

THE FUTURE OF

PR

IN A DIGITAL WORLD

BY THE MAKERS OF



Prezly

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Introduction

Public Relations has been around for [more than a hundred years](#). And while the way people communicate and consume content has evolved dramatically, PR seems to be stuck in the past, maintaining a dated workflow that's no longer suited for today's information flux.

People share and consume content on a plethora of different channels. The internet and social media have given rise to a new range of influencers and stakeholders. Meanwhile, the PR industry keeps falling back on its traditional tools and workflow: static content, email blasts to journalists, flat contact databases, and poor measurement.

In this eBook, we'll paint a picture of the current state of affairs for Public Relations, look ahead to what the future holds, and most importantly, we'll attempt to outline the strategies to adopt in order to make your PR efforts thrive in the digital age.

The current state of PR, or PR as it shouldn't be

PR today seems to be stuck in the stone age. And that's somewhat strange, because looking at the recent technological evolutions, PR should actually be thriving.

It has never been easier to connect, communicate, and discuss with stakeholders. Social media has provided communication professionals with a direct line to their stakeholders. Widespread access to the internet has further democratized the media, allowing anyone to be a thought leader, and giving people access to a wide new range of channels and platforms to consume and share content.

The opportunities are clearly there. We simply need to overcome the challenges plaguing PR practice today.

Static Content

Does the following workflow sound familiar to you? Write your story in Word, throw some images in there, and export to PDF. Ready for distribution.

There are a number of issues with static documents like those, the most important one being that they are simply not adaptable to the wide range of channels frequented by your audience.

Attaching a file to an email *might* still work, but there aren't a lot of other channels where you'll be able to share it in an easy and accessible way. Have you ever seen someone share a Word document on their Facebook wall or Twitter account? Have you ever enjoyed downloading and reading a PDF file on your smartphone?

Using static files for content sharing limits accessibility. And limiting accessibility, in turn, inevitably limits your reach.

There are much better and versatile ways to communicate our stories. So let's use a 21st century way to do it.

Irrelevant Content

Another factor strongly affecting the potential reach of press releases, is the nature of their content. It happens all too often that the stories shared by PR pros simply don't resonate with the audience.

Press releases about company acquisitions, headquarters relocations, record profits,...

People are talking about how Felix Baumgartner together with Red Bull did a [supersonic freefall from space](#). They're talking about how Casey Neistat together with Samsung built [a drone that could carry him snowboarding through Finland](#). And you're talking about your most recent fundraiser? Ask yourself the question: who really cares?



Content should be compelling. It should offer your audience something worth spending their time consuming. And if you can't make it compelling (not everyone can do a space jump, after all), at least make sure it's relevant.

Spray and Pray

Have you ever blasted out your story to everyone on your contact list, just to cover all your bases?

Mass email campaigns with little regard for relevancy and timeliness are nothing new in the PR industry. In fact, the phenomenon is so widespread, it has been given its own name (one that you're undoubtedly familiar with): **spray and pray**. It's an unkind name for an unkind practice, where neither party benefits. Think about it.

Stakeholders' inboxes are flooded with emails that are irrelevant to them. And for you, as a PR professional, this approach quickly amounts to a wasted effort: you don't know what your stakeholder is interested in, if your emails arrived, whether they read them or not,... For all the work you put in, you get limited results, and you don't even know where it went wrong.

Following up

"Hey there, this is X calling, from Company Y. You've probably read my email earlier about Z, and I was just wondering if you had any questions about it that I could answer for you."

It's not uncommon to hear this phrase being answered with, *"Uhm, what email was that again?"*

If you're sending huge email blasts to people you don't actually know, you reap what you sow during the follow-up round.

The "spray and pray" approach often employed in the PR industry leaves you with a ton of follow-up work to do. Work that only adds to the wasted effort we've already talked about earlier.

Measurement

After all the work you've put into a PR campaign, are you often left wondering what its effects really were? Difficulty measuring the ROI of a campaign is, once again, a fairly common issue for many PR practitioners.

Despite mass email campaigns and extensive, repeated follow-up calls, there is no guarantee that your content will actually be published; different stakeholders and media are so spread out, that measuring the actual reach of your campaign becomes a complex and time-consuming endeavor: some people reply to emails, others you talk to on the phone.

But does that mean your efforts had no impact at all? There are plenty of other metrics that can indicate where you fell off your stakeholders' radar.

Summary

Over the last few pages, we've detailed the different aspects and accompanying struggles of the current PR workflow. Here's a quick recap of how things stand right now:

- Press releases are created and published as **static content**, limiting the audience's access due to their inadaptability to other media platforms.
- Brand stories' impact have weakened because of their **irrelevance** to, limited value for, and resonance with the audience.
- Email distribution of press releases often amounts to a lot of wasted effort, because of the untargeted nature of the **spray and pray** method.
- Tons of **follow-up** work resulting from said spray and pray method further add to wasted efforts.
- After all the work put into a PR campaign, it's hard to gauge what its impact was and where improvements should be made, due to a lack of decent **measurement**.

It's a cumbersome process that's stuck in the past, and over time, the results of this dated approach will diminish.

We're in the information age. The internet has put all the information in the world right at people's fingertips. And people can, want, and most certainly *will* seek out the content that they can relate to.

And it's not just the content. It's the way they consume it as well. People want to be able to use whatever channel or platform they want to access content. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, you name it.

If the PR industry wants to seize the opportunities brought about by the age of information, it needs to adapt, and meet stakeholders on their own terms.

The Future of PR

It's clear that the media landscape has changed, and that it will keep evolving. So how can the PR industry adapt to seize the new opportunities this evolution has brought along?

Of all marketing disciplines, PR remains among the most powerful ones. And if you think about it, it already has one of the most crucial skills needed to thrive in this new environment: the art of sparking conversation.

PR regaining its footing really boils down to applying the skills you already have to two things:

1. Adopting the new disciplines of the information age.
2. Getting to know the multifaceted stakeholders of today.

What's changed?

New Disciplines

Search Engine Optimization

[Google runs more than 3.5 billion searches per day](#). Which means there's a good chance that your audience is already *looking* for you, or at least for content related to your brand.

So it's just a matter of making it easy for them to actually *find* you. That's where SEO comes in. And while it might seem like it's just a bunch of complicated rules people manipulate to rank higher in search results, it's really about getting in touch with those that are trying to find the answers to their questions.

SEO is a daunting project to take on, especially in your already busy role as a PR professional. Search engines rank pages based on [more than 200 factors](#), after all. But you might be surprised how far well-researched and qualitative content might get you.

Influencer Marketing

As we've said before, the internet has given anyone, anywhere the ability to become a thought leader and social influencer. And there's a lot of them. So chances are someone's already talking to your audience.

So why not build a relationship with those influencers, just like the many relationships you've built before with journalists? It's a skill you, as a PR professional, have already honed better than anyone. And if put to good use, that skill will help you reach your audience with a new voice.

We've written an extensive [influencer marketing guide](#) that can help you if you're not sure where to start.



Social Media Marketing

Another field where you can put your skill of sparking conversation to good use, is Social Media Marketing. The big difference with more traditional PR practices is that here, you can cut out the middleman (that middleman being a journalist or other influencer).

Social media provide you with the opportunity to converse with your stakeholders directly, and to push your stories into their social feeds. This can help you become more visible online, increase brand recognition, and improve brand loyalty by actively engaging your audience.

Content Marketing

We've touched on the subject of content before. Content marketing is a fairly recent development, focused on creating well-researched, valuable content that answers its audience's questions.

And it's from content marketing that the PR industry might be able to learn the most. Your content should no longer *just* be geared towards gatekeeper

influencers such as journalists and social thought leaders. Your content should also cater to the needs of your ultimate audience. Additionally, content marketing sets a clear goal: to convert the readers of its content. These kinds of goals have traditionally been absent in the PR industry.

New influencers

Traditionally, PR pros have primarily reached out to journalists working at a range of different magazines and newspapers, using them as a mouthpiece to communicate with their audience. But the landscape of people that are talking to your audience has evolved tremendously, and it keeps changing.

There is now a whole new range of influencers that communicate with the people you're trying to reach. Think about social influencers, employees, board members, public interest groups, politicians,... All of these actors can be targeted and provided with information that they, in turn, can share with their peers.

Next to that, influencers have also become increasingly multifaceted. For example, it might very well be that a financial journalist you're reaching out to also runs a food blog on his own time. One of your employees could be an avid Instagram user with a large following.

It's your job to know what all your different stakeholders are up to, what occupies them, and to actively engage with them so that you can employ them as ambassadors for your brand.

Why should you care?

You might ponder why you should care about all of this. It's not because you have a whole new range of influencers and channels to pick from, that the traditional ones have lost their value, right?

The traditional press isn't dead yet, radio is still going strong, and television still has a large audience.

But while that may be true, something else *has* happened: media consumption has become increasingly fragmented. Which means that the influential power drawn from it, in turn, has also become fragmented.

If you want to maintain the return from your PR efforts, you need to cover all your bases, and start investing in these new channels and ways of content consumption.

PR done right

From what we've seen up until now in this book, it's clear that the environment in which PR professionals operate has drastically changed. At the same time, the PR industry has been slow to adapt to those recent evolutions.

There is a whole new range of channels to communicate through, accompanied by new disciplines. The PR industry has yet to fully adopt these new disciplines, and its current workflow is not suited for them either. Just look at the static content that is often used to share brand news and stories with: PDF and Word files, or plain text that is locked away somewhere in an email. The content you produce should be adaptable to a wide range of platforms and consumption patterns.

Alongside new channels, the number of stakeholders and influencers has grown as well. You have employees, board members, journalists, social influencers, the political field, action groups, and so much more to take into account in your communication. And on top of that, those stakeholders are more multifaceted than ever. Almost everyone has a social account somewhere, an economic journalist can maintain a popular blog after hours, one of your employees can be a superstar on Instagram. Again, these different sides to your stakeholders can not be kept track of in the way the PR industry has traditionally done: using Excel or other flat contact lists.

So how can we manage this mess?

We've mentioned before that you, as a PR professional, already have the key skills needed to thrive in this new environment. Building relationships and sparking conversations is in your DNA.

It simply comes down to eliminating the disconnect between your messages and your stakeholders. And luckily, that's just a matter of adopting the things that have been working well within digital marketing and applying your PR skills to them.

Quality content

First of all, quality content is paramount. It's useful to look into content marketing practices in this respect. Focus on creating content that answers the questions your audience is asking. It's common practice among content marketers to use tools such as Google Trends to look for often-used keywords to

eventually arrive at the topics their audience seems interested in. Based on those insights, they can then start producing content that is of real value to their target audience.

Online content

Of course, a good story isn't worth much if nobody is able to read it. Today, a great part of content consumption takes place online. So it's only logical to make sure your content is present online and can easily be shared and reused on different channels. It could be as simple as creating a blog on your brand's website, where you can publish your stories. It will still be possible to distribute via email, like you've always done, with the added benefits of giving your corporate website some SEO juice, and the ability to easily share it anywhere else on the web.

Modern contact management

Keeping track of all these new, multifaceted stakeholders isn't easy with an Excel file. Why not organize them like sales teams have been doing, using a CRM system? A CRM can help you log your interactions with influencers, and keep track of their interests and social media profiles. Someone called you on the phone or published something about you? Make a note in their profile and use that information later when you're launching a new campaign.

Measurement

The beauty of the digital world is that everything is measurable. Visits to blog posts, social media shares, mentions from other websites, opens and clicks of emails,... Measurement can give you insights into what works and what doesn't.

Tools like [Priceonomics](#) allow you to keep track of where your content gets mentioned online. [Google Analytics](#) is a powerful ally when analysing where your traffic comes from, how long people are reading your story for,... Most email distribution tools allow you to see whether or not people opened your emails, if they clicked on them, or even replied to them. And everything that happens with your content on social media can be tracked with yet another range of tools, like [Buzzsumo](#).

Conclusion

The landscape of content consumption has changed. A great part of it now takes place online on mobile devices, social networks, blogs,... which has given rise to new influencers and gatekeepers, and new ways of sharing information. It's an

environment in which traditional PR practices are slowly but surely falling short of attaining the results they once generated.

The key to thriving in this digital age is surprisingly simple: PR needs to fully adopt the online world and apply the skills it already excels at to it. It has to move away from static content creation, shared exclusively via email blasts to journalists and other traditional gatekeepers. It has to bet on new influencers and gear its content towards widespread consumption on a multitude of different channels.

In doing so, you, a PR professional, won't lose anything you already have. On the contrary, you're expanding your audience and finding new and better ways to connect with the people that matter to your brand.