

THE STATE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS 2014

Busting the Myths

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Busting the Myths

Vocus commissioned Market Connections, Inc., an independent market research firm, to study how public relations (PR) and marketing professionals grapple with digital media technologies. The study showed a changing world in which PR professionals are moving towards digital and social media.



While the research supported many known trends, it also busted several common PR myths generally accepted on the social Internet. PR bloggers and other online voices insist that the industry is engaging in converging marketing practices like content marketing and SEO, but surveyed professionals reveal a disparity between online chatter and reality. Our research reveals these myths, and then discusses general trends impacting the PR sector.

Market Connections conducted an online national poll of 325 mid- and senior-level marketing and PR professionals. The poll queried a cross-section of marketing and PR agencies, commercial companies and non-profit organisations. The margin of error on the poll results is +/- 5% at a 95% confidence level.

The following report analyses four concepts widely held as truth in online conversation, and then examines how these 'myths' are really affecting today's public relations professional. The remainder of the report dissects major trends impacting the public relations sector.

Busting Trending Myths

Some online discussions identify visionary content as the most important PR trend for 2014 while others state that public relations is expected to support SEO and visibility, not hinder it. Whereas popular online chatter paints one picture of public relations, data paints a different one. Only half of PR pros surveyed are leveraging content and SEO.

The survey reveals that beliefs held about content marketing may be more myth than reality.

Myth 1: Virtually Everyone Has a Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing is a common discussion on the social web. Many PR practitioners are tasked with creating all or some of their brand's 'owned' content, including market research, blogs, events, infographics and much more. Everyone assumes that everyone else is deploying content marketing tactics.

Our study shows that while content marketing may be an omnipresent tactic, only 60% of respondents or their clients have an actual content marketing strategy in place. The number is even lower with respondents identifying themselves as PR practitioners. Only 53% say they use branded content in their outreach campaigns.

Myth 2: PR Practitioners are Adapting to All the New Digital Tactics

The digital public relations suite now often includes social media, owned content, native advertising and several other tactics, but it is not clear that PR practitioners use all of the online tools available to them. While SEO is directly impacted by strong PR, and branded content fuels social engagement, a significant group of PR pros do not use these tools:

- Only 53% of PR practitioners use content marketing.
- Even fewer (49%) use search engine marketing.

Perhaps most surprising is that most PR pros don't use mobile. Only 34% of PR pros have a mobile engagement strategy, even though 57% of web users in Great Britain accessed the internet via a mobile device in 2013 (eMarketer).

Myth 3: Social Media Pros Don't Care About ROI

It is believed that most social media experts measure weak statistics such as engagement (likes and retweets) and reach, and that they don't care about ROI. The State of Public Relations research reveals that 32% of self-described social media pros care about increased revenue per customer. In contrast, only 22% of traditional marketers measure ROI. 21% of PR practitioners say it is a key metric.

Myth 4: Blogging Is Essential



Another myth busted by the research is that blogging is essential to PR practitioners. Of all the distribution channels noted by survey respondents, blogging was considered the least effective, with only 35% of pros rating it as a 4 or 5 (highest). In contrast, websites, email, events, social media and media relations received higher scores. More than 50% of PR professionals view the five as strong distribution channels.

Blogging's lacklustre results may have to do with the larger content marketing trend. While many consider blogging a primary tactic, blogging is hard to sustain. It requires daily frequency and consistent quality to attract and keep attention. Both factors are problematic when competing with news publications and established blogs, not to mention trying to trigger regular inbound searches.

Unless the brand has a well-functioning blog and can own relevant keywords, its blog posts are less likely to create a big splash for news and information dissemination, meaning the brand will focus its efforts elsewhere.

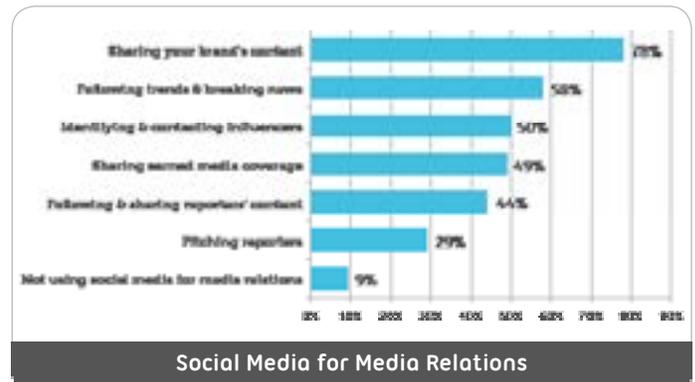
Remaining Report Findings

While the myths are certainly interesting to review, there were several major findings that impact PR pros. The remainder of our report discusses those trends.

Integrating Social Into Media Relations

Perhaps a more positive sign of the times is the widespread use of social media as a PR tactic. Respondents now use social to share content (78%), follow trends (58%), identify and contact influencers (50%), and share media coverage (49%).

Further, an emerging trend shows more and more survey respondents are using social to engage in direct media relations. 44% use social tools to cultivate relationships and 29% pitch reporters directly via social.



"Where reporters were once confined to the depth of their Rolodex, today we have new ways of reaching out to the eyes we want to catch," says Lisa Barone, vice president of strategy at Overit. "By following reporters and media outlets on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social sites, we get in their line of sight."¹

When the survey findings are isolated to PR professionals only, the results show greater leveraging of social for media relations. PR pros are more likely to use social for:

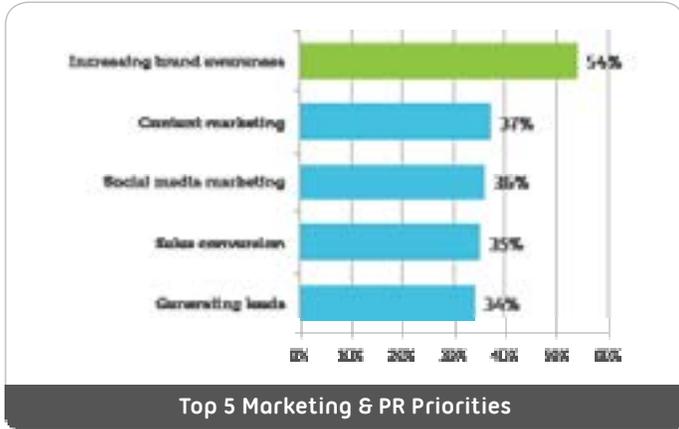
- Pitching reporters with social media (34%)
- Sharing earned media coverage (55%)
- Following and sharing reporters' content (49%)
- Following trends and breaking news (64%)

It's clear that media is becoming more integrated with social tools, and PR practitioners are responding in kind. They are meeting and interacting with bloggers, reporters and influencers where they are most likely to congregate and respond.



1 <http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2285822/Bridging-the-Gap-Between-Social-Media-and-PR>

Strategic Aspirations, Tactical Concerns



Brand awareness is by far the top priority for survey respondents. More than 54% say it is a top concern. 72% of nonprofit communicators view brand awareness as their number one priority.

The brand awareness focus explains a refocus on PR by many companies. In a VentureBeat article, venture capitalist Brian Stolle writes, "PR, often thought of as a 'red-headed stepchild' in terms of marketing planning and budgeting, is rapidly regaining favour as digital and social media become central to customer engagement and acquisition."²



The next highest-ranking concern is content marketing at 37%, followed by social media, sales conversion and lead generation. All four are tactical concerns, showing a disparity between building brand and day-to-day communications functions. Communicators begin with the best of intentions for their efforts, but the need to generate and convert leads day in and day out often takes precedence.

PR practitioners have their own unique concerns. 39% of PR pros see thought leadership as a critical need. Earned media coverage is also a great concern; 32% view it as a priority. Further, 41% of PR and marketing agencies listed thought leadership as a critical concern.

Resource Challenges



PR professionals always face resource challenges, but their needs in 2014 seem more pronounced. Survey respondents say a lack of staff and time (51%) and budget (48%) are their top challenges. Their third-highest concern, at 42%, is measuring and demonstrating results.

One-third of respondents who work at companies with marketing automation solutions have fewer challenges in justifying budget and staffing expenses than their counterparts. Only 37% of respondents with marketing automation solutions feel budget is a concern, and 43% think lack of staff and time is an issue.

Decisions on the implementation of marketing automation often hinge on cost concerns. Ironically, marketing automation systems not only allow communications departments to see what is working, but also better help justify their existences. Our research shows that the systems are also delivering increased efficiencies through campaign management, better response in the form of more and higher quality leads, and improved ROI through sales conversion. By implementing marketing automation, companies can avoid the old John Wanamaker statement: "Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is, I don't know which half." Companies

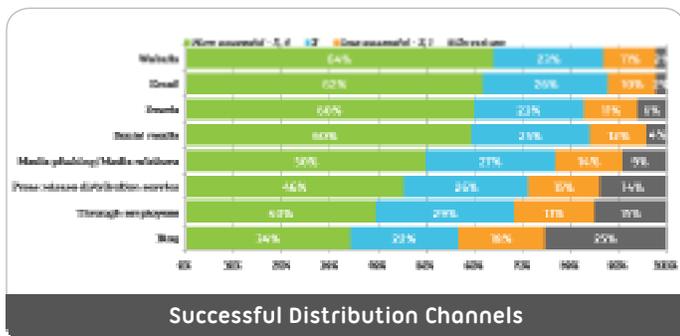


² <http://venturebeat.com/2014/05/26/pr-tech-the-next-automated-marketing-frontier/>

using automation solutions know what is 'wasted' and what is working, and can justify investing time, staff and money with data.

The other three concerns fall into traditional PR and marketing categories: generating quality leads (31%), driving traffic to the website (30%), and nurturing and converting leads (30%). PR and ad agencies also view keeping up with new technologies (45%) and receiving earned media (39%) as primary challenges.

Changing Distribution Models



The media still ranks as a successful distribution channel; 58% of public relations respondents cite it as a strong method for interacting with customers. However, it ranks fifth behind websites (62%), email (60%), social media (60%) and events (59%).

Most tactics are within the domain of the public relations professional, but social and digital media have completely altered conventional methods of getting news out. Many PR pros now take a blended channel approach when sharing information and news with stakeholders.

Events provide an interesting context. While events are a traditional tactic, they continue to be extremely worthwhile endeavours for both traditional and digital PR professionals. 79% of PR, marketing and advertising agencies and 58% of nonprofit respondents surveyed rated events as successful distribution channels.



People can rally around live events. Photos, discussions and speeches provide fodder for online communication. Hashtags allow attendees to follow conversations and trends, and let PR professionals measure impressions, engagement and reach. Follow-up emails turn attendees and stakeholders into potential customers whose relationships can be nurtured through targeted and traditional marketing.



Michael Brenner, vice president of global marketing for SAP, says, "[...] the event team thinks multi-format, multi-channel and a steady and continuous promotion of great content. The event is seen more like a conversation that continues well before and long after the physical part."³

Professionals who identify themselves as social media specialists have more success with digital media. They indicate that the website (41%), social media (39%), media pitching (32%) and blogging (24%) are highly successful tactics for them. The finding isn't surprising; they tend to be more engaged with the social and digital evolution than their more traditional peers.

Conclusion

Public relations, as an industry, is moving toward the acceptance of digital as part of its fundamental definition. However, while the individual PR professional may be more digitally savvy, the industry as a whole is less converged than you might believe.

Rather than engaging in content marketing strategies and SEO, PR pros are integrating social media into their traditional media relations strategies. They're also using social media to extend digital buzz and increase the value of traditional event management to develop moments in time that generate buzz, create online earned media impressions, and drive brand awareness.

While the role of a PR professional remains the same – generating and creating goodwill for an organisation with

its stakeholders through a variety of tactics – how they accomplish their goal remains an intriguing evolution. As social and digital media continue to be impacted by technological developments, PR practitioners will be challenged to optimise and cut through the noise with the right mix of strategy, creativity, channels and campaigns.

About Vocus

Vocus provides leading cloud-based public relations and marketing software that enables companies to acquire and retain customers. The company offers products and services to help clients attract and engage prospects, nurture and convert customers, and measure and improve marketing effectiveness. More than 16,000 annual subscription customers across a wide variety of industries use Vocus software. The company is headquartered in Beltsville, MD with offices in North America, Europe and Asia. For more information, visit www.vocus.co.uk.

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