

PRNews

Public Relations in Practice



Foreword

The Public Relations in Practice survey “takes you inside the minds of 713 PR professionals.” Now there’s a scary thought.

This cranial exploration suggests, among other things, that we are indeed an eclectic mix. It may also suggest a widening of the left-brain/right brain gap that has typified this practice even before Eddie Bernays fired the shot that turned-off lights around the world.

We’re a mix of art and science. Let’s face it, for many of us, that’s the attraction. The chance to make a bottom-line difference without having to wear pinstripes and suspenders all day. Too restless for accounting, we thrive on the freeform challenges of forging connections. But we’re not artists; we’ve got “real jobs.”

Welcome to the emerging red and blue states of public relations.

The Public Relations in Practice survey suggests the left brain/right brain, art/science battle is alive and well, especially when it comes to adopting new media relations management tools. While 99% of respondents rated reaching the right journalist as important to their overall success, only 29% have adopted an online media directory designed specifically for PR professionals. Two out of three respondents regard ongoing tracking, analyzing and measuring media content as critical, yet many still rely on old technology – or no technology – to get the job done.

So what’s wrong with a profession where some congregants worship at the MySpace altar while the rest stay home to read the Sunday paper? Nothing (in my book) unless the either/or, boxers/briefs, contact management system/rolodex false dichotomy inhibits us from using the right tools for getting the job done.

Maybe that’s why I like the Institute for Public Relations tagline so much: the science beneath the art of public relations.™

- Steve Quigley

Steve Quigley is an associate professor of public relations in Boston University’s College of Communication.

PR News and Vocus Survey Reveals PR Industry in Early Stages of Leveraging Technology to Gain Strategic Advantage

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With a fundamental shift in the media landscape impacting both the traditional media and the public relations industries, many PR professionals are questioning how other organizations effectively manage their media relations and analyze results. What technology and services do my peers use to advance their PR efforts? What factors contribute to the overall success of my PR initiatives? And most importantly, are my current techniques working or are there better and easier ways to do PR? The answers to these and other questions were revealed in a recent survey conducted by PR News and sponsored by Vocus.

Conducted in May 2007, the “Public Relations in Practice” survey takes you inside the minds of 713 PR professionals to discover the industry’s new “tools of the trade” and determine where your organization falls in the mix. Read below to see how your methods stack up against those used by other PR professionals.

Summary

The survey indicates that the adoption of technology in the PR industry is still in its early stages. While technologies designed for public relations are gaining mainstream recognition, PR professionals have been slow to adopt the new technologies. The survey found that more than 65% of PR professionals still use either a paper-based method or generic technology solution to track and manage their media relations and almost 20% of those same professionals still use scissors and the local paper to manage and track their news coverage. Organizations that are behind the technology adoption curve may not only be falling behind emerging best practices but also risk not keeping pace with changes being driven by the internet and social media.

Survey Highlights & Key Findings

Among the key findings:

- While 99% of respondents rated reaching the right journalist as important to their overall critical success, only 29% have adopted an online media directory designed specifically for PR professionals. And more than 66% of respondents still use a paper-based method or generic software solution to track and manage their media relations. The implication is that most organizations have not yet implemented a contact management system for public relations to systematically track ongoing conversations with journalists.
- Over 98% of PR Professionals surveyed ranked tracking their organization's news as important to their critical success. Among survey respondents, 73% reported tracking their company news coverage on a daily basis, with 18% conducting hourly or real-time news tracking. Again, while monitoring news is seen as critical, many organizations continue to physically clip their news from newspapers and trade magazines (17%) or rely on search engines (32%) that are limited to online news outlets and lack archiving capabilities.
- Among survey respondents, 98% rated measuring and analyzing PR initiatives as important to their overall critical success. While many organizations still rely on internal measurements a shift is underway towards utilizing tools designed specifically for PR that go beyond counting the number of clips an organization receives to help demonstrate the true impact of PR. Surprisingly, given the pressure to justify PR budgets, 12% of organizations do not measure their PR efforts in any way.

Detailed Results

PR Success

When asked to decide what functions of public relations are most important to PR success, not surprisingly, an overwhelming 89% of respondents (644 professionals) indicated that reaching the right journalist is "very important" while another 10% found it "somewhat important".

Additionally, 75% of survey respondents ranked Tracking News as a critical success factor to their PR programs, which is also not surprising due to the increasing stream of news in today's 24x7 news environment.

Finding the Right Journalist (89%), Tracking News (75%) and Measuring and Analyzing PR Initiatives (63%) are the keys to success

What is surprising, however, is that Measuring and Analyzing PR Initiatives ranked as the third most important function to PR success among survey respondents. While in the past many professionals may not have given much weight to measuring results due to its subjective nature, the survey revealed that 63% of respondents now consider measuring and analyzing their initiatives as critical to their overall PR success. This is most likely a result of emerging technologies with specific analytics tools to help PR professionals accurately measure their work while better demonstrating strategic value.

Ranking only slightly lower among respondents were Tracking Conversations with the Media and Producing Clip Books and Reports. Of the survey respondents, 50% and 52% respectively ranked Tracking Conversations with the Media and Producing Clip Books and Reports as important to their success as PR professionals.

Media Relations

Less than 30% have adopted an online media directory designed specifically for PR professionals

When asked what tools they use to track and manage media relations, the majority of PR professionals admitted to using old-school technology for functions they deemed critical to their success. The survey found that less than 30% have adopted an online media directory that includes advanced capabilities to track and share conversations with journalists. These contact management capabilities allow organizations to build better relationships with the media over time and ensure the institutional memory is preserved should a team member leave.

So how are other professionals targeting journalists and tracking conversations? The majority of professionals still rely on

manual techniques. More than 30% use paper-based methods including hardcopy media directories (18%) and a rolodex of names and numbers (15%). Slightly over one third (34%) of respondents reported using generic software such as Excel and/or Outlook to manage their media contacts.

While sophisticated online systems can't, and shouldn't, replace hard-earned relationships with key journalists, the drawback of these manual efforts is that they simply do not provide PR professionals with the tools they need to do their job effectively with today's media. While those key relationships need to be protected, to foster new relationships it is important to stay current. Lists become out of date overnight, information is not accessible to other team members and organizations are vulnerable to turnover with no existing information archives. Most importantly, there is no integration with the other areas of PR such as news monitoring, news distribution and PR measurement.

News Tracking/Management

Rated as the second most important factor to overall PR success, news tracking and management was further assessed in the survey. The intensity and frequency with which organizations have begun tracking company and competitor news reflects the PR industry's response to today's 24x7 news coverage.

73% of PR professionals track company news coverage at least once a day

The survey indicated that 73% of PR professionals track their company's news coverage at least once a day while 53% conduct competitor coverage searches as frequently. Furthermore, nearly 18% of respondents track their company news coverage in real-time and 22% track their competitor news coverage as often.

Many PR professionals are using simple or free methods to track and manage their news, some of which limit results or leave a large margin for human error. Despite their limitations, Google and/or Yahoo searches (32%) were the most popular tool, with nearly one third of the survey respondent votes. While search engines are a powerful aid to PR, they are limited to online sources and do not include any print or broadcast news, they have no archiving capabilities and cannot be tied back to specific PR activities or journalist outreach.

Almost 20% of respondents are still using outsourced clipping services to track and manage their company's news coverage.

Only 17% of PR professionals surveyed are using web-based news monitoring services (17%) to manage their news coverage, some of which include additional features that allow them to archive their coverage and track it back to their media outreach. This level of integration and automation can significantly reduce the amount of time PR professionals spend forwarding their news (e.g. creating daily clipping reports) and tracking their results.

And, surprisingly, another 17% of respondents are still using their favorite pair of scissors and the local paper to keep track of their news.

In-House vs. Outsourced

With advancements in technology and solutions designed to make measuring each aspect of your PR program simple, PR professionals are taking their measurement in-house. In fact, 61% of those surveyed indicated that they track and quantify their Public Relations internally, while just 17% enlist outside services. An astonishing 12% are not measuring their PR at all.

61% track and quantify PR internally

Additionally, 67% of survey respondents are looking internally to conduct their PR activities. Just 19% have turned to an external resource, with 13% employing more than one.

The results may reflect the difficulty of coordinating activities and measuring results with external agencies, as only 13% of the respondents who use external resources reported that agency communication is handled "very well" and 18% rated communication as just "OK".

Trends in PR

Social Media and the Evolving Marketing Mix Leading Change

When looking at trends that are impacting or will impact the way organizations conduct Public Relations, the emergence of blogs and other social media (23%) and the increasing importance of public relations in the overall marketing mix (23%) both ranked highest among respondents.

23% ranked the emergence of blogs and social media as having the biggest impact on PR

The impact of the Internet on the news cycle ranked third with 20% of respondent vote and blurring lines between PR and marketing (e.g. search engine optimized press releases) ranked fourth with 19% of the vote. Increased pressure from management to measure the impact of Public Relations received the least amount of votes with 15%.

Summary

The Public Relations industry is shifting to keep pace with the changing media landscape as evidenced by the emergence of PR management technologies designed to increase the effectiveness of PR investments. However, the overall industry's adoption of these newer technologies remains low.

The industry has a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of technology to streamline and enhance Public Relations efforts. Organizations increasingly including more online media into their PR initiatives as a direct result of today's Internet enabled 24x7 news environment. And PR professionals are just beginning to adopt industry specific software to assist in activities such as media relations, news tracking and measurement.

Although the survey results indicate that PR professionals understand and feel the pressure to advance both their approach to and management of PR, it reveals that many PR professionals are not yet leveraging new technologies. With an increasing field of technology focused on helping PR professionals succeed, organizations that integrate these tools into their PR strategy will have a decided advantage over their competitors.

About Vocus

Vocus, Inc. (NASDAQ: VOCS) is a leading provider of on-demand public relations management. Our web-based software suite helps organizations of all sizes manage local and global relationships and communications with journalists, analysts, public officials and other key audiences. Our software helps customers manage media relations, monitor and analyze their news, conduct interactive email campaigns, build online newsrooms, and manage government relations activities. Vocus' PRWeb platform is also recognized as one of the Internet's leading online news and press release distribution services. Vocus' software is available in five languages and can be accessed from any computer via secure login over the Internet with no need for internal hardware, software or IT support. Vocus is based in Lanham, MD with offices in North America, Europe, and Asia. For more information please visit www.vocus.com or call 800.345.5572.