



Putting the Public Back in Public Relations

How Social Media Is Reinventing
the Aging Business of PR

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Foreword

It is a tradition for authors to ask a well-known person in their field to write a long, eloquent, and flattering foreword about their book. However, this is a book about the new PR, and it must reflect the current trends.

One of today's most powerful current trends is the use of Twitter as a PR weapon—how else can you describe something that is fast, free, and approaching ubiquity?

Don't get me wrong, I am perfectly capable of a long, eloquent, and flattering foreword as anything but that would simply be wrong. Hence, in the *lingua franca* of the times, here goes:

“Attention all marketing and PR people! Must-read new book by @briansolis @dbreakenridge: *Putting the Public Back in Public Relations*.”

**Guy Kawasaki, author of *Reality Check* and
co-founder of Alltop.com**

Preface: The Socialization of Media and PR 2.0

What is *Social Media*?

Social Media is the democratization of content and the shift in the role people play in the process of reading and disseminating information (and thus creating and sharing content). Social Media represents a shift from a broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many model, rooted in a conversational format between authors and peers within their social channels. Social Media is, quite simply, anything that uses the Internet to facilitate conversations. People now have the opportunity to broadcast their thoughts, opinions, and expertise on a global scale. In many cases, these voices are as influential as many of the most widely renowned journalists and industry experts.

Social Media is empowering people to become the new influencers, and it is forcing PR and marketing professionals to recognize and include these powerful tools in their advertising and marketing communications (marcom) strategies. However, marketers are still unsure exactly how to adapt to the new world of Social Media. Believe it or not, relatively few experts exist, even though there are many actively trying to play the role.

Social Media is powerful. It is not only changing “the game,” it is also inspiring everyone across every marketing discipline to evolve or quickly become victims of media “survival of the fittest.” Some professionals will make it; some won’t. Others will get mired in researching ROI and reasons to justify whether there’s a business case to participate. Others will waste time questioning the viability of Social Media and the need to reform, while simultaneously the world advances around them. Unfortunately, the outcome will be the gradual obsolescence of many marketing departments and advertising and PR teams.

In the mid to late 1990s, Brian Solis observed a shift in PR, which he termed *PR 2.0*—in recognition of the impact that the Web would have on PR and how the communications industry would be forced to eventually connect with customers directly while still working with traditional and New Media influencers to also reach them. This is an important distinc-

tion in the evolution of PR. PR 2.0 was born almost ten years ago, well before Web 2.0, and was inspired by the early signs of the shift in media during the Web 1.0 boom.

Long before Social Media, user-generated content originated from the very people who would inevitably rise up and use the Web as their soap-box, and who would eventually recruit readers, enthusiasts, and evangelists along away. User groups, forums, bulletin boards, and even manually created personal Web sites were the channels through which people shared their thoughts, opinions, expertise, and vision. As the Web grew, so did the ability to reach people through online tools and channels.

Do you remember Deja News? Believe it or not, Google and Yahoo! Groups are still widely used today, and these were among the catalysts for Social Media.

The communications and marketing industries are going through some of the most incredible and dramatic transformations in decades. However, only a few industries are embracing it and pushing things forward. Even though Social Media is eliciting corporate participation and engagement, not all companies believe that this is the right step. These companies hesitate because of a variety of factors, including fear, disbelief, underestimation, lack of ROI and metrics, plain old misunderstanding, misperceptions, or a combination of all these. In general, companies are conservative. They don't move quickly and are inherently resistant to change—even though the entire media landscape is already transforming radically right before all of us.

In some cases, companies are merely experimenting with Social Media because of mounting competitive or customer pressure. Some are doing a great job. Others, unfortunately, are underestimating it and applying the same old-school approach of “marketing at” people instead of engaging in conversations that will enhance the brand and customer relationships. And, some companies just don't get it at all. Many executives still view blogs as random musings, social networks as places where people troll for friends, and other social places as fountains of pure narcissism. Most notably, companies fear letting go of control and acknowledging that the “wisdom of the crowd” can be a powerful group.

In actuality, companies lost 100% control of their communications a long time ago. People are discussing their brands, products, and services right now, across multiple forms of Social Media, with or without them. Plugging their “ears” and pretending none of this is taking place isn’t going to help the situation or make it go away. Quite honestly, it will only make things worse for the brand. The key is to let go and embrace the chaos.

We are merely nodes in the greater network of life and business. We just need to participate to earn the attention of our customers and peers. Think about it this way: In the process of learning the new channels of influence, you in turn can also become an influencer:

- Participation is marketing.
- Participation is branding.
- Participation is influence.

As you participate and contribute content, advice, and information, you build an online portfolio of knowledge that enhances your reputation, boosts your brand, and raises the profile of the company you represent. And most important, that participation encourages customer loyalty. You earn trust, and trust is priceless.

In all honesty, most PR and marketing models are not designed to engage with people directly, nor are they equipped to do so in a way that doesn’t insult those they try to reach. But this doesn’t mean that the future represents doom and gloom for us. Social Media requires one-on-one conversations and unfortunately many marketers and PR “pros,” until recently, have cowered in the shadows, hurling messaging in bulk at people, hoping that some would stick. This is our chance to not only work with traditional journalists, but to also engage directly with a new set of organic influencers using the media channels (traditional and social) that reach them.

PR 2.0 starts with a different mindset and approach, neither of which is rooted in broadcast marketing or generic messaging. It’s all about humanizing and personalizing stories specifically for the people we want

to reach. Great PR has always been about telling stories in a way that makes people identify with like-minded individuals to share information and build strong relationships.

Participation is the new marketing. And to participate, we must become the people we want to reach. The New Media landscape is creating a hybrid of PR, online marketers, market analysts, and customer advocates, to effectively and genuinely engage in the conversations that define Social Media and create relationships with customers (those formerly known as the “audience”). No BS. No hype. What we have here is just an understanding of markets, the needs of people, and how to reach them at street level (*their street*). Social Media isn’t a spectator sport. To truly participate, companies must be inspired and compelled to do so. After all, we’re in this to build relationships with customers wherever they go to share and discover information. This is about the masses, but at the same time it’s about peer-to-peer interactivity.

We’re combining the art of personalized mass marketing with the individualization of distinct, vertical, and smaller markets, also known as the *Long Tail*. This is the socialization of media, the amplification of word-of-mouth marketing, and the engagement between companies and people (for example, customers, their influencers, and their peers). We can all discover and share information in ways that bring everyone together, and we can extend conversation threads “across the chasm,” bridging stories and market segments with relevance and unique benefits that matter to communities rather than to audiences.

For too long, PR and marketing have operated behind a wall, spamming media with generic e-mails and news releases. Even so, many in the industry have survived without understanding why their news or information matters to the communities they try to reach via this push. Now we have the tools at our fingertips to reach people directly. Some PR pros will fail. However, many smart, proactive, immersed, and passionate professionals will readily adapt to this New Media landscape. If you do so, you will no longer be just another PR person. Instead, your relevance elevates you to someone much more important and influential. You become the PR person who walks into a room and is introduced as more than just some “PR guy/gal.” You now receive a proper introduction. “This is *the* PR pro,

the one you need to meet.” Suddenly, you are proud of your profession again.

In the realm of Social Media, companies will earn the community of customers they deserve. The revolution will be socialized, and it all begins with you. With this book, we intend to help guide you through this new landscape. We wrote this book to show you how to take advantage of the socialization of media, whether you are just starting out or you’ve been in the communications industry for years. Part I, “The True Value of New PR,” is the start of your education. You learn how traditional PR, as you know it today, does not provide communications to accommodate the fundamental shift in our culture. A new layer of influencers is present, as is an entirely new ecosystem for supporting the socialization of information. The influencers and the ecosystem in which they socialize are facilitating new conversations that can start locally but have global impact. As our friend Shel Israel, coauthor of *Naked Conversations* and a technology adviser for start-ups on strategic communications issues, says, “We are building global neighborhoods.”

As you work your way through Chapters 1 through 5, you’ll quickly understand what’s wrong with PR, how we can fix it, and the clear differences between PR 2.0 and the PR we used to know. You will also learn how PR 2.0 has a place in the Internet economy and how traditional vs. new journalism vs. Social Media is changing the art and process of influence.

Most of all, PR is about relationships. It always has been and always will. Although we discuss many changes throughout this book, it doesn’t change the fact that you need to know what you’re talking about, why it matters, and how and who it helps. Part I discusses how we can put the *public* back in Public Relations. Basically, we must focus on important markets and influencers. By doing so, we will have a much greater impact than if we try to reach the masses with any one message or tool (old-school PR).

Part II, “Facilitating Conversations: New Tools and Techniques,” is more than just talking about what to do. In this Part, you learn how to implement best practices into a company’s communications plan. This section of the book charts “unchartered” waters for many communications professionals and requires an open mind and a true understanding of the nature of marketing conversations in Web communities. You will read

about the reasons why you should strike *users* and *audiences* from your vocabulary and how doing so will change your approach (and success rate) in New PR.

Part II also covers how to get into the conversations through blogging, whether corporate blogging or blogger relations with new influencers, and how to develop and sustain mutually beneficial relationship through blogging. This Part also examines other useful tools and techniques, such as Social Media Releases (SMRs), Video News Releases (VNRs), and explains why Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Social Media Optimization (SMO) are vital to PR 2.0 efforts.

The ultimate goal of Part III, “Participating in Social Media,” is to have you internalize a new approach. You will come to realize that Social Media is more about sociology and anthropology (and the social sciences in general) than it is about technology. You will also be reminded (and reminded again) that listening is key to the most intimate conversations in markets where you might not have been invited to participate in the past. In this Part, we also want to raise your comfort level with regard to marketing and Public Relations in social networks. You will gain a true understanding of social networks and micromedia (any form of online media that channels smaller chunks of “bite-sized” communications through Web communities and mobile devices), which you will come to learn is the hub for your online brand. You will also learn that PR is in the “Long Tail.” Chris Anderson’s (author of *The Long Tail*) concept applies to the field of PR, and certainly is not about using the news release as your ultimate tool. You reach the Long Tail through conversations in niche areas of Web communities. The Long Tail is perhaps one of the greatest concepts in the field of marketing, and in this Part you learn why it’s so important to your PR 2.0 initiatives.

Part IV, “PR 2.0: A Promising Future,” takes a look at our industry’s future. Communications professionals who embrace PR 2.0 will gain additional influence, and they will also quickly come to realize that PR 2.0 is a wonderful form of customer service for companies. After all, listening to conversations, answering questions, and helping people enables companies to create trust of and foster relationships with a brand. When you listen, you can then use valuable information to better your company and its

products and services. The last few chapters of this part introduce you to the new rules for breaking news, the future of news releases, and new metrics relevant to our industry. After all, if you do not monitor and measure your new marketing conversations, how will your knowledge remain current regarding market perceptions?

Part V, “Convergence,” anticipates the future of PR, where PR 1.0 + PR 2.0 = New PR, and explains how to make it a reality today. The future is already underway, and as your professional landscape evolves, so do your roles and responsibilities. New PR is the path to better relationships with your stakeholders and the opportunity to really listen and help your customers. Convergence enables PR to excel in today’s social economy, and you have the opportunity to become a champion, leading your organization to more effectively compete now and in the future. No longer will PR professionals be seen as mere publicists or spin artists. Instead, your role will increase in size and scope. You will become involved in everything from Web marketing and analytics to viral marketing, and from customer service and relationship management to cultural anthropology. Your willingness to converge will lead to new and higher standards for Public Relations and the professionals who serve the industry.

Introduction

Social Media = The Reinvention of Public Relations

Public Relations as we know it is quickly changing. Many tried-and-true PR strategies that we know and rely on are becoming ineffective and irrelevant. We can no longer trust them to effectively reach and motivate today's influencers.

The Web has changed everything. And the Social Web is empowering a new class of authoritative voices that we cannot ignore.

This rising group includes (and is being led by) people just like you. User-generated content (UGC) has flipped traditional PR and media on its head, leaving many communications professionals and journalists dazed and confused. They wonder why everything is changing so suddenly, seemingly overnight. However, these changes do not really represent “new” concepts. The “sudden” shift has actually been more than ten years in the making.

Social Media and Web 2.0 are altering the entire media landscape, placing the power of influence in the hands of regular people with expertise, opinions, and the drive and passion to share those opinions. This people-powered content evolution augments instead of replaces traditional media and expert influence. And in the process, entirely new layers of top-down and bottom-up influence have been created. These layers dramatically expand the number of information channels (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many).

Traditional influence flowed from a news or information gatherer (for example, a journalist) to his or her audience. Blogs, social networks, online forums, and other forms of Social Media have changed the dynamics of influence. New information is now readily shared among peers. This peer-to-peer sharing—in which you, personally, and as a client representative participate—now affords communications professionals the opportunity to reach beyond their “A-list” media when telling their story. We can

now also reach the “magic middle,” that group of ideal customers who directly reach their peers through Social Media channels. As you’ll learn throughout this book, the participant’s story replaces the pushed messages of the past, now tailored for specific audiences; Social Media requires that we “share” stories that benefit all those engaged in the process by first learning what they’re specifically looking for.

Monologue has changed to dialogue, bringing a new era of Public Relations. It’s no longer about traditional media and analysts. PR must now also focus on the very people it wants to reach.

Everything is changing, and (in our opinion) it’s for the better.

People are blogging.

Journalists are becoming bloggers.

The masses are creating and sharing content via social networks.

Bloggers are gaining recognition as industry authorities, earning the same (and sometimes more) respect and reach as traditional media (and sometimes surpassing it).

PR veterans are suddenly finding themselves searching for guidance and answers as everything they know is changing right before their eyes. A new, hybrid breed of Web-savvy communications professionals is emerging, and companies and agencies are actively seeking these new experts to effectively compete, now and in the future.

These highly sought-after New Media PR practitioners include those who blog, run a podcast or video show, communicate in popular micro-media networks such as Twitter, create profiles across several social networks and actively cultivate their social graph, customize pages with an understanding of “lite” HTML, and participate in the communities that are important to them (whether professionally or personally). Genuine experience is the desired commodity, not just a willingness to venture into new marketing channels just because you have no other choice.

Therefore, it's time to engage.

Don't worry, though. It's not too late to join and help guide the PR renaissance. You're reading this book, so you already have a head start. The principles driving the New PR movement are not foreign; they're deeply rooted in customer service, the social sciences, and community participation. When you look at it from the perspective of an ordinary person and not a marketer, you'll quickly realize that you already have experience as a consumer—one who makes purchases and advises others about their purchases. You have what you need to start the change from within.

We're writing this book for you.

Social Media will help us put the *public* back into Public Relations. With that in mind, we encourage you to jump in, but also to understand the dynamics of Social Media, the new world of influence, and the relevant tools necessary for successful participation. Our goal with this book is to make you Social Media literate and to start you down the path of becoming a New Media expert and, more important, a champion for change. We believe that this book will help you excel in your marketing career and give you the capability and confidence to help those around you, including the company you represent.

This book lays out the lessons you need to learn, direct from our experiences over this past decade of continuous evolution. The information (and, we hope, wisdom) included in this book comes from more than just our personal experiences. We have included insight from some of the most visionary, brilliant, and active authorities on the subject of PR and the socialization of media. We believe that these insights will help you understand New PR and encourage you to adapt your own professional practices to our new reality.

We all learn from one another.

Chapter 1

What's Wrong with PR?

Although it's exciting to witness the evolution of the Public Relations industry, it is also a bit frightening. PR is evolving quickly, from the technology used, to the changing market dynamics, to the increased demands and empowerment of the twenty-first-century consumer. Most important, the principles and channels you use to reach people, whether influencers or your direct customers, are also changing. It's impossible to continue viewing the PR industry in the same way we have for years. After all, we always have something new to learn and embrace—no matter how much we think we currently know.

You might have uttered or heard this question once or twice in your career: “What’s wrong with PR?” Many PR veterans are cautiously or skeptically observing the changes taking place in PR. Instead of debating what’s wrong with the status quo, let’s look at a different way. With Web 2.0 and the mass adoption of Social Media (discussed in more detail later), we can also ask, “What can we do better to make PR more effective in these rapidly changing times?”

The answer involves a new, forward-looking way of thinking. The answer also shows you how to enhance your own personal experience, value, and brand through engagement and how to approach Social Media for your brands. For us, it took years (in fact, a decade) to change our way of thinking about PR. But now we believe that the socialization of media and PR 2.0 have expedited all the good change that we see today and discuss throughout this book.

In the chapters ahead, we examine why and how PR has changed and still is changing, and how PR 2.0, Social Media, and marketing conversations with customers and new influencers are reinventing an industry. Over the course of our careers, we have talked with hundreds of professionals to find out what they believe are the greatest benefits of PR and what they think PR is supposed to achieve. Those conversations have told us that these professionals believe that good PR does the following:

- Provides one of the most credible forms of marketing: third-party endorsements
- Leads to effective communication, which builds trust and strong relationships with media, bloggers, analysts, influencers, and customers
- Influences and changes opinion, increases exposure, and builds a positive image and reputation
- Creates presence, enhances brand loyalty, and extends brand resonance
- Elicits response and action

These positive features of PR must remain prominent in our minds as we consider the changing markets, the advancing Internet technology, and the shifting ways in which consumers want to receive information (and, in turn, share it in their communities). Because of the technological revolution currently underway, PR can truly be one of the most powerful marketing disciplines. And although we know that PR should always result in the positives previously listed, we must now seriously consider some new factors: how to engage and communicate through the appropriate channels and which tools to use to achieve these benefits.

Challenging the Status Quo

Let's first identify what's wrong with the industry before we try to fix it. This is not a bashing session to point fingers or otherwise place blame on you, your PR and marketing colleagues, or your faithful industry associations (or to make professionals feel like they "just don't get it"). Instead, this is our way of saying that we recognize how difficult it is to embrace change. With insight and shared knowledge, however, we can move forward together. If we establish and maintain a united front, the change will be easier and more widely accepted. It will also help so many companies and their customers have meaningful, direct conversations—dialogue resulting in strong relationships and, ultimately, more brand loyalty. The change is meant to complement traditional PR, which means

that first we must reflect on the status quo. Our goal, as you are reading *Putting the Public Back in Public Relations*, is to have you say, “I know what’s wrong with PR, and I know what to do to fix it.”

As experienced professionals, we can identify what is good within our industry and then pinpoint what is less than desirable—the PR practices we prefer to leave behind. In the face of socialized media, however, our industry has a new wave of critics. And instead of plugging our ears, we’re listening and sharing what we’ve learned with you.

Countless articles, books, blog posts, comments, and opinions speculate about why PR doesn’t work and why so many executives have a bad taste in their mouths at the mere mention of Public Relations. In this book, we show you how this conversation has been building in various communities (for example, in blogs), with some very influential people sharing their opinions.

Industry veteran, financier, and marketing evangelist (the man credited with bringing “evangelism” into the marketing department through his work with Apple in the 1980s) Guy Kawasaki sparked a thread of conversation with his blog post “The Top 10 Reasons Why PR Doesn’t Work.” Kawasaki followed up with “DIY PR,” a guide to “do-it-yourself” PR penned by Glenn Kelman, the CEO of Redfin. With blog titles such as these, every new comment, link, and blog post ruffled feathers and bruised egos. (This is just a small glimpse at the ongoing discussions about this topic; you can also get involved in the dialogue and vest in the process of improving and changing the game.)

Truth be told, there are 1,000 reasons why PR doesn’t work, but there are also countless reasons why it does work. Sometimes DIY PR works, too, but often it works to an extent that eventually requires an internal team or an agency (depending on the goals and reach of the campaign).

Kawasaki’s blog post, sourcing Zable Fisher of ThePRSite, lists the top ten reasons why PR doesn’t work:

1. The client doesn’t understand the publicity process.
2. The scope of work is not detailed and agreed upon by both parties.

3. The client has not been properly trained on how to communicate with the media.
4. The client and the PR person or PR firm are not a good match.
5. The client has not gotten results quickly enough and ends the relationship too soon.
6. PR people don't explain the kind of publicity placements a client will most likely receive.
7. Clients don't realize that what happens after you get the publicity coverage is sometimes more important than the actual placement.
8. Clients refuse to be flexible on their story angles.
9. Clients get upset when the media coverage is not 100 percent accurate or not the kind of coverage that they wanted.
10. Clients won't change their schedules for the media.

However, paring PR to its basics to address these top ten concerns will not solve the industry-wide plague of bad PR. In fact, just addressing these concerns would make sense only to those who believe that bad PR doesn't exist.

Dave McClure, a Silicon Valley technology entrepreneur, seemed to capture it more accurately in his blog—at least, for those of us in a world that demands that we prove value and worth using metrics (and not just whether we can get along with people, trained our spokespersons well, or explained the publicity process so that executives could have something other than running a business to worry about). McClure summed up his top six reasons why PR doesn't work:

1. The PR firm doesn't understand the product or technology.
2. The PR firm is seen as a spinner, blocker, or gatekeeper to access the CEO/CTO/brain trust.
3. The PR firm hasn't been properly trained on how to communicate with bloggers or Social Media.

4. The PR firm prefers working with a few big traditional media instead of lots of smaller online media and online channels.
5. The PR firm doesn't understand SEO (search engine optimization), SEM (search engine marketing), widgets, blogs, tags, social networks, pictures, video, or other online and viral methods—a.k.a. “all that Web 2.0 stuff.”
6. Most PR folks have no clue what the hell a TechMeme is.

(*TechMeme* is a news aggregation site for the most popular discussed technology news stories at any given moment. McClure's point is that PR people generally don't stay plugged into the evolution within their own respective industries.)

Obviously, there's no shortage of gripes about PR. If you look closely, however, you'll notice common themes. We asked a few more respected influencers about why PR works and why it doesn't. Forrester Research analyst Jeremiah Owyang continued with more reasons why PR doesn't work on his blog, www.web-strategist.com, paraphrased here:

1. Dialogue versus monologue is not fully understood. I believe that markets are two-way conversations, not message throwing. As dialogue happens, communities form and trust (or distrust) forms.
2. Marketing is about storytelling, not raw facts on the press release.
Marketing (and communications) is not just facts (the when, what, and where), but it's telling a story, engaging the community, and being “human.”
3. The community must be included in the event and message.

In countless events that I've attended, PR firms have forgotten to welcome or invite “influential people” who will help dialogue or tell a story about the event using Social Media. Although it often makes sense to invite the mainstream media, don't forget that customers are now playing the role of media as well as analyst. I got beat up pretty bad when I asked this question: “Who should you trust more, a paid analyst or a customer blogger?”

4. More than one group in the company does Public Relations (resulting in a lack of awareness).

PR is no longer limited to the PR firm or corporate communications. Various groups and individuals will communicate with the market. If you don't know what I'm talking about, it's important to understand Brian Oberkirch's Edgework concept.

Brian Oberkirch is a marketing consultant focused on Social Media and product development. His Edgework concept is inspired by the very media evolution that we highlight in this book. It's based on the idea that PR can also complement outbound influencer and market relations with two-way dialogue.

You can understand from this discussion that PR and the way we need to communicate with people are changing. No matter what business you're in, you can do a number of things to help you improve, manage, and measure PR. This list of 20 PR gripes is a game changer and can serve as the foundation for improving PR and elevating its value among those who have been burned by previous experiences.

PR for PR People

So you've heard some reasons why PR fails (from us and from people who join us on a quest to better an industry). *This is the part where you can take your fingers out of your ears.* The gripes about PR that we've heard for years, our own involvement in the discussion, and the dialogue among people who share similar concerns—all these conversations are important. They set the stage for the chapters ahead. We affirm that we can all learn something about our own communications. It's similar to driving: No one admits to being a bad driver, but the roads and highways are full of them.

If you read carefully, you'll realize that our suggestions or answers to the "What's wrong with PR?" question are just the beginning. By internalizing and remembering them, you will see and think about things differently:

- Remember that just because you show up to work doesn't necessarily mean anything. It may simply equate to you keeping your job.
- If you expect to represent anything, whether in an agency or in a company, spend a significant portion of your time figuring out why it matters to people—on your own time. This is the difference between PR and good PR.
- Figure out who your customers are and where they go for their information. This forces PR to mirror sales strategies to reach the people who could benefit from the product or service. Different people go to different places for information. First determine where you want to be, and then work backward from there.
- Read the blogs, magazines, newspapers, forums, newsletters, and so on—this is where customers are actively engaged. Then understand how to translate what you do in a way that matters. This is the only way to be successful in running PR in the “Long Tail.” People within your target markets share experiences, pains, and wants that are unique to each group. By reading, you're participating. And by participating, you're better staged to engage more effectively than the rest of the flacks.

The Long Tail, written by Chris Anderson, describes a niche business strategy in which businesses realize significant profit by selling small volumes of hard-to-sell items instead of focusing on large volumes of blockbuster items.

- Don't speak in messages. Instead, spark conversations based on the unique requirements of each market segment and the people within them. And please, don't spin. We all hate when politicians do it. If you find yourself consistently selling or spinning instead of evangelizing, you might be in the wrong place in your career.
- Traditional PR still matters, but you also need to embrace Social Media (after you've had a chance to participate as a person and not as a marketer). This is the future of PR. Understanding how it

works and what it takes to participate will ensure that your experience is relevant to the communications needs of businesses during the next decade.

- Broadcasting your “message” to your audience with top-down PR campaigns no longer works in New Media. You have to engage people through the diverse segments that represent your target markets.
- When working with reporters, bloggers, analysts, and other influencers, spend a significant amount of time understanding what they write about, to whom, and why. Then align your story accordingly. One story no longer applies to the masses.
- When you understand what it takes to make the story more compelling to the various markets and the influencers who reach them, then, and only then, think about news releases. One news release no longer carries across the entire spectrum of customers. Figure out the core value proposition and then write several different flavors based on the needs and pains of your target customers, addressing how you will help them do something better, easier, and more cost-effectively.
- Set goals with the executive team of the company you represent. Based on the previous points, you have to ensure that your activities align with their business strategy. Ask them to define success month-to-month so that you can all agree, in advance, what it takes to move forward. Create the PR program that will help you achieve these goals. If anything beyond your control stands in your way of success, do what it takes to fix it. If your spokesperson is horrible, either train him or her or tell the spokesperson that you need someone else. If the product or service isn't wowing people, find out why and learn what it takes to compel people to use it.
- Communicate progress regularly, document milestones, and showcase successes. PR often suffers from a lack of “PR for the PR.” If you don't demonstrate success, who will? By communicating progress, status, and feedback, you can consistently prove your value to those who underwrite the PR program.

Company Executives

You can't fairly assess work that you don't understand. We also offer our advice to company executives who need to understand the difference between PR and *good* PR, and how to be an effective partner in the process.

Understand PR Capabilities and Limitations

First, understand what PR is and what it isn't. Businesses often expect PR to perform miracles just because they confuse it with advertising, online marketing, media buying, search marketing, and so forth. PR can't *guarantee* legitimate coverage in industry publications, no matter how tight the relationship. If PR promises it, they're lying. We leverage relationships daily to encourage consideration of "stories" packaged in a way that's most relevant to them. If we took advantage of our contacts to force coverage whenever we needed to deliver on a promise, it would mark the beginning of the end of our relationships.

Although we won't compare PR to each branch of marketing, we agree that *PR is not advertising*. Reporters and bloggers don't stop what they're doing to write about your company just because you send them a news release. They're bombarded by PR people from all over the world. Stories are cultivated. If you respect your contacts, do your homework and help highlight the value of a story—coverage is imminent. If you want guaranteed exposure, buy an ad.

Don't Undervalue PR

When done correctly, PR is extremely valuable to company branding, which results in immeasurable benefits in the long haul. Customers have choices, and if you're not consistently vying for their attention, it's pretty easy to fall off their radar screen when they evaluate options. Too many companies try to nickel-and-dime PR, to the point of absurdity. Don't get us wrong: Expensive PR doesn't equal success. But shortchanging PR is usually a first step in the wrong direction.

Maintain PR Participation

PR is not a switch. It doesn't go on and off whenever you have the time or budget to throw at it. The market moves too fast, and if you're not actively participating in it, you'll quickly find that company sales and site traffic will begin a downward spiral that might not recover.

Plant the Seeds

In most cases, coverage doesn't just happen. PR is similar to farming: The more seeds you plant, the more crops (in the form of coverage over time) you will grow (as long as you spend time watering, caring for, and feeding those seeds and new shoots). Although some things force information out quickly (for example, hard news), other stories take time. And when those "slower" stories appear, they help raise brand visibility, drive some people to buy, and also spark others to consider writing about them (which, in turn, influences the cycle to repeat). Don't assume that all this coverage happens just because you are a popular company or have a killer product. Even the best companies and solutions need great PR to rise above the noise.

Use the Best Spokesperson

Just because you created the product doesn't mean you're the best person to sell it. We've worked with some of the most passionate executives who just don't click with the people they're trying to engage—no matter how hard they try. Suck it up and get a spokesperson who will connect with the people and who will help grow your business.

Recognize Campaign-Specific Factors

Understand that PR is only an umbrella for the specific communications initiatives that will help you reach complementary, simultaneous goals. For example, corporate branding and product marketing require different campaigns.

Use an Array of PR Tactics to Reach Your Full Audience

No matter what industry you're in, realize that the most popular blogs, newspapers, and magazines are only one part of the process. Your market

is divided by adoption and buying behavior and documented through many means: a bell curve rich with chasms, pyramids that further divide and classify them, quadrants that demonstrate competitive advantages, ladders that represent how people use the technology to participate in online media, a “cluetrain” that shows how people carry it through the Long Tail as the new conductors, and, hopefully, the guerilla tactics that propel the hockey stick and eventually force you to evaluate what to do from “inside the tornado” to continue the success. For those who just read that sentence and are shaking your heads wondering if you just missed an inside joke, let us explain. We referenced the most often cited and the most popular business and marketing books, graphs, and tactics that help companies carve up their markets and define how to reach them at every step of the product life cycle. Yes, this was meant to be funny...but it does show that one program no longer serves the masses when you deconstruct it by the markets and the people who comprise them.

This means that you have to embrace both New Media and traditional media in PR. In the tech space, for example, TechCrunch, Mashable, Venture Beat, ReadWriteWeb, and other channels will yield measurable traffic so great that most of the time it knocks out company Web servers. Every executive wants these channels. CEOs cry if they can't get coverage on them. But by no means do they carry your value proposition to the entire collective of people who might embrace your product and help sustain your business for the whole game.

These channels represent early adopters and pragmatists. However, other worlds of global micro communities rich with horizontal and vertical publications and blogs can carry your story to the more conservative groups of people who collectively converge as the primary base of recurring revenue. In this case, it's less about traffic and hits as metrics for success and more about quality, registrations, purchases, referrals, and so on that define business growth.

Involve Yourself

Engage in Social Media. We live in a “social” economy, and the only way to succeed in it is to participate:

- Listen to what your customers and the customers of your competitors are saying.
- Blog about industry-relevant topics, not just company accomplishments. Social Media is not just a new tool in the marketing belt. It is a new opportunity to engage customers and cultivate relationships. Be a resource for your community. Comment on other blogs, too. Be part of the conversation.
- Embrace online video and watch how creative, genuine, and cool content becomes incredibly viral. Words can carry the message just so far, but video is an opportunity to showcase the product while entertaining viewers.
- If possible, host a podcast, livestream, or Webcast to share new updates, customer successes, ideas for new product uses, and so forth. Embrace and cultivate the community.
- Bookmark and share relevant links using the popular social tools available.
- Cultivate user-generated content.
- Write Social Media releases in addition to traditional releases.
- If relevant, build transparent profiles in the social networks where your customers can find and support you and where you can find and support them. Go where your customers are.
- Share images, demos, and behind-the-scenes footage using services such as Flickr, Zoomr, and YouTube.
- Hire a community manager. Having someone actively represent the company in all things social will complement New PR by providing proactive information and support to people looking for guidance in the communities they frequent. Don't market to them—have conversations.

Although this is just an ultra-simplified list of how to jump into the world of Social Media, your initial participation will increase your curiosity, knowledge, and online savvy. You can expect your community profile

to increase exponentially with your participation. But first you have to get your feet wet.

Support Your PR Program

Support your PR program and feed it as you do any other branch of the company. Respect it when it works and let your team share in the success. Don't focus on the shortcomings. Extend congratulations as goals are achieved.

Keep Your Allstars

If you find a PR person who truly lives and breathes the company and the product, never let that person go. These Allstars are a rare breed and deserve support and promotion.

Communicate Regularly

Meet with your PR team regularly to communicate realistic goals and measure progress. Paint a real-world picture of what success looks like each month and listen to the reports to see whether those goals are indeed attainable. You get out of PR what you put into it.

Establish Metrics

Agree upon metrics in advance. Executives often lose sight of what PR is designed to do. The right coverage is invaluable, even when it doesn't translate directly into visible hits, traffic spikes, or sales. Super Bowl ads, for example, rarely pay for themselves in the short run. Realize that a proactive, intelligent, and consistent PR program will contribute to the bottom line. It shouldn't be solely responsible for company success or failure. Metrics can be in the form of specific targets every month, registrations, lead generation, links, and, now, conversations.

In the past, a PR person looked at a campaign with a well-known and highly accepted approach: You evaluate the target demographics, develop strategic messages, conduct an audit or focus group, revise messages,

determine the broadcast mechanisms to push your content, go live, monitor the response, evaluate the ROI, and repeat the process with enhanced information.

However, communicators who have embraced Social Media and the idea that sociology is a prominent focus, not just the technology that facilitates the process, take a much different approach.

Brian shed some light on this topic when he blogged about an excellent example of a company whose communication team knew the value of dialogue and engagement. Skullcandy (www.skullcandy.com) is a popular Generation Y brand that makes electronic products, including MP3 players and headphones, that can run circles around Sony, Bose, and Phillips. Everything Skullcandy does is reflective of those they want to engage and embrace—from embeddable widgets with valuable content, downloadable music, custom artwork, and peer-to-peer street teams to blogs, communities, events, and social networks, all combined with traditional marketing. Skullcandy makes the customer the center of everything. And it could do even more to reach customers with the right social tools, proactive participation, elevated outbound strategies, and voices.

Here's an example of a tweet scan from Twitter engaging a community of people in the Skullcandy brand:

Seanieb64: My Skullcandy canal buds pair #2 have lost the left channel again I'd rather get these, and I will <http://tinyurl.com/5w3xz6> (2008-04-11 23:21:44) Reply

concafe: Nuevo post: Skullcandy todo de rosa las chicas (<http://tinyurl.com/6y8nxq>) (2008-04-10 09:14:21) Reply

litford: wicked sick MP3 watch by Skullcandy: <http://snurl.com/23zmt> (2008-04-10 00:40:55) Reply

Noticiasdot: New blog post: Los cascos y auriculares de Skullcandy todo de rosa <http://tinyurl.com/552xtn> (2008-04-09 17:42:39) Reply

MosioQuestions: Where can i find skullcandy earphones on sale?
Crystal -crystal1987 www.mosio.com/q (2008-04-09 14:41:29)
Reply

angryfly: Picked up a pair of SkullCandy Full Metal Jackets while I was out for lunch... these things sound way better than the apple earbuds... (2008-04-08 15:23:21) Reply

Chorazin: I'm returning my Skullcandy FMJ iPhone earbuds. Cord too short and not that comfy. (2008-04-07 13:12:38) Reply

fetalsage: I love my new Skullcandy headset :D (2008-04-06 19:56:19) Reply

chriswall: My last pair of expensive headphones (<http://tinyurl.com/6kuhbc>) or the shures ? Or the Skullcandy iPhone FMJ.....sheesh here we go again (2008-04-06 15:03:40) Reply

cavlec: @cfred: I <3 my Skullcandy Proletariats. (2008-04-02 18:18:42) Reply

nickle4urdreams: I am a COMPLETE idiot. My Skullcandy canabuds have been on top of my TV for about 2 weeks, while I've thought they've been lost... (2008-04-02 05:14:44) Reply

Chorazin: Mmm...my iPhone Skullcandy FMJ earbuds are the shiznit. I <3 Skullcandy. (2008-03-31 18:54:32) Reply

Noticiesdot: New blog post: Skullcandy: auriculars Rasta
<http://tinyurl.com/38mdd4> (2008-03-31 18:48:33) Reply

T_Infin: is enjoying his Skullcandy. (2008-03-31 13:55:12) Reply

justinpeacock: checking out the hip/ghetto Skull Candy headphones: <http://www.skullcandy.com/> I want the ones with the bullets on the headband! (2008-03-31 13:21:51) Reply

T_Infin: just bought some Skullcandy headphones (2008-03-30 23:47:31) Reply

The Skullcandy example shows how PR is changing—more than 180 Skullcandy blogs exist, proving that the brand’s customers are its surrogate sales force.

We think the change in PR is for the better. It will take some intense readjustments in thinking, resources, and participation by all. Most important, it requires you to become more than just a communicator. You need to evolve into something more significant than just a publicist. You can be more effective and valuable as a genuine enthusiast for who and what you represent. We want you to become a part of the New PR movement that carries forward all the good of the past, but also moves ahead with a realistic sense of how today’s brands need to communicate in the market. Welcome to the world of PR 2.0 and the socialization of media—a new standard to advance the PR industry and the communication professionals who abide by today’s rules of conversation.

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