the marketing pod

DEVELOPING A DIGITAL-FIRST PR STRATEGY

A guide from The Marketing Pod



PIVOTING YOUR PR STRATEGY FOR A DIGITAL WORLD_

With newsrooms under pressure and in-house teams increasingly required to report on the ROI of every penny they spend, can PR still provide value in a world that's been changed dramatically by Covid-19? Absolutely - if you take the right approach.

It's hard to think of an industry that the coronavirus pandemic hasn't impacted, but it has certainly created new challenges for PR professionals. Most journalists have been working from home since the pandemic began, and many will continue to work remotely moving forward - Reach, the UK's largest newspaper publisher, recently announced plans to close the majority of its newsrooms. This makes the traditional 'sell-in' even more tricky.



As many organisations have faced financial difficulties due to the pandemic, the value of PR is also being put to the test by senior teams who want to understand the ROI they can expect to receive before they approve any activity.

Despite these challenges, the changes we've all had to make due to the pandemic have created new opportunities for PR professionals, too. The data that can be collected on digital activity gives PR specialists a greater ability to track the success of the stories they secure, refine their approach and prove the true value of public relations.

There's no doubt that PRs need to do things a little differently to achieve results in a world where their audience is largely online - but with the right approach, you'll be able to reach a wider audience than ever before. In this guide, we'll share our best advice on how to perfect your PR strategy for a digital audience, so you can ensure your brand's voice is heard in an increasingly crowded online space.

Sara Burgess, PR Specialist at The Marketing Pod



PREP BEFORE YOU PITCH_

With many journalists now working from home for the foreseeable future, you will either need to have their mobile number (and decide whether your story merits a call to their personal number...) or rely on your email being noticed in a packed inbox. We'd recommend the latter, unless you have a really strong relationship with a journalist - but it's going to take more than a catchy subject line to make your email stand out.

Instead, you need to pitch your story perfectly by personalising it to the right journalist at each of your target titles. You need to show that you understand their brief and give them all the information they need to cover the story in a way that fits their title and audience.

So don't simply send out a blanket email to all of your media contacts. Identify your key titles, then spend some time researching which journalist will be most interested in your piece and what they're looking for - this way, you're far more likely to achieve pick up.

SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATE SEO_

With media titles increasingly moving to digital-only models, and B2B audiences spending more time online as many continue to work remotely, it's vital that any PR content you create is developed with SEO in mind. You can optimise your press releases and features for search engines by identifying the keywords you'd like to push and including them throughout your piece - just make sure to include them naturally, and not to go overboard.

Make your content as scannable as possible, using bullet points, lists and subheaders where appropriate, as this will make it easier for search engine bots to crawl through. You could also consider sending out slightly different versions of the same story to different journalists over a couple of days, rather than sending out a mass press release to lots of titles at once. This should prevent Google from grouping stories it sees as the same / similar together, which could boost visibility for your brand.



MAXIMISE YOUR REACH_

No matter how long you spend polishing your pitch, there's still a chance that it might not get picked up - which it's why it's vital to make PR a piece of the puzzle, rather than the whole campaign.

The days of simply sending out a press release at random are over - now, any strategic PR activity you undertake should be part of a wider marketing and comms campaign. If you've just released a new whitepaper, for example, gaining news coverage and securing features in media titles is clearly important, but you should also be looking to maximise your reach and effectiveness of the campaign through activity across other digital marketing channels, such as paid social media ads. You should also consider creating supporting content, like blogs and infographics, so that anyone who's discovered your brand for the first time through your media activity can find out more about what you offer.





EARNED ISN'T EVERYTHING_

Today, some of the most successful PR campaigns involve a mix of paid, earned, shared and owned (PESO) media. For maximum credibility (and minimum expenditure), it's still important to strive for earned coverage in key titles, but many brands are complementing activity by investing in paid media too.

Sponsored articles can be effective at building awareness of your brand and interest among your audience as long as you ensure that the content of the article is high-quality, relevant and engaging for your audience. If your business wants to get a message out there, and you want guaranteed coverage or an article in a specific title or issue, then you should consider investing in sponsored content. It's a guaranteed way to get your brand featured in your target titles, and should help you to boost your site's SEO if you can include a backlink.



PROVING THE VALUE OF PR_

Whereas PR success was once only measured in column inches and slightly spurious stats to prove an article's reach, now there's a bigger range of useful measurement metrics to help prove the value of PR activity and monitor a campaign's effectiveness. The days of calculating the controversial advertising value equivalent (AVE) are thankfully long gone - we now have much more accurate measurement techniques at our fingertips.



Whilst secured coverage will undoubtedly always be the leading metric, where a story is picked up is often more valuable than the number of stories secured - particularly in B2B PR, where a target audience can often be pinpointed to a few well-respected trade titles with a smaller reach but which talk directly to your target demographic,

So don't just count the number of articles you secure - research and prioritise target titles and show how your coverage is engaging your audience with metrics like sentiment, and social media mentions and interactions. If possible, remember to create custom tracking links, too, so that you can monitor the effectiveness of each individual article - this will help you to choose which titles to target in the future.

You should also monitor your website traffic and sales pipeline to measure the tangible impact that your activity has had on awareness of your brand and whether sales have increased due to your efforts.

PERFECT YOUR PR STRATEGY_

If your PR strategy could use a boost - perhaps you're not getting as much pick up as you'd like, or maybe you want to increase brand awareness in a new market - our PR specialists are here to help.

Get in touch at pr@themarketingpod.co.uk.