

Is PR still relevant?

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This is a summary of the talk I gave at [@MarketingIndaba](#) in Cape Town on 25 May.

This question has come up a lot lately. Clients ask. Marketing peers ask. Heck, even PRs ask! The resounding answer is YES. It is still relevant, but it's had a makeover... And needs some PR (ironically).

To set the record straight, let's cut to the chase: Contrary to common perceptions, PR does not only involve traditional media relations; it also includes stakeholder, blogger and influencer relations, reputation management, corporate and brand communications. And much more. But for some reason traditional media relations has just stuck. And is why the profession's sustainability comes under attack way too often.

Traditional is falling, but it's not an avalanche

For years digital has claimed to be the Armageddon of traditional media. Yes, the [Nov 2015 ABCs](#) reveal that, as a category, magazines are down by 4,5% and daily newspapers by 2.7%. But the last time I checked *Huisgenoot's* circ was 230,000. Or take *Woman & Home*. With a monthly circ of 92,000 it's doing pretty well for a "has been." It's important to take these numbers into context before completely writing off an entire media life-line that creates jobs, provides a platform for advertisers and keeps millions of people entertained, informed and engaged.

On demand is in demand

That said, there is no denying that the media power is firmly in the hands of the people. Thanks to a variety of handy gadgets and better bandwidth, we can dip in and out of our favourite series, when we want, catch the news as it happens, from anywhere, and get lost in our favourite blog or app at a whim. Or, we can do it all at once if we wish.

But this ambidexterity doesn't mean we've become uninterested in current affairs, the latest scandals or trends; it means we're consuming content in a different on-demand way. And that's what PR – and its clients – need to get on board with.

A world of new "editorial" opportunities

Editorial – or earned media as it's now called – still holds a heck of a lot of weight. Advertising sells. PR tells. And we're using online media, bloggers and influencers to help us do it. It's hard to believe now, but there was a time when an online article used to turn a client's nose up. "Who wants to be online?" they'd say. A full-page feature in a weekly newspaper carries so much more thud factor.

Fast forward to 2016 and, depending on where that online article appears, it can have as much, if not more impact (and reach), than its physical form. Take *Business Day* for instance. A respected daily business and financial publication it sells approximately [29,300 copies a day](#)* while its online version www.bdlive.com has 601,916 uniques a month. If a PR generated article is published on *BDLive* there is also potential for it to be tweeted to its 143,000 followers, which then can be retweeted on and on and on. That's pretty good exposure.

Or what about an app? Convenient and quick, the likes of News24 round-up the latest must-knows at a glance. Or, if you have more than a few seconds, browse their and their sister publications for opinion pieces, features and multi-media content. All of which can be shared, should you need to tell all your friends about it. Then there's the media's social networks. Side-stepping their physical and online platforms entirely, pitching a piece of content to *House & Leisure's* Facebook page (44,865 followers) could, if it was shared enough, generate as many views as an article in its hard copy

magazine (136,000 readers). Or, how about that post a journalist just shared about your new product? If you're [@JennSanasie](#) that's to an audience of 2,500 or 26,300 if you're [@alechogg](#).

Thought leaders and social media kings and queens

Bloggers and influencers are now as common a channel for PR folk as the media. And if your brand is aimed young, they're probably in the majority. Collaborating with an influential blogger for instance can propel your campaign or story into the social stratosphere; providing you've worked in tandem and not dictated the storyline. Bloggers want traffic. And good content helps drive it. Provide good material (read: exclusive and collaborative) and you have the potential to reach their community's community. Etcetera, etcetera.

Influencers are key too. And they don't all want to be paid. There are plenty of very active communities on social media who are open to working together and sharing good content – providing it's high quality, relevant and shareable of course, and you support them back.

A tweet is worth a thousand words

What this means is that a post made by a thought leader in their field (journalist, blogger or influencer) has as much if not more clout than a full-page feature in a leading broadsheet. Not to mention the leverage you can enjoy by sharing or retweeting.

What about the humble press release?

It still has its place. It just works differently. Rule number one, do not issue unless you actually have something to say. It's incredible how many clients still ask for a press release as their first choice of approach. Rule number two, share with great images. This is non-negotiable; media want striking pics to use online and in a social post. Video is still a nice-to-have but it's pricey to produce; if you can afford it, use it. As are visuals. Infographics have been around for years, but they still have their place and again, are great little pieces of content to share digitally.

A release should also be written as you intend for it to be read. So ditch the sales pitch, write a news-story and give it some context; it'll go so much further. Or forgo a press release entirely and simply tweet your news, providing it's big enough that anyone will care to help carry it for you.

Reuse, repurpose, retweet

A great piece of content - be it an opinion piece, infographic or video - doesn't only have one life. It can live forever, providing it's repurposed for different platforms. An editorial story that traditionally would be written as a release or feature can now be repackaged into a social media series, video or visual and then shared on social as well as among media, bloggers and influencers - assuming it fits their style and tone. In fact, today any and every story should have a minimum of two formats to do it justice.

PR is thriving, not dying

What all of this means is that the so-called dying PR profession is anything but. There are now more opportunities available to create earned media opportunities (read: free exposure for your brand and business) than ever before. And, within the ever-expanding marketing mix, PR is best placed to generate it; it's what we've been doing for years and what we'll continue doing forever.

The platforms have changed, not the profession.

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