

THE MODERN PR MEDIA MIX:

[SPONSORED] CONTENT + SOCIAL + AMPLIFICATION = SUCCESS

inkhouse®

FALL 2016

THE MODERN PR MEDIA MIX

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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 billion¹ 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.

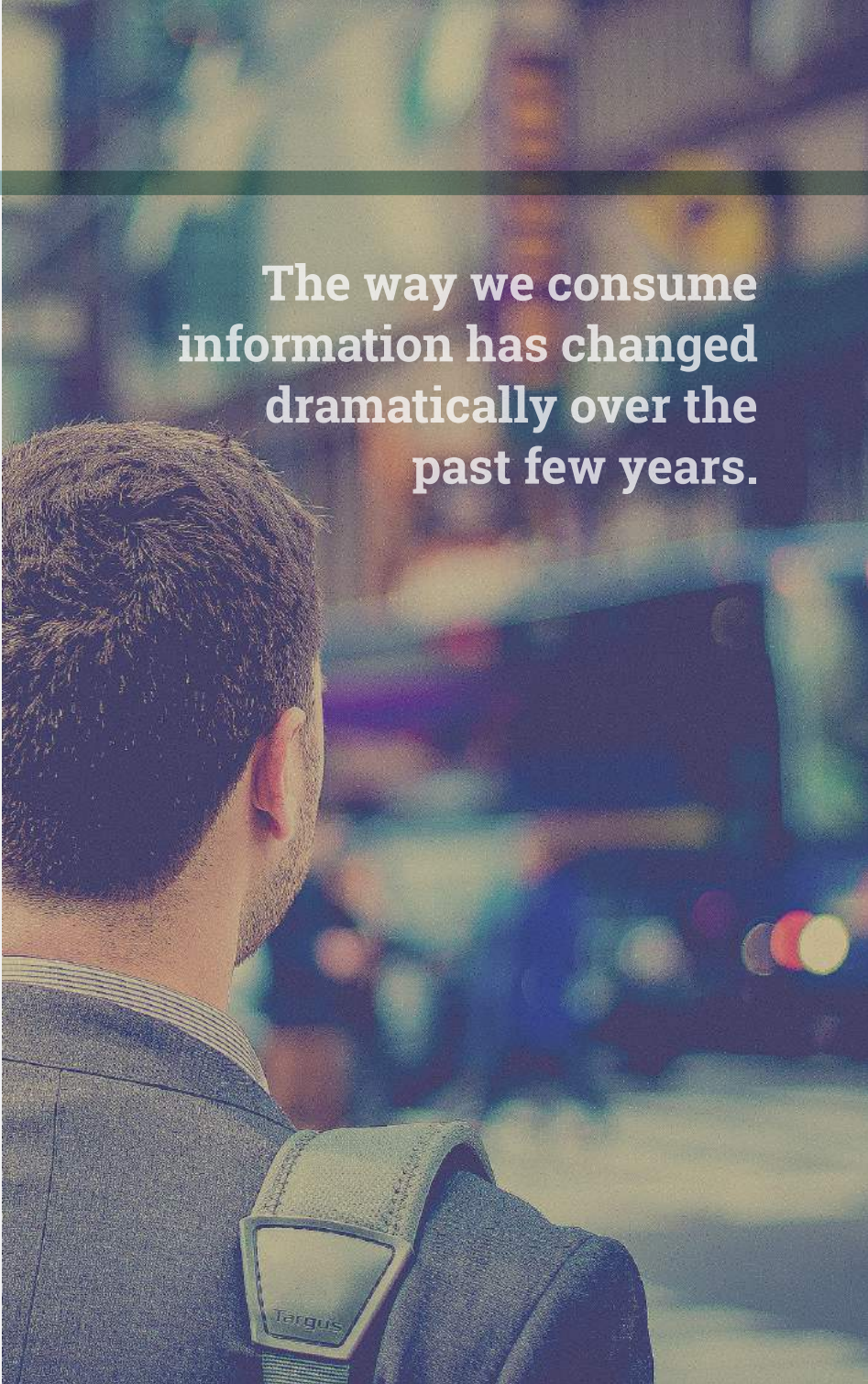
In fact, digital ad revenue totaled nearly \$60 billion in 2015 alone, growing 20 percent from 2014.² This growth is happening for three reasons. First, the media is looking for new sources of revenue and they have turned to native advertising; promoted, sponsored or amplified content; even distribution 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.³ 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 2019.⁴

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 2015.⁵

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,⁶ 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 right hand, looking at the screen. The background is a blurred city street at night with colorful lights and buildings.

**The way we consume
information has changed
dramatically over the
past few years.**



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.



The world is your oyster when it comes to the types of content you can sponsor.



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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SECTION 2. SOCIAL MEDIA

Since social media hit the mainstream in the mid-2000s, it has barely stopped to take a breath.

Established players like Facebook and Twitter, as well as newer entrants like Snapchat, are constantly shifting and transforming. The Facebook of 2004, where a profile picture was all you were able to post, is barely recognizable to the Facebook of today, which has live-streaming, Instant Articles and a host of other new features. Now, platforms like Snapchat add not only new ways to communicate but also new ways to reach specific audiences. This gives fresh opportunities to reach the right audiences.

Social media today: The numbers.

65%

According to the Pew Research Institute 65% of adults use social media in the U.S.⁷

90%

Among millennials, that number reaches 90%.⁷

38%

38% of Americans get their news from digital sources, like social media.⁸

35.98

eMarketer estimates that global social media ad spending will reach \$35.98 billion in 2017.⁹

46%

46% of all video plays in Q4 2015 were on mobile devices.¹⁰

170%

Tablet and smartphone video consumption has grown 170% since 2013.¹⁰

1/3

One third of smartphone videos watched in 2015 were longer than ten minutes.¹⁰

2084%

Mobile video has grown 2084% in the past five years.¹⁰



By the platform.



1 BILLION DAILY ACTIVE USERS ¹¹



23 PERCENT OF ALL INTERNET USERS ¹²



28 PERCENT OF ADULT INTERNET USERS ¹²



100 MILLION DAILY USERS ¹¹



100 MILLION MONTHLY ACTIVE USERS ¹⁶



25 PERCENT OF ADULT INTERNET USERS ¹²

Facebook.

- 72 percent of adult internet users in the U.S. are on Facebook ¹²
- Of those, 77 percent of female internet users are on Facebook, compared with only 66 percent of males ¹²
- Facebook is projected to reach 1.43 billion monthly users by the end of 2016 ¹³
- In 2016, mobile is expected to account for 82 percent of Facebook's U.S. digital ad revenue ¹³
- Facebook reports that 100 million hours of video are watched every day on the social network ¹⁴
- Facebook recently launched its own ad platform, CreativeHub, to make creating Facebook Ads simpler ¹⁵

Twitter.

- Twitter is more popular among younger adults — 32 percent of adult internet users are on Twitter ¹²

Instagram.

- Instagram is projected to earn \$1.3 billion in mobile ad revenues in the U.S. alone ¹³
- Instagram is more popular among racial minorities, compared with white users ¹²
- In the U.S., Instagram will represent 15.4 percent of Facebook's total mobile ad revenues ¹³

A photograph showing a person's hand raised in a crowd, likely at a concert or event, with a sunset or warm light in the background. The hand is in the foreground, and the crowd is blurred in the background.

Social Media gives fresh opportunities to reach the right audiences.

Snapchat.

- One of the fastest-growing social media sites ever, has already surpassed Twitter for daily users ¹⁶
- Snapchat's users spend an average of 30 minutes inside the app every day ¹¹
- More than half of the new users who sign up to Snapchat are over 25 ¹¹
- 10 billion user-generated video views a day ¹⁷

Pinterest.

- 31 percent of adult internet users are on Pinterest ¹²
- Only 16 percent of male internet users are on Pinterest, compared with 44 percent of female users ¹²
- New features include rich pins, which let businesses include information right on the pin itself ¹⁹
- Projected to grow explosively to more than 320 million monthly active users by 2019 ²⁰

LinkedIn.

- Recently acquired by Microsoft for \$26.2 billion, making this Microsoft's biggest acquisition yet ²¹
- LinkedIn is the only major social media platform whose usage rates are higher among users aged 30 to 49 than those aged 18 to 29 ¹²
- Now users can directly publish their own articles to their profiles via LinkedIn Pulse ²²
- More than 1 million people have published articles on LinkedIn ²³



Social use in the U.S.⁷

- **Seniors on the rise** – Today, 35 percent of all those 65 and older report using social media, a number that has more than tripled since 2010.
- **Social media gender parity** – Men and women have used social media fairly equally since 2014. But now women are outpacing men 68 percent to 62 percent.
- **More lower-income households on social** – Now 56 percent of those living in the lowest-income households are using social media.
- **Rural goes social** – Though still less likely than suburban or urban dwellers to use social social, 58 percent of rural residents are now on social media sites.

Today's opportunities in social media content.

Organic vs. Paid

When deciding how to approach your content strategy, you face the question of whether you want to focus solely on organic opportunities — in which you build your audience the hard way, one post or engagement at a time — or consider layering on paid opportunities, which can guarantee you a certain number of impressions, engagements or followers. Organic opportunities are the bulk of what a brand creates on a consistent basis: each Facebook status update, Tweet or LinkedIn post builds trust and community with your fans, but organic opportunities only begin to touch on the social media opportunities available to you. Paid opportunities can include everything from a sponsored content campaign on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter (where you can target everything from demographics to job title) to offering a fun filter on Snapchat within a certain geography, or even paid posts from influencers on YouTube.

If you've hit a wall growing your channels organically, paid opportunities will give you the opportunity to expand your social presence, reach a particular audience, have greater control of your message or want to tell deeper stories.

Campaign-Based vs. Program-Driven

Decide what you are trying to get out of your social efforts. Is it building a brand? Selling a product? Building community? Strengthening thought leadership? Once your goals are defined, you will be able to see which is best: campaign vs. program-driven.


For a short-term boost, or to support an initiative that has a definite end date, a campaign approach may make the most sense. These types of campaigns should have very clear key performance indicators, typically smaller spends and a definite end point. For a great example of using a campaign-driven approach, look at the campaign Terminator Genisys ran on Snapchat last year.

For longer-term branding, program-driven activities are a good approach. These run over longer periods of time may appear in different forms and different channels over time, and they are less likely to be driving to a single measurable goal. Check out the work SAP has done with Forbes as part of the publication's ForbesBrandVoice channel. For Forbes, the focus is heavily on providing great content, but the section is heavily branded by SAP, giving SAP many layers of branding.

A vintage microphone with a silver grille and a wooden handle, set against a blurred background of a person's face. The microphone is the central focus, with its silver grille and wooden handle clearly visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus image of a person's face, likely a woman, looking towards the camera. The overall color palette is muted, with a mix of greys, browns, and soft skin tones.

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SECTION 3. AMPLIFICATION



Using organic approaches can be effective, but you may not be reaching the right audiences.

Imagine you've just had your dream story appear in a top-tier publication.

It's right there on the home page for all to see. But in just a few hours that hot hit has been relegated to the site's back pages. How can it be given greater reach? The answer is amplification.

Amplification uses social media to gain more followers for your channels and get more attention on a particular piece of coverage, news story or announcement. It extends the reach of the number of viewers and amount of engagement you could get through normal distribution on the wire or on a website.

Amplification is all about boosting content. It can be done organically or be bought and it can be done through social channels or through purpose-built networks. Content can be amplified on social media organically by using well-trafficked hashtags, mentioning influential people, syndicating it on sites like Medium, and using word of mouth approaches.

Using organic approaches can be effective, but you may not be reaching the right audiences and it usually takes some time to build up your following.

Paid social, as described in the previous section, can also be used to increase audience exposure to specific content. The same strategies used to promote an account or white paper can be applied to a great article, with excellent targeting capabilities and measurable results. If you're all about increasing engagement around a particular piece of content, use paid social amplification services to up your game.

Beyond social, paid syndication services like Outbrain provide the ability to reach highly targeted audiences across a range of websites. These services are essentially ad networks that use eye-catching graphics and headlines to draw viewers to selected stories. If you're looking to increase impressions around a particular piece of content, then you should consider syndication services.

Before starting an amplification campaign, start by asking yourself, who will share this and why? What audience am I trying to reach and where and how do they consume information? This will inform the approach you should take.

Today's opportunities with amplification

Earned amplification


Amplification should begin with earned opportunities, especially ones you can do on your own behalf. Examples include:

- Sharing content across your company's owned social media channels
- Suggesting content for your employees to post on their social media channels
- Publishing owned content to your company blog
- Cross publishing your blog's content to Medium or on LinkedIn's publishing platform, Pulse
- Including content in your organization's emails to customers and prospects

Paid amplification

You can also amplify your story in a number of ways with various paid opportunities. Here's the breakdown:

- Running a paid social campaign on platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Snapchat
- Using a paid syndication service like Outbrain
- Investing in paid influencer relations on platforms like YouTube
- Utilizing paid advocate marketing through a service such as Crowdly



In order to get the results that you want... you need to adapt.



What makes amplification effective.

Content amplification is most effective if:

- The content is newsworthy
- The content is entertaining and shareable
- It is posted to a legitimate news outlet
- It is posted on a “neutral” (meaning not a company website) site like Medium or LinkedIn

Content amplification is less effective if:

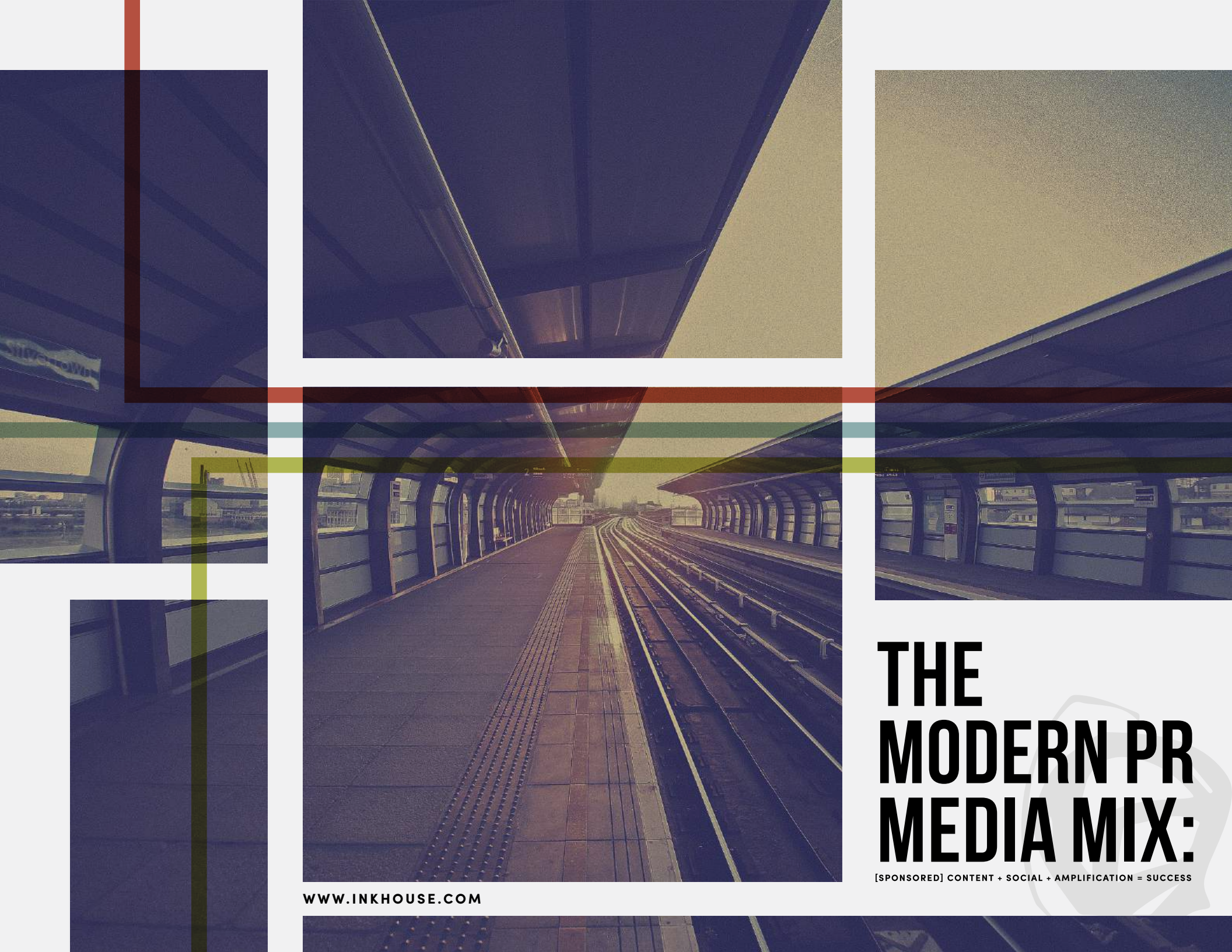
- Your goal to drive to a product page on a website or an Amazon link
- Your content is too self-promotional
- Your content only lives on your blog or organization website

Amplification can offer your content both a bigger and a more targeted audience, depending on the approach you take and how much you are willing to spend. Of course, it comes down to the needs of the brand, but amplification is a great way to spread the word!

In order to get the results that you want for your stories, you need to adapt to the changing times. By using social media, amplification and sponsored content, you can take your PR and marketing efforts to the next level. [Learn more](#) about how you can use these services to get your content the kind of engagement you’re looking for.

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