recently took its news distribution a step further by adding interactive email as part of its online PR software. The PR team at the association, which represents more than 50,000 specially educated health information management professionals, creates electronic, interactive press releases containing buttons that journalists select for the information they need.

AHIMA discovered the real value of this capability when inviting industry leaders to an important meeting to address health-care IT issues with a key federal government official. With the interactive email feature, PR tracked who opened the invitation and made a reservation. The association then followed up by phone with invitees AHIMA hoped would attend, but who had not yet opened or responded to the invitation.

"Interactive email allowed us to operate more efficiently, to see who planned to attend quickly, and know whether our efforts were effective," said Kevin Gould, director of public relations at AHIMA.

Integrated, Electronic News Management

News management has long been a cumbersome manual task. Staff at costly clipping services would sift through hardcopy news sources for mentions of you or your competitors, then cut and mail your clips. Once they arrived, perhaps weeks after the run date, you might copy and circulate them around the office before pasting them into clip books or logging them in files. With such delayed feedback on your efforts, it was impossible to make changes mid-campaign or measure results comprehensively. Too many organizations still follow this outdated model.

Today, you have access to powerful electronic clipping services that can be integrated within your centralized PR system. Through such services, you can automatically receive electronic clips from thousands of worldwide news sources based on established criteria that you can set yourself and change at anytime in your PR software. You can collect and store clips on any relevant search terms, which are then catalogued in the PR system based on those terms. You can easily forward them via email to other colleagues, the same day a story runs. Finally, you can immediately review and measure coverage – and change tactics or messaging mid-campaign to enhance results.

Whereas traditional clipping services charge flat fees, as well as per-clip fees and search term fees, new electronic clipping services provide unlimited access and the sources, timeliness and reporting capabilities you need for one low annual fee without the per clip charges or search term fees. This enables a PR team to accurately budget for news monitoring.

Cutting Costs and Freeing Considerable Time

Starr Commonwealth, a Michigan-based non-profit organization offering programs to help children and families, simplifies its news management through its online PR software. Previously, PR spent a full day each month logging clips even though it spent \$36,000 on a clipping service.

Now, by using a news management feature integrated with its PR software, the organization cut ties with its clipping service – and \$36,000 in annual costs. This addition alone freed a full day each month for Marianne Haisten, public relations coordinator, who previously blocked off an afternoon every two weeks just to sort and log clips provided by clipping services.

The feature seamlessly brings electronic clips into the PR system, which allows Starr Commonwealth to comprehensively see and analyze coverage. With newfound time, Haisten can redirect her efforts to more strategic activities. "I can actually re-search stories to work on and I'm not spending hours cataloging clips," she said.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology also takes advantage of new technology to manage its news. The organization follows about 200 clips every month on its association, competitors and the eye industry at large. To better capture, log and measure its coverage, the Academy recently added a premium, yet affordable news monitoring service integrated right into its online PR software. The organization brings clips automatically into its PR system, allowing it to sort and analyze coverage immediately – without hours of manual sorting.

The communications team knows immediately when a story runs, allowing it to respond instantly and shape coverage. The Academy also tracks coverage on competitor stories and key spokespeople, giving the communications team an instant understanding of a broad range of eye care issues currently playing in the media. By automating this once-manual activity, the PR team is free to focus on activities that generate more coverage for Eye M.D.'s and respond immediately when hot issues arise.

Instant Clip Books and Reports

With one integrated PR management system that includes electronic news management, preparing clip “books” and reports is a matter of a few mouse clicks and a few seconds. To share clips with others in the organization, you simply select the appropriate stories and forward them in emails to the appropriate individuals. This lets you share coverage with key members of your organization right away.

You can easily impress board members at monthly or quarterly meetings by creating detailed reports of coverage and activities, and printing copies of all recent coverage. With PR software and electronic news management, PR professionals report that they save hours in preparing results information for important meetings. Right from their PR system, they can print everything necessary for the meeting, eliminating manual photocopying and number-crunching.

Prominence Scoring

You may spend hours trying to score your articles for impact or prominence. Or, you may spend thousands of dollars each year on outside services to give you prominence scores on your articles. The right PR management software product can reduce the time you spend on this task and eliminate the need for outside services so you can measure the way you're featured and the medium you're featured in to give you a mathematical score for each article.

When considering a PR management system, choose one that offers the powerful measurement methodologies you need to fully assess the value of your coverage:

- Prominence calculated and given a rating by number of mentions of your organization compared to competitor mentions in the headline and first paragraph of a story.
- Tiered ranking based on the importance of the media outlet in which a story was featured.
- A total prominence score, allowing you to determine the overall value of a story.
- Customizability, enabling you to modify rankings of various media outlets based on your needs.

With a formulaic method for “grading” stories, you can work to increase the quality of your coverage and easily know when your efforts are paying off.

Immediate Metrics on Results

In the past, you might have been able to get by with passing out clip books of coverage, or simply tallying the number of stories per month or quarter. You might have reported results quarterly, or just annually, due to lack of time to assemble clips and prepare reports. With such delayed information, you could only use results to shape future campaigns and report to management.

In an age of increased accountability and competition, you have to provide hard numbers – faster and more often – to show your activities and results, and how those results tie to increased revenue. This adds a whole new dimension to your job. In addition to all your daily responsibilities, you must keep track of every activity and the corresponding result, which ironically can take time away from the strategic activities that drive results.

PR technology today allows professionals to manage everything in one place, from pitches and releases to all coverage. With new capabilities, you can analyze coverage on an ongoing basis, allowing you to adjust your efforts and improve results – mid-campaign. You can slice and dice your efforts and coverage any number of ways: by type of coverage (print, online, TV); by geographic distribution; by campaign; by reporter; by product line and more.

Detailed Reporting Shapes Campaigns

Southwest Airlines brought measurement in house with powerful reporting integrated into its online PR system. With the feature, Angela Vargo, Measurement Specialist, draws on activities and coverage in its online PR system to build dozens of easy to read charts and graphs based on any criteria – by city, type of media, reporter, frequency of key messages, spokesperson, campaign, and more. Mid-campaign, PR analyzes coverage and shifts its efforts to improve its results.

For the launch of Southwest Airlines flight service at the Philadelphia airport, Southwest could quickly see its performance against legacy airlines in terms of message mindshare. With graphs showing message momentum during and after the launch, PR saw how its key messages appeared in stories in response to its efforts.

PR can “tie inputs to outputs” to show executive leadership how activities resulted in coverage, and how the public views Southwest. “We’re not only able to show them results but also provide them with input and suggestions for moving forward – and that’s very well received by management,” Vargo added.

Simplifying Your Online Newsroom

Did you know that 91 percent of journalists surveyed said they want access to executive team bios on your Web site? Or, did you know that most journalists want to read about past coverage on your site? In extensive journalist surveys, a high percentage reported wanting access to information in just about every category: contact information, research/study data, corporate backgrounders, press releases, media kits, corporate financials, corporate statistics, executive team bios, photos, past coverage, upcoming events, white papers, awards and recognition, and speeches.

The fact is, a professional online newsroom generates more media coverage and ensures that your company information is more accurate. Yet, while many companies take advantage of the Web to keep their audiences informed, a significant gap exists between what information journalists expect to find and what corporate Web sites present. Today, reporters confirm they use Web sites to do basic research, fact check, as well as pursue story leads, and appreciate sites that provide them with content-rich factual details.

So, how do you keep your site updated and loaded in content without having to rely on your IT department to make changes? Fortunately, newly available technology allows you to maintain a professional online newsroom without assistance from your IT staff. You can simplify the management of your online newsroom and create a valuable site more easily with turnkey online newsroom solutions.

Arbitron, the media research firm, relies on an online newsroom solution to keep its news site updated with press releases, executive bios, photos and other corporate collateral. With a more comprehensive newsroom, journalists and the company’s external PR firm have access to valuable information for stories at any time of the day or night.

In addition, the PR staff is able to upload breaking news without the help of IT support. For example, when Arbitron ranked among Fortune magazine’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” for the third time recently, PR immediately uploaded the press release to Arbitron’s newsroom.

Likewise, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), the nation’s voice for crime prevention, easily keeps its Web site updated with valuable information for the media. With the click of a button, it posts recent stories, and allows site visitors to search for stories by dates, headlines or topics. Online, reporters indicate the type of email alerts they want to receive, providing a way to tailor content to individuals.

When considering an online newsroom solution, choose one that’s hosted by an external PR software provider. With external hosting, you relieve your IT department from having to manage this site. However, you’ll want to ensure that your provider can match the look and feel of your newsroom with the rest of your site to create a seamless online experience. Your solution should also allow you to easily change and update your content anytime. Finally, look for search functionality so that journalists can find the information they need for stories quickly. With all these components, you can dramatically simplify the process of creating and maintaining a valuable, information-packed online newsroom.

Anytime, Anywhere Access to Information

Over the past decade, the Internet has dramatically changed public relations. Within minutes of releasing your news, it can be found on online media sites worldwide. With Web sites, email newsletters, blogs, wikis, webinars and podcasts, you can now communicate directly with your audience and contacts via the Web in the place and time that's convenient for them. It's become a 24/7 digital communications world, with news and information available online, anytime.

But the Web hasn't just changed the way we communicate with our audiences. Today, powerful Web-based PR solutions give your entire team, and any external agency users, access to your key contacts and information from any computer. With an online PR system, as users communicate with contacts, create lists, and distribute and manage news, that information is automatically updated in real time in the system, ensuring that all users stay on the same page. This reduces tedious calling and emailing for team members to learn the status of projects.

A Web-based system benefits both large corporations as well as one-person operations. On the road, you can manage your contacts and projects as usual, with complete access to everything you have back at the office.

X-Rite, a company providing hardware, software and support solutions that ensure color accuracy in printing and packaging, takes advantage of online PR software. Tyler Andrew, public relations manager, attends worldwide trade shows about 25-30 percent of the time. When on the road, he logs on to his online PR system at any computer to access to his lists, empowering him to release news at shows. As a result, he announces new developments immediately, rather than waiting until he returns to the office.

Your IT team also benefits from Web-based systems. Because there's no need to host the system in your organization, online PR software doesn't become another application that adds to the burdens of your in-house IT department. However, when considering online PR software, make sure the provider has a good track record for customer service and support, and continuously works to upgrade the software.

A Centralized, Integrated System

Clearly, new technology offers improvements in every aspect of the PR practice – contact management, list development, news distribution, news management and measurement. However, you further streamline your efforts by using a single, integrated PR system that offers all these capabilities. With one system, you don't have to juggle between multiple applications or CDs to accomplish your job from day to day. Plus, you have a complete record of everything you do in one place, allowing you and colleagues to find critical information immediately.

The Vocus Solution

All the organizations featured here use Vocus' on-demand software for corporate communications and public relations to manage track and measure all their PR activities. Though their challenges and needs are unique, the PR teams all share the need to operate more efficiently, while continuously driving bigger and better results. Vocus helps drive true efficiency in every phase of the PR process, empowering teams to focus on more valuable strategic activities without adding staff or relying on external vendors.

About Vocus

Vocus is the global leader in on-demand software for public relations and government relations. Vocus offers Web-based software that helps companies meet today's local and global communications challenges, and build and manage relationships with reporters, analysts, elected officials, and other key audiences. Its award-winning software helps customers manage media relations, news monitoring and analysis, interactive e-mail campaigns, online newsrooms, government relations, and PAC reporting. Vocus software is delivered as an easy-to-use and cost-effective annual subscription, with no need for internal hardware, software, or IT support. Vocus has received broad industry recognition and is used in five languages around the world by more than 1,000 organizations. Vocus is a privately held company with headquarters in suburban Washington and offices in North America, Europe, and Asia. For more information, please visit www.vocus.com or call 800.345.5572.