

# Social media's impact on PR

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PR & SOCIAL MEDIA: The impact of social media upon corporate communications is changing the role of the public relations practitioner. In short, the world has changed, and the dynamics of PR have changed with it.



Disruptions in global economics and the rise of social media have presented the world of corporate communications with a new paradigm. Drastic changes in general media are changing how PR practitioners address content, the media and representation of their clients.

At the heart of the evolution is content, and the PRO's role in its generation, aggregation and resulting conversations.

## The deliverable

The successful publishing of content in the media has been a goal of traditional public relations, viewed as the deliverable by the PRO's clients. Once published, the traditional public relations practitioner would be divorced from the content, unable to govern its proliferation. The content is handed over to the publisher, or media, which becomes the custodian of its final form and aggregation. Consumers would then hopefully be exposed to the content, and a conversation would arise that PROs and their clients would not necessarily be privy to.

Social media, however, along with other disruptions in the market, has changed the dynamics surrounding content. In the past, the PRO was responsible for creating content and pitching it to the media. In the new paradigm, the PRO is responsible for content creation, pitching, self-publishing, content marketing and then listening to and learning from the resulting conversations.

PR must generate content that offers value and challenges people, bearing in mind that in our new, on-demand culture and changed media consumption environment, people are increasingly busy and have shortened attention spans. Content must

be concise yet substantial.

## Still vital

The pitch, in terms of motivating the publishing of content, is also still a vital role of public relations. But this now extends beyond traditional publishers. Of course, the PRO must address traditional press and media, but must also include bloggers, prominent social media users and new media publishers that have influence in their own right.

There are also many tools now available that allow the PROs to become publishers themselves and package content for media and consumers. These outlets allow the PR agency to build its own audience and invest them in the publishing component of content.

But in order to effectively manage the publishing of content, PR practitioners need to understand the implications and effective use of tools. This implies realising the effect that platforms such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook have where content is involved, and an acknowledgement of the changing roles in ownership of that content.

Marketing is a function of publishing that PR must now also assume. In the old paradigm, the publisher was responsible for marketing packaged content, whereas now the PR must strategise the marketing of content published via alternative and new media channels.

Twitter and Facebook, for example, are as much tools for the sharing and promotion of content as they are for the creation and publication of content.

## Changing influence

The influence of media has also changed. Whereas in the past pure readership numbers and broad demographics were used to gauge influence, now quality beats quantity. There is always a chance that 300 Facebook users who are part of a niche group may offer more influence in a specific area of interest than 5000 magazine readers who may or may not be interested in something.

The proliferation of content in social media is also accelerated as posted items appear in public timelines and are shared by multiple users. A small group of people are able to reach potentially millions of social media users with relatively little effort, if the content they are offering is of sufficient interest.

And when the resulting conversation surrounding the content begins, the PRO is in the mix. *But it is important to note that our role is not to manipulate the conversation, but to be aware of its occurrence, form and implications, and to be available to respond if the need occurs.*

It is no longer acceptable to pretend these conversations are not happening. PR needs to be aware of the conversations and be open to learning from the insights provided by the content consumers.

## Correct response

Constructive feedback can be used to produce better content in the future. And tools are available that allow conversations to be monitored. However, the correct response to negative criticism is not to send the provocateur free samples of the very thing they are complaining about, or to try to control the conversation.

Instead, you must realise that being privy to these conversations is a privilege. If customers are telling you to fix your product, then the problem is with the product itself, not the communications surrounding it.

If you monitor the conversation, stripping out commentary by individuals seeking glory or trolling for negative attention, a good cross-cut of opinion is provided.

The role of the PRO in the conversation is as facilitator and listener. To find where the conversation is happening and access this to provide relevant feedback to the client.

## **Change and adapt**

The way people communicate and the forms of media and information consumption are changing. PROs need to be aware of these changes and adapt their roles and responsibilities accordingly.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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