

How to navigate the new PR landscape

 By [James White](#)

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Like society, business is changing. You know that, everyone knows that. What worked 10 years ago just doesn't cut it today.

While some may call it a result of technological changes, others may blame the shift in society toward wanting connections in an on-the-go market. The result is the same. The business landscape, especially relating to public relations, has changed. Now is the time to get with the changes, adapt and push forward, or be left behind picking up the pieces of the other businesses who moved ahead.



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Why it's different

In the past, PR was built on [solid brand reputations](#), reinforcing histories and values of companies, influencing target markets and cultivating a solid image for customers and potential clients. In the past, this relied mainly on engaging local and mass media through ad buys, traditional press releases and speaking engagements and articles.

Brands had to rely on outside help, the media in particular, to accomplish their goals and to reach target markets. Without assistance, PR was generally a no-go.

Think back to the well-known PR nightmares of the past. When reputations were soiled due to events within or without a brand's control, a simple social media message couldn't fix it because that option didn't exist. Instead, organisations, like Johnson and Johnson during the [Tylenol disaster of 1984](#), had to rely on reactive methods and media favouritism to resolve any issues or to reach audiences. Specificity was hard to achieve and engagement was an afterthought. It was about promotion from start to finish.

Enter the digital revolution. With the rise of online communication and social networks, [56% of Americans](#) use social media on a regular basis and [mobile devices](#) are expected to overtake desktop devices by the end of this year. The PR landscape has been changed forever.

Now, PR professionals must move toward innovative and creative tactics that drive results, which may vary from one client or brand to another. Instead of publicity, it's about engagement and public sharing. Business owners must identify target goals and selective tactics to get ahead. One size no longer fits all. If you're not heading in this direction, you're probably missing out.

Four areas of focus

According to Gini Dietrich in the book [Spin Sucks](#), there are four areas of PR that can and should be used to navigate today's PR landscape, all relating to the all-important media of the past, but in a very new and more accessible way. The four areas of focus are Earned Media, Shared Media, Owned Media, and Paid Media.

Earned media

Earned media is like the traditional media exposure of the past. If a company is looking to make a splash, to make the front page of a newspaper or to reach a large audience through more traditional methods like blogger relationships, earned media should be a focus.

If an organisation is looking to target news media or to reach a market through a more controlled channel, it's about attracting attention.

While press releases still play a role in earned media, a PR pro knows building relationships with bloggers, influencers and journalist are what will make a company's earned media tactics successful.

Shared media

Shared media doesn't rely on traditional exposure in any way. Instead, it works on the masses, on the potential for going viral and on driving the interests of fans and followers until they act. Social media activity is a critical aspect of shared media PR.

[Havahart](#), a company that creates humane animal traps, understands the importance of shared media in today's landscape. By creating an active [Facebook page](#) with over 68,000 followers, the brand relies on everyday consumers for spreading their message by sharing the content that they post. It's about attracting attention and promoting action while engaging a specific, interested market.

Owned media

Owned media provides brands with more control than traditional exposure through earned media or social reliability of shared media. Instead, it focuses on creating targeted content through expert opinion and employee or customer testimonials while offering incentives to certain groups such as brand ambassadors, affiliates and native advertisers to spread pre-formulated messages to target audiences.

[Gone for a Run](#), a running apparel company demonstrates a focus in this area with the creation of a brand ambassador team. By submitting an application, bloggers can be chosen to receive free product, with the understanding that a review is their payment.

While brands must walk a careful, narrow line in this area, it provides more control than throwing out information and hoping for the best. It's an up-and-coming, popular PR tactic.

Paid media

At the opposite end of the spectrum from earned media, paid media relies heavily on traditional SEO, optimised content and sponsored posts, more like an integrated advertising approach to PR.

Retailer, [Target](#) is known for success in this area. By engaging customers through retargeting and other PPC campaigns on popular social networks and other third party sites, the retailer has control over what's shown and can reach a target market quickly and efficiently.

No one method guarantees success. However, by learning about the new PR landscape and taking steps to properly adapt, you're likely to find success in the modern world of PR.

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