



# THE MODERN PR MEDIA MIX:

CHAPTER ONE: [SPONSORED] CONTENT

inkhouse®

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## The shifting media landscape

### Which media outlet published the latest news story you read? Many people don't know.

They read it on Facebook, or LinkedIn or Twitter — in the stream, as we like to say here at InkHouse. Almost overnight, the relationship between consumers and content has radically changed. In fact, today, 62 percent of U.S. adults see news on social media. Also, consumers are less aware of the sources of their news, and more aware of the stories themselves. Those stories are being delivered based on algorithms that match interests to news. And so the distinctions between what we in PR call “earned media” (traditional news coverage), “owned media” (blogs and social channels) and “paid media” (ads, sponsored social, etc.) have blurred.



Effective public relations programs must recognize this reality, one in which data analytics teams are sitting in on newsroom meetings and Facebook is delivering breaking news. This is a far cry from a time when people got their news from the daily newspaper or nightly news (which was available on only a few channels). Meanwhile, media outlets need new sources of income. Ad blockers have given rise to native ads. By 2018, spending on native advertising is expected to reach a whopping \$21 billion<sup>1</sup> and yet media coverage is ephemeral.

Indeed, the pace of the race for eyeballs on content has never been faster, and the consolidation of media consumption to platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media sites has made it even more difficult for brands to break through. While this clamor for attention was the subject of our previous ebook, “[PR in the Age of Inattention](#),” this eBook is about the response to content saturation (how to break through!) and the new tools available to us to do so. Essentially, this comes down to what we are calling a modern media mix: sponsored content, social media and content amplification. Of course, all of this assumes you already have a great story. Let’s explore this new landscape.



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**SECTION 1.**  
**[SPONSORED]**  
**CONTENT**



# Marketers are looking for a way to break through the clutter.

**Let's let the numbers do the talking for a moment. Among all of the media opportunities, paid media is the one that is expanding most rapidly.**


In fact, digital ad revenue totaled nearly \$60 billion in 2015 alone, growing 20 percent from 2014.<sup>2</sup> This growth is happening for three reasons. First, the media is looking for new sources of revenue and they have turned to native advertising; promoted, sponsored or amplified content; even distribution of information for a fee. Second, at a time when there is so much content available, marketers are looking for a way to break through the clutter. How can brands gain better visibility on a website and for a set amount of time? How can they target a very specific audience? And third, new technology (from algorithmic headlines to apps) can feed content at just the right time to just the right people.

With that said, the massive volume of content currently available has made it difficult for consumers to navigate and distinguish between earned media and sponsored content. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission has recently set up some new regulations to guard against possible deception in native advertising.<sup>3</sup> This modern media mix of paid social, content amplification and sponsored content is the new PR toolkit, which we evaluate for clients many times a day depending on the strategy, goals, target audience, and desired impact. At the end of the day, sponsored content is a huge opportunity to get your message in front of the right audience at the right time.

The way we consume information has changed dramatically over the past few years. One of the most dynamic and interesting examples can be found in consumer internet video traffic. This medium is predicted to explode in the next three years, growing from 64 percent in 2014 to more than 80 percent by 2019.<sup>4</sup>

Increasingly, viewers are watching video on mobile. The Adobe Digital Index revealed that in the third quarter of 2015, the share of smartphone digital video starts worldwide was 18.1 percent. That's a significant increase from last year's number of 13.6 percent. Additionally, the share of digital videos viewed on a smartphone was up 33 percent since 2015.<sup>5</sup>

Though video promises to consume the lion's share of bandwidth, other forms of visual media will also become increasingly important. This shift started a few years ago with the rise of infographics. Though infographics have since lost some of their luster,<sup>6</sup> other forms of visual communications have cropped up, such as micrographics and data visualizations. These new forms of visual media are fresh ways to tell stories.

A photograph of a man in a dark suit jacket and light-colored shirt, seen from the back and side. He is holding a smartphone in his hand, looking at the screen. The background is a blurred city street at night with colorful lights and buildings.

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## Where you can publish.

Today you can really publish anywhere. Many publications or outlets that accept earned opportunities will also accept paid placements. The powerful thing about sponsored content is that you can be as targeted as your budget allows. You also don't have to accept where you are able to get your story earned. Now you can pay to get your story in the publication and present it in a variety of content types, such as columns, articles, research studies, videos, infographics, whitepapers or interactive web pages. The New York Times' brand marketing arm, the T Brand Studio, is an excellent example of the kind of dynamic stories that can be told through sponsored opportunities.

While the Times sits at the more expensive end of the spectrum (think \$500,000), there are other opportunities in trade publications that can cost as little as \$500. Another benefit to sponsored content is that you can track its performance more precisely and determine what topics and outlets are driving the best results.

Not wanting to get left out of the action, now social media platforms are becoming publishers in their own right. Snapchat launched Discover last year, giving brands a channel to publish their own stories and giving brand enthusiasts one more way to engage. In April of this year, Facebook made Instant Articles available to any company. Like Snapchat's Discover, Instant Articles gives brands a direct path for publishing on Facebook. As Facebook is one of the largest sources of news, this is a powerful tool for brands to easily get their message in front of potentially millions of people.

## Ways you can target.

There's no one way to effectively get your story out through sponsored content. You first need to keep in mind the audience you want to reach. Are they in a specific vertical? Are they local? Rather than immediately jumping to a broad distribution or a top-tier publication, be sure to identify where you want this story to reach.

Targeting vertically, geographically or demographically may be a cost-effective way to penetrate your target audience with your story. Although smaller trade publications may have smaller circulations, they're quite specific. So if that's what your target reads, then it will get your story in front of the exact audience you want to reach. The same principles apply if you're looking to reach a local audience. Why pay for national reach if your audience is local or highly specialized?

However, if you want and need the premier publications, they're the ones that have perfected the model of producing sponsored content. These publications have numerous options and teams creating the content for you or you can sponsor very specific content relevant to your audience.

## What you can sponsor.

The world is your oyster when it comes to the types of content you can sponsor. These run the gamut from your standard contributed article, webinars and email newsletters to more innovative videos, virtual events and microsites.

To get this content sponsored, you need to create relationships with the publishers and publications and gain an understanding of how their process works and what the benefit will be for your organization. For example, these benefits could come in the form of social shares from their handles, possible inclusion in Snapchat Discover, guaranteed readers or guaranteed leads from webinars or events.

## How the sponsored content model works.

First, you want to figure out your budget, as that will inform the types of opportunities and publications that would be available to you. Then decide which publications would be right for you. Be sure to select the publications that will reach your ideal audience.

After you've selected the publications you want to work with, find out the types of offerings a publication offers. For the highest-tier publications, you can expect the publisher to create your content for you. This is the best option, as they tailor the story to your message. However, this content is not going to be promotional about your brand, so this approach needs to be tied to high-level messaging goals for it to be effective for you. They could offer services like research, interactive web campaigns and developed content like articles, videos and white papers. For middle- to lower-tier publications, typically you provide the sponsored content.

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# You should consider sponsored content when...



A piece of content is deemed too self-promotional for earned media, even if the brand's name isn't on it.



You want complete control of your message.



A piece of a content or campaign needs to run on a particular date and get in front of a particular audience.



You want to target a specific audience.



You want to start building a relationship with a smaller vertical publication.



You're looking for new ways to tell stories or connect – such as through live or digital music.



Earned has not worked as effectively as wished.



You want to tell deeper paid stories than advertising agencies typically create.



You are not landing speaking engagements (panels are increasingly pay-to-play).

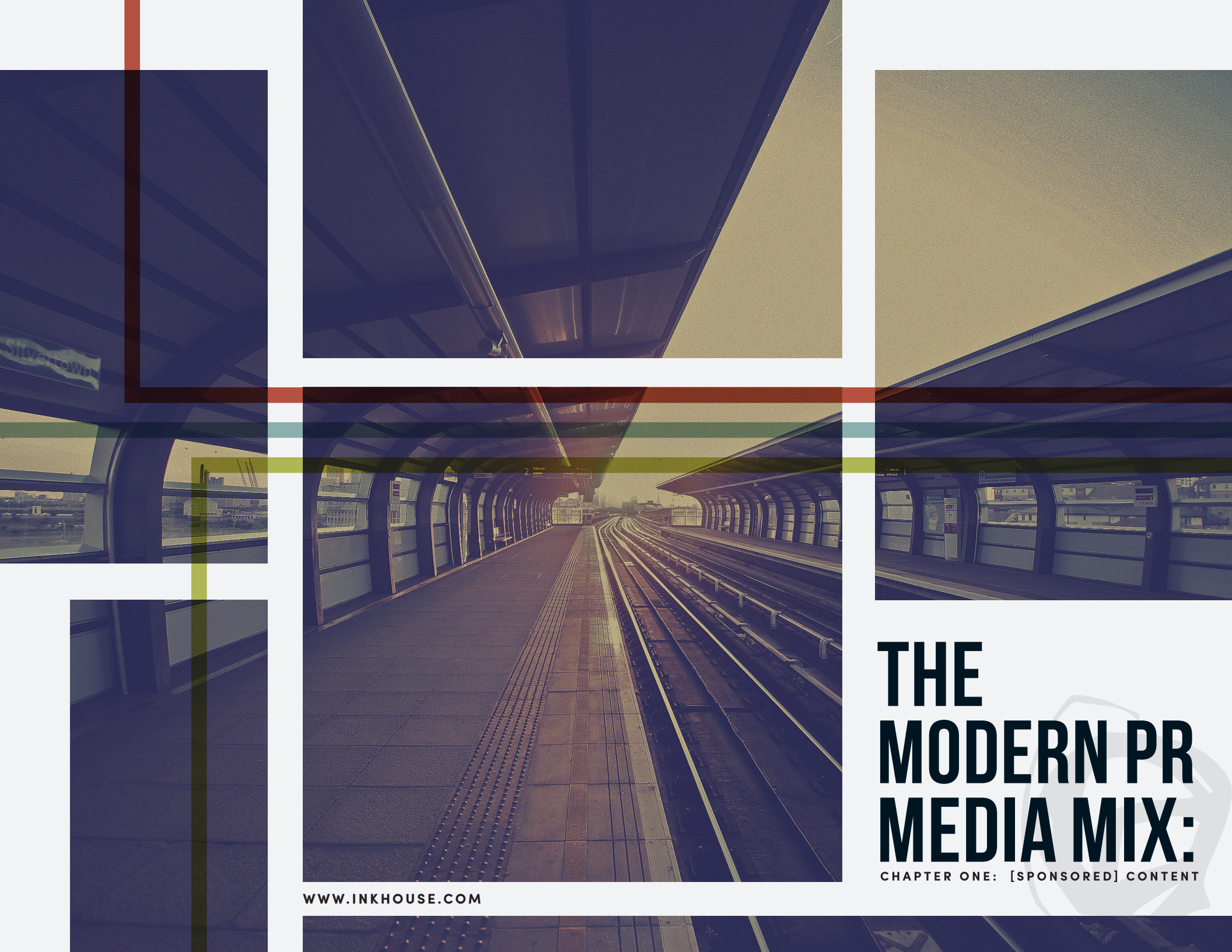


You want to connect your marketing more closely with a story.



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