



THE FUTURE OF PR



**in a
digital
world**



THINGS ARE DIFFERENT

But you know that.

Public relations has been around for more than a hundred years, and yet, now more than ever, it feels like it is stuck in the past.

People are consuming content and communicating with each other at breakneck speeds. Information is at everyone's fingertips and in everyone's ears.

But PR practices can't seem to keep up.

And that shouldn't be the case.

Because today's world is a world that needs PR more than ever.

Think about all the new media channels and possibilities! Social networks, online communities, consumer generated content, influencers, virtual reality...

But we're stuck. The PR industry keeps falling back on its traditional tools and workflow. Create static content, email blast journalists, blindly follow up, pray for coverage, try to find a way to prove your impact, repeat.

In this book, we'll paint a picture of the current state of affairs, then look ahead to see what the future holds and how we can thrive as PRs in this exciting new digital age.



PR AS IT SHOULDN'T BE

PR today seems stuck in the stone age. And that's somewhat strange, because looking at all the new tech and communication channels, PR should be thriving.

The problem is, though, that PR moves too fast to adapt. We are constantly on the go, and stick to the tools and tactics we know, simply because they are the comfortable.

When is there time to engage stakeholders on social media? When is there time to create rich, dynamic content for journalists? When is there time to learn a new tool or skill?

It's a catch 22 that will make sure you're out of a job when the younger generations start rolling up their sleeves.

If time can't be found, then time must be made. Wielding digital tools in everyday public relations can help you not only find time to learn something new, but it will also make time for you by freeing you up. Then you'll be able to dig into the stuff that really matters to your stakeholders.

Imagine the possibilities of more time, faster communication, and measurable PR?

I know! Exciting!

But first let's pick apart the way things are done now:



STATIC CONTENT IS BORING CONTENT

Does the following workflow sound similar to you?

Write your story or press release into a Word document. Throw an image or two in, and export to PDF. Then attach it to an email and send it off.

If it is, this is like inviting friends to dinner, telling them it is going to be something really great, and then serving up off-brand macaroni and cheese from a box.

Your story is good! Stop serving it up in a static document with static content. There are two huge reasons why: 1. Journalists will have a harder time using it and adapting the content for different channels and 2. Because of this they won't use it.

Look at the news you read every day. How much of that is only text and a single image? News is a multimedia affair, so why are you serving up the bare minimum?

Attaching files to an email might work, but that again requires more work from the journalist. Using static files for content sharing limits accessibility, and thus limits your reach.

Static content also is not exciting. There are so many other delightful ways to deliver news including using video, animated gifs, audio files, and well-designed infographics. Give a journalist an irresistible, easy to share content, and your story will become instantly more engaging, and have more viral potential.

Static content can't do that.



IRRELEVANT CONTENT IS AN EPIDEMIC

Another factor that strongly affects the potential reach of a press release is how newsworthy it is, and how relevant it is to the person you are sending it to. It happens all too often that the stories shared by PR pros simply don't resonate.

Either it's not newsworthy, it's poorly written, or it's not served for the right audience.

People are talking about how SpaceX carted a Tesla up to outer space. They talk about things like that one time Casey Neistat together with Samsung built a drone that could fly him through Finland on a snowboard. And you're talking about your most recent fundraiser and how great it is... for you?

Ask yourself: who cares?

Content should be compelling. If you're not doing a supersonic space jump like Felix Baumgartner and Red Bull, maybe you should reframe your story and target a more niche set of journalists.

Sending irrelevant or self-promoting bloat to journalists is why they hate us so much. Take a more targeted, deliberate approach to your content and you'll see a huge difference.

SPRAY AND PRAY IS UNHEALTHY

Admit it. Have you ever blasted your story out to everyone on your contact list, just to cover all your bases and save a little time? We all have.



Mass email campaigns are tempting, but they operate with little regard for relevancy and timeliness. And they are nothing new in the PR industry. In fact, the phenomenon is so widespread, it has been given its own name (one you're undoubtedly familiar with): the good ol' spray and pray. It's an unkind name for an unkind practice.

No one benefits here. Journalists become jaded to their inboxes. You lose out on coverage. This approach quickly amounts to wasted effort. You don't know what your stakeholder is interested in, and by doing a spray and pray campaign, you essentially are telling them that you don't care to know.

FOLLOW UPS ARE BLIND

"Hey there!

This is X calling from Company Y. Did you get a chance to read my email about Z? I just wanted to see if you had any questions or were interested in learning more."

It's not uncommon to hear silence on the other side of the phone followed up with "ermm... what email?"

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

Even if you don't spray and pray, if you don't have any evidence that they opened or read the email, following up becomes a blind guessing game that will make things awkward for everyone.



MEASUREMENT IS HARD



After all the work you've put into a PR campaign, you are often left wondering what the effect of it really was. Difficulty measuring the ROI of a campaign is a huge issue in public relations.

Despite mass email campaigns, and extensive repeated follow ups, 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 endeavour.

But that isn't acceptable. Your efforts have an impact, and it is measurable. There are plenty of other metrics that can indicate where you succeeded and where you need to improve.

SUMMARY

We've detailed the different ways PRs struggle with the current workflows. Here is a quick recap:

- **Press releases are created and published as static content, limiting access and reach due to their inadaptability to other media platforms.**
- **Brand story impact has weakened because of irrelevance, and lack of value for their audiences.**
- **Email distribution of press releases often amounts to wasted effort and damaged relationships due to spray and pray tactics**
- **Tons of follow up work is also wasted.**
- **It's hard to gauge what the actual impact of a campaign was due to lack of decent measurement tools and techniques.**





It's a cumbersome process that is stuck in the past. Over time, the results of this dated approach will prove poor.

We're in the information age. People can and will seek out the content that they can relate to, on the platforms they enjoy. Think of all the times you've sat watching TV, skimming through Twitter or Instagram, and asking your Google Assistant to find out what Indian restaurants are near you?

If the PR industry wants to seize these opportunities brought about by digital technology, it needs to adapt.

It needs to meet people where people are and give them content they actually want to consume.





THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

It's clear that the media landscape has changed. It is clear that it will keep evolving. So how can the PR industry adapt to seize these opportunities?

PR regaining its footing really boils down to this:

1. Applying the skills you already have to new mediums
2. Adapting to new disciplines by learning new skills and embracing new stakeholders
3. Adopting technology into your workflow

THE SKILLS YOU HAVE

Luckily, if you've made it this far in the PR profession, you probably have some really great skills built in. The most crucial skills for this new age is the art of relationship building and the ability to spark a conversation.

The digital space, when looked at objectively and coldly, is devoid of humanness. But that couldn't be further from the truth. As humans we are seeking out connections and relationships through digital means everyday. For example, social networks are huge!

Did you that according to GlobalWebIndex in 2015, on average people have at least 5 social network accounts?



And according to the Pew Research Center, 68% of adult Americans got either all or some of their news from social media.

Making your news and press releases friendly for social sharing should be a priority and this is where your conversation and relationship skills are essential.

You need to be able to communicate your news in the right tone and breakdown the formalities of writing and speaking into the new medium of conversational writing. .

This is just one of many examples that shows how important your current skills are to the PR of the future.

THE SKILLS YOU NEED

Search Engine Optimization

Google runs more than 3.5 billion searches per day. This means there's a good chance that your target audience is already looking for you and content related to your business.

It's just a matter of making it easy for them to actually find you. That's where Search Engine Optimization (SEO) comes in. SEO seems like complicated wizardry (and sometimes it is) but it's really about formatting your content to be able to be found on search engines like Google.

Search engines rank pages based on over 200 factors and algorithms change all the time. But despite that daunting outlook on SEO, the reality of it is quite simple. Create relevant, easy to read and skim content with a clear aim. You'll be surprised how far a





well-researched and qualitative piece of content will get you.

Learn the basics about page structure, keywords, and meta data and you'll be way ahead when it comes to planning and publishing your content.

The benefits of SEO include:

- Your content will be found by people looking for it or something similar to it
- SEO is easily quantifiable in terms of measurement in organic traffic
- SEO rules make your writing clearer, and more relevant

Influencer Engagement

The internet has given everyone, anywhere the ability to become a thought leader, topic expert, and social influencer. It is highly likely that one of these people already has a following and is talking to your target audience. Check Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Medium and other high-impact, visually engaging channels for potential influencers.

So why not build a relationship with those influencers, just like you did with journalists and politicians before? It's one of those skills you already have, just applied to a new medium. If you adapt, you can reach your audience in new and exciting ways.

Content Marketing & Inbound PR

Don't let the word "marketing" turn you off. This is just for simplicity when it comes to finding these tactics on your own. Content marketing is a relatively recent development in the marketing world that takes a page from PR. It's about creating well-researched, valuable



content that answers its audience's questions without them ever needing to formally ask. Content marketing is about making yourself available online (remember SEO?) with quality content that satisfies different needs of their target market.

Why can't PR deliver the same?

From content marketing, PR can learn a lot. Your content should be varied, stimulating, and available. Not all content should be for gatekeeper journalists and influencers, but also cater to the needs of your wider stakeholders. .

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, but imagine getting subscribers to your press releases and PR content! Imagine all you could accomplish with automated emails, scheduling, and a willing audience

Learning the new landscape

Our stakeholders have changed.

Sort of.

What really happened is that they grew. 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 is evolving.

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.

Influencers have also become more multifaceted. For example, it might be that a financial journalist you're reaching out to also runs a food blog on his own time. Or 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.

Get data savvy

AVE has been the PR teams go-to metric for success. But it's becoming a serious thorn in the side of the industry now as every department has the tech to report its ROI. AVE is bloated, baseless, and increasingly useless.

So it's vital that the PR team can find a way to report progress or success that isn't a fictional metric. If you are able to understand the metrics behind your content performance, you are able to provide insight into the actions of visitors.

You are able to know what pages are visited, how long for, test different headlines, styles, and layout. Data is only as useful as your understanding of it and ability to use it to your advantage.

Being able to use and understand platforms such as Google Analytics is a good place to start. For example with cohort analysis, you can start to see how well you bring people back to your site. What happened on a



specific day that drove results and so on. AVE will soon become a mystic metric, relegated to the past.

So it's time to get comfortable with your understanding and manipulation of data. It's a core skill that will be vital to your professional progress in this changing industry.

THE TECH STACK

A tech stack is just a fancy way of saying the sum of all the software you use to perform a task or run a project. PR requires its own tech stack in order to achieve goals and find more time to manage all the new stakeholders, content types, and channels.

We so strongly believe this that we partnered up with PR rockstar Stephen Waddington to create PRstack.co, a crowd-sourced resource for over 250 tools for PR professionals.

Not sure where to start? Always assess your stakeholders needs, budget constraints, and content requirements before you jump into a decision. Be realistic about where you are now and you'll find success in software.

However, we do recommend these basics to get your PR stack foundation in order so you can start to tackle the future of PR.

Modern contact management (CRM)

You may be familiar with a Contact Relationship Management (CRM) platform when it comes to sales teams, but PR teams need them too. Keeping track of all these new, multifaceted stakeholders isn't easy with an Excel file. Why not build your media lists like a pro





and start using a CRM system? A CRM can help you log your interactions with influencers, and keep track of their interests and social media profiles. If you work in an agency, it also helps you get an overview of who has done what in terms of contact touchpoints, follow ups, and meetings.

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.

CRMs also let you tag and segment your contacts so that you can send targeted campaigns later on without sifting through everyone every single time.

Email automation

A marketer's ally can also be a boon for PRs. Getting a good email automation tool that lets you schedule campaigns in advance, personalize emails in bulk, and get follow up metrics is a real life saver.

The follow up metrics are particularly helpful. This way you can see things like how many people and who specifically opened your emails, who clicked, and whose email address is dead in the water. When emails bounce (read: don't get delivered) it reflects poorly on your email address which could blacklist you. Save yourself the hassle and get visibility on email activity.

Press Release Publisher & Online Newsroom

Remember all that talk about SEO and quality content? Here is where things get easier. Get an easy to use press release publication tool that lets you publish content directly online.

You won't have to worry about sending lame PDFs anymore if your content can be interacted with online.



Think video embedding, in-line images that journalists can download, and so much more. A good tool will also have an online newsroom component where all your press releases, brand stories, and press kit can live together in harmony.

The other benefits of having news in an online format, besides being found, is that you can update it on the fly! Make a typo? No problem. Just received the latest pictures from an event? Add them now. Need to pull a story completely? Kill it!

It really is a huge time saver.

Online newsrooms also make your news discoverable and journalists can even subscribe to them! You'll be able to build media lists without lifting a finger!

Media monitoring

Get a good tool for online media monitoring. Digital content is scannable and has a lot of data behind it. This means you can get real numbers for your reach and impact. You'll even be able to get qualitative tonality readings and reactions in real-time.

Media monitoring tools can be as simple as letting you "listen" to social media or as complex as getting into the nitty gritty of your coverage and online mentions.





GO FORTH AND RELATE

The digital world is full of opportunities. PRs have core skills that can easily be adapted to excel in this new landscape. It's time we do so.

The world needs good, quality PR.

The key to thriving in this digital age is surprisingly simple: embrace the new and take the time to evolve properly.

So stop creating static content and sending mass email blasts. Start using technology to bring humanity and relationships back to the forefront of digital public relations.

BY THE MAKERS OF



ONE TOOL FOR BETTER FASTER PR