



Vocus White Paper

PR and the Net

How the Internet Enables Any Communications Team to Look Like a PR Powerhouse

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In the past 10 years, even the past five, 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 world, with news and information available online, anytime.

As powerful as Internet technology is, most PR practitioners only use it as a venue for publishing and exchanging news and information, which is just a fraction of what's possible with the Web. Today, you can leverage the Internet to streamline your internal efforts and finally break free from a number of manual tasks that take valuable time away from more strategic activities.

Streamlining Internal PR Activities with Internet Technology

From contact management and list development to news distribution and monitoring, Internet technology is changing public relations for countless organizations. Online technologies connect you with powerful databases of continuously updated media contact details. You can share information and stay connected with a team member or agency across the country or across an ocean. You can build world-class lists in minutes based on the most accurate information available. You can distribute your news directly to contacts, helping you build stronger one-on-one relationships with the media. Finally, you can more accurately measure and evaluate results to ultimately enhance your efforts.

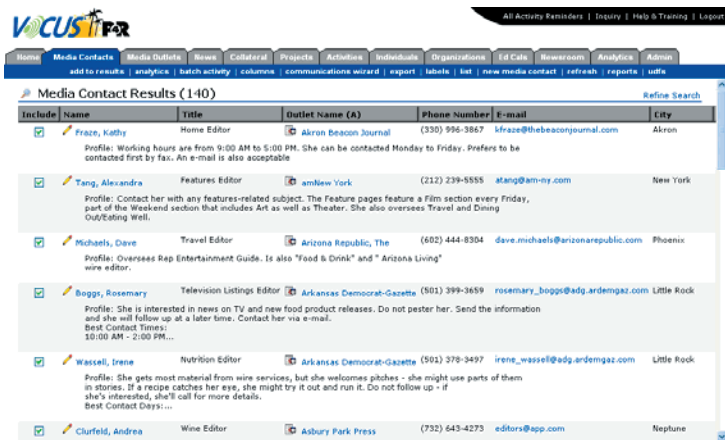
Organizations that adopt these online technologies in their daily workflow realize tremendous efficiency. Nowhere is this more essential than in the mid-size organization, where your team runs lean yet you are asked to deliver considerable and measurable results. On one side you are limited by your in-house manpower and on the other side by budget constraints that don't allow for much use of external resources.

Many PR practitioners at mid-size organizations find that, the more they leverage Internet technology in their daily workflow – beyond just for broadcasting news – the more they multiply their effectiveness. The use of these technologies is establishing a whole new set of PR best practices today. Here, we'll highlight some of the challenges that PR teams face and feature how some are using Internet technology in various aspects of their day-to-day operations – to ultimately become PR powerhouses.

Managing Contacts and Lists

Like many organizations, American Healthways knows a thing or two about manual contact and list management. 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, calling media outlets to verify information that would soon be outdated, prevented the two-person PR team from proactively pitching stories necessary to maintain its standing as the industry thought leader. This approach also made it nearly impossible for the team to keep up with which journalists it contacted, the details of each interaction, or the history of a relationship with a contact.

"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.



Lists in “Half the Time, Twice the Accuracy”

American Healthways’ PR team brought in online software for public relations. The software includes an extensive media database, which now allows the PR team to easily keep up-to-date contact information for all media, including detailed journalist profiles with which to pitch stories. 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. Plus, the team creates targeted media lists in minutes.

“With online PR software, we’re able to put together media lists in half the time with twice the accuracy,” Shackleford said. “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.”

You can create accurate, targeted, information rich media databases, through general or very specific searches. Once the information comes back, Vocus provides in depth pitching profiles, increasing your odds of cutting through the clutter.

Extensive, Up-to-Date Journalist Details

Software maker Cincom Systems faced a similar challenge. Though Cincom has been in business for decades, its PR department is in its infancy. In 2003, the company created the department as a result of the CEO’s mission to increase awareness about the company. Though new, the two-person PR team has its work cut out for it handling PR for six different divisions or messaging campaigns. As a new department, Public Relations had to build most of its relationships, processes, lists and campaigns from the ground up.

Cincom brought in PR management software to automate and simplify many of its activities. 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.

The database also supports the team’s need to build a variety of unique lists. In fact, 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.

A Centralized View of All Activities

For companies that work with external agencies, having an online PR system connects the various entities and keeps them on the same page about activities and results – eliminating duplicate efforts, and calls and emails to get updates. “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 of our activities so that agencies in other parts of the country can easily track and monitor the activities taking place.”

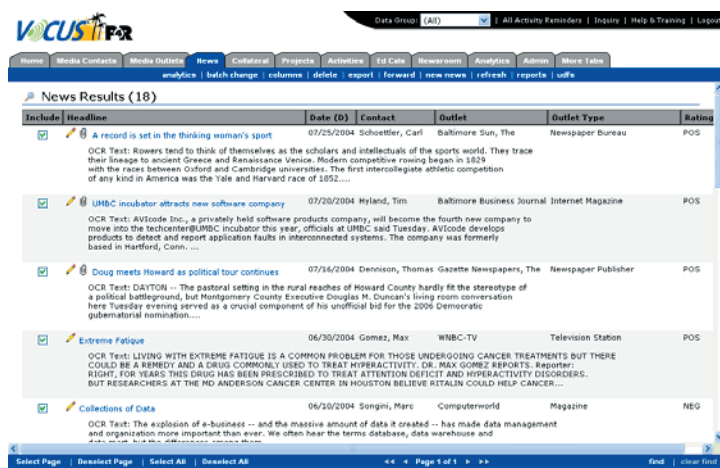
News Distribution

Many PR teams rely on wire services because they allow you to distribute news quickly. But wires can’t tell you which journalists received your news — and don’t give you an easy way to follow up. Direct distribution of news to key journalists, in the format and method they desire, helps support those relationships you work so hard to build.

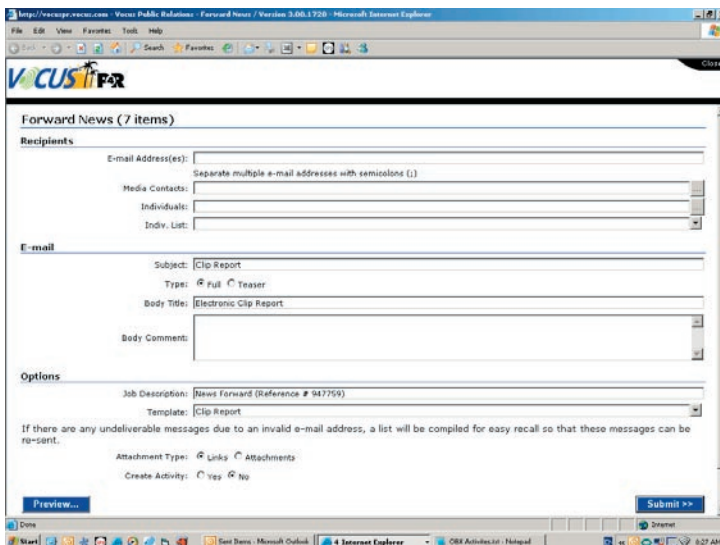
Today, Internet technology gives you considerably more options when it comes to news distribution, allowing you to distribute news to contacts directly – and quickly. Michigan-based X-Rite, a public company, takes advantage of this technology for its non-financial-related news releases. The company provides hardware, software and support solutions that ensure color accuracy and data communication when color output is critical to business.

Reaching Key Contacts Directly

Using online PR software, and the extensive contact database within it, X-Rite distributes releases to its own contact lists, ensuring that news reaches key contacts directly. Direct delivery to contacts, tagged with the PR manager’s name, increases the chance that media will take notice of X-Rite releases and enhances media relations. Using unique features of the software, PR reps can specify the distribution method for each media contact via fax or email, based on the journalist’s preference.



With Vocus News on Demand, you can set unlimited search terms to track your organization by name, product, spokesperson or executive. And you can track your competitors in the same way, to see how you're stacking up against them.



As your news clips appear in your Vocus News dashboard, you can forward a clip report showcasing all or select news mentions to your executive team, marketing team, or the entire organization.

Now, instead of sifting through, organizing and generating reports on company and industry media coverage, American Healthways receives clips electronically from its news clipping service directly into its PR system. With all coverage in the system, PR sends daily news updates, in an attractive email, to executive leadership in a matter of minutes. Plus, a complete record of electronic clips lets the company measure and analyze coverage more easily.

Cutting Costs and Freeing Considerable Time

Starr Commonwealth, a Michigan-based non-profit organization offering programs to help children and families, additionally 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 online software, the organization cut ties with its clipping service – and \$36,000 in annual costs – representing significant cost savings for the non-profit. This addition alone freed a full

Reporters can then reply with questions or comments. The company also saves a couple thousand dollars on the releases it sends out directly, as opposed to using the wire for all releases.

Another key benefit of the online system, when the PR manager attends trade shows – 25-30 percent of the time – he has continuous access to his lists, empowering him to release news while on the road.

American Healthways also distributes news through Vocus, customizing releases to individual contacts. Direct email distribution in its PR software, branded with the sender's name, offers a more personalized approach, fostering better media relationships. "The more we personalize releases for each contact, the more reporters feel like we took the time to understand what they cover," Shackleford said.

Most importantly, for companies like X-Rite and American Healthways that use online PR software, as releases go out, they have a complete record of each contact that received a release, allowing them to follow up.

News Management

At many organizations, fees for outside clipping services consume a large part of the PR budget. Yet for all the cost, many PR departments don't take full advantage of those clips. Most collect, copy and send out clip books or file away clips for their permanent records, making it tough to tie the results to the activities that generated them and to circulate clips easily to others in the company.

Online PR software available today enables companies to store and easily access clips electronically, allowing them to summarize and report on news mentions – as well as analyze the results of coverage. American Healthways significantly streamlined its news management with its online PR system. With a staff of just two professionals, the two-year-old PR department at the company must keep up with more than 1,000 clips a month on the company, its clients, the industry and competitors. Previously, the small department was hard-pressed to manage its volume of clips, much less share and analyze that coverage.

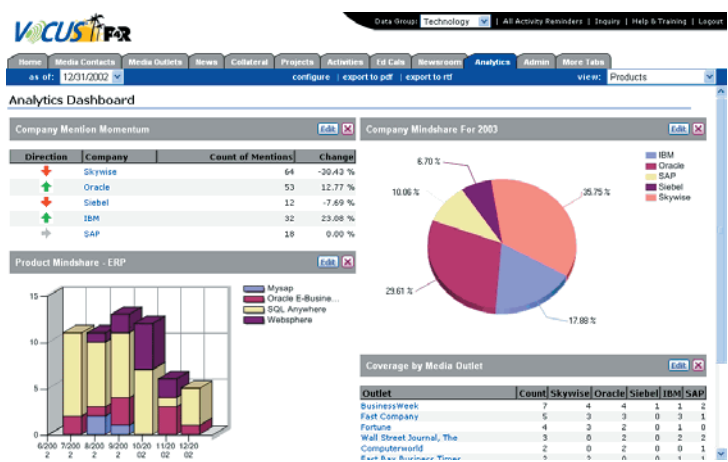
day each month for Marianne Haisten, Public Relations Coordinator, who previously blocked off an afternoon every two weeks just to sort and log clips provided by clipping services.

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.

Reporting

In the past, you might have gotten by with passing out clip books of coverage, or simply tallying the number of stories per month or quarter. But now, in an age of increased accountability and competition, you have to provide hard numbers to show your activities, your results and how those results tie to increased revenue. This pressure adds a whole new dimension to your job. Not only must you manage your daily responsibilities, but you must keep track of every move and every result, which ironically can take time away from the strategic activities that actually drive results.

Reporting has emerged as a key area where Internet technology brings significant value for mid-size organizations pressed to achieve and prove their results – with minimal internal staff resources. Online PR software, from which you can manage all activities, and release and manage news, gives you a centralized view of all your activities and results.



Now that you've got better media lists and better tools to get your messages out, it's time to measure your success. With Analytics, you can track your coverage regionally, by media outlet, or versus competitors. It's a quick way to understand the success of your PR programs.

Reports in a Couple of Clicks

With reporting integrated in its online PR system, the department creates reports at the click of a button, instead of manually sorting through clips. Reports measure clip counts, as well as break coverage down by type, such as broadcast, print or Web, and even by topic. Management can clearly see the team's efforts and results – key data for proving the department's value.

With everything in one place in the software, the Academy has more immediate and more detailed records and feedback on its efforts and results. "It's all in one place," said Michelle Stephens, media manager at the Academy. "We're getting results much more quickly now. We can see what news came in that day, and organize projects so we keep track of everything."

Results: Boosting Team Efficiency, Coverage

Internet technology has revolutionized public relations, creating efficiency and enhancing media relations. Ultimately, timesavings throughout the process – from list development to news management to reporting – allows lean PR teams to increase coverage and provide more value to their organizations. In fact, many find the technology itself is equivalent to another staff member.

Previously, you might have reported 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. With new capabilities available in PR software, 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.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) is one such organization that has taken advantage of powerful reporting capabilities in its online PR software. The Academy is the largest national membership association of ophthalmologists, or "Eye M.D.s." With about 200 clips per month, the team has to capture, log and measure all its coverage to ensure it meets annual objectives. Recently, the department has been pressed to provide management with more detailed quantitative data to demonstrate its efforts.

At American Healthways, online PR software allows the two-person PR staff, with limited external support, to develop and implement communications strategies proactively, rather than spending all their time on tasks. American Healthways PR cut the time it takes to build media lists in half, and significantly streamlined news management. “The software allows us to play the media relations game on a larger scale than we would ever be able to without it,” Shackleford said. “It’s like having a third staff member on our team. Some of our better placements were the result of either my colleague or I having some extra time to do creative PR, where we were setting the agenda rather than reacting.”

That strategic focus pays off. “Online PR software helped us cut down our busywork and all the daily tasks we have by probably 50 percent,” he added. “At the same time, we’ve been able to generate at least 60 percent more media coverage in that timeframe.”

The American Academy of Ophthalmology has increased coverage every year that its PR team has used online PR software, although the organization has not added more communications staff. In short, the Academy keeps costs down while maximizing coverage – and can clearly show performance to management.

Shifting from Tactical to Strategic

At Cincom, an online PR system effectively gives the small staff extra manpower by automating daily activities and reporting. That lets the PR coordinator shift from tactical to more strategic activities. “Online PR software has freed up my time,” said Donna Hedge, public relations specialist at Cincom. “With a two-person staff, it didn’t make sense to be doing administrative stuff. This allows me to do more. We’re getting ready for a press tour. Before, I wouldn’t have had time to prepare for all this. In addition, it helped us get understanding internally about what PR does.”

With immediate access to key metrics, the team has the important proof it needs to demonstrate its value to the organization. The CEO, as well as the various divisions, have clearly seen the results: From one year to the next, with the founding of the PR department, the company increased its total impressions from around 25,000 per month to over one million per month now. Additionally, overall clips increased by 333 percent, while coverage in key publications jumped by 200 percent.

Taking Back Days Every Month

Starr Commonwealth streamlined most of its regular tasks, such as list development, distribution and clip processing, giving it extra days each month to focus on more strategic activities. With more targeted lists, Starr Commonwealth gets its message to the best individuals at each outlet, which has helped increase coverage in markets nationwide. In fact, coverage more than tripled the year the department began using online software. Starr effectively brought its message to more people while saving at least \$36,000 per year by eliminating external clipping services.

“While our budget has not changed significantly in the past three years, our productivity has changed dramatically,” Haisten said. “A key element is our PR software and the ability to get us to the contacts we need and to focus our energies. The more we do, the more kids are helped and the more we can allocate resources to remain one of the most charitable charities.”

Finally, with targeted, current lists and direct distribution, X-Rite reaches the right media quickly, and is empowered with the information to build relationships with contacts. The ability to release news without delay to the most appropriate contacts contributed to an increase in coverage of approximately 20 percent during the first year of using the software. Most importantly, by reducing manual busywork, the technology has helped Tyler Andrew, public relations manager at X-Rite, become a one-person PR powerhouse.

“Online PR software has been an absolute lifesaver for me. It’s saved me a lot of time,” Andrew said. “I’d recommend it to any small PR operation that wants to operate efficiently and effectively with the media, internal audiences and others who count on measurement of PR.”

Vocus Public Relations Solution

All the organizations featured here use Vocus’ online software for public relations to manage, track and measure all their 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. Beyond serving as just a method of publishing information, Internet technology drives true efficiency in every phase of the PR process, empowering teams to focus on more valuable strategic activities without adding staff or relying heavily on external vendors.

About Vocus Online Software for Public Relations

Vocus provides the only totally integrated on-demand software suite for PR professionals. The Vocus on-demand software suite manages media and analyst relationships; interactive email campaigns; projects and news; files, documents and other collateral; and online newsrooms. The software also analyzes media coverage and other PR information to provide real-time feedback on the effectiveness of PR campaigns, and early intelligence on trends unfolding in the press. The software features the Vocus global media and analyst database, the most comprehensive source of contacts, pitching tips and editorial calendars. The Vocus database combines into one resource the directories and databases of several leading research firms including PR Newswire, Bulldog Reporter, Thomson Financial, Press Access and Bacon's. Vocus public relations software is available in a Professional Edition for small to medium-size PR departments, and in an Enterprise Edition for larger organizations with more complex needs. For more information, visit www.vocus.com or call 1-800-345-5572.