

PR as the custodian of brand - why it makes perfect sense

 By [Judith Middleton](#), issued by [DUO Marketing + Communications](#)

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Building a brand is about establishing a positive, desirable perception of a product, person, service or company. And in the world of brand building, advertising is often the golden child, taking the lion's share of the marketing budget.

If you're a large established brand or the next big thing in the consumer market, it makes sense to make the (considerable) investment in a large-scale advertising campaign to get broad awareness in the market.

But what if you're a stage 2 business-to-business tech company with limited budget for marketing and a need for measurable value and great returns on investment on your marketing spend? Can PR take the lead and become the custodian of the brand?

I say yes.

The market we play in

Over the past decade we have worked extensively with innovation-driven transformative technology companies, locally and abroad. And the key factor in any decision around spending money on marketing activities is the need for real, measurable returns that prove value to their bottom line.

These are not companies that can afford multimillion rand ad campaigns a la MTN and Vodacom and Mweb. They need highly refined marketing and PR activity that delivers to commercial needs and focuses on value-based returns. They need trust and credibility more than they need broad market awareness. For them, PR makes the most sense.

That's because the PR industry's main preoccupation over the past century or so has been uncovering the real, noteworthy facts and presenting them in the most transparent, trustworthy way possible. If PRs don't get this right, journalists won't be open to receiving press releases and interview pitches, and they'd be unable to do their job. It lies at the core of what makes the industry what it is.

The nature of the tech industry

Because of the highly-specialised nature of the tech industry and the complexity of products and services in the B2B space, the companies we work with often need us to act as translators of the business value of their solutions. The available media pool is much smaller than that for consumer tech, so we focus quite strongly on cultivating an environment of innovation and specialisation internally to match the organisational culture of our clients.

This specialisation is needed to translate the business value of our clients' technology and to then identify niche channels that will reach the very specific decision-makers our clients want to build relationships with.

PR taking the lead

Operating in such a highly specialised field, clients largely depend on us to satisfy their brand building needs. That's not to say we are suddenly designers, copywriters, logo specialists, web developers or video editors. But we have made it our business to know the best specialist suppliers in each of these disciplines, to partner with suitable experts that enable us to holistically manage our clients' brands and be the complete brand custodians.

Our ability to translate the business value of our clients' technology enables us to guide the designer in developing high-

impact infographics. It informs the design brief for a new client website, and helps construct compelling stories around their brands. And because PR is focused on transparency, trust and credibility, clients enjoy a boost in reputation among their business customer based on their interactions across all touch points with the brand. PR, in the space that our clients play, keeps the overall brand honest.

And there's a lasting value here that will remain even if one of our clients become the next Shuttleworth-esque success story and require the services of a global advertising agency. Even in such a case, PR should retain its seat at the boardroom table to ensure the integrity of the brand remains intact in any advertising or brand communication. It's PR's job to retain the brand's honesty and transparency on an ongoing basis, to make sure that the core values that the brand has been built on are not lost in the excitement of rapid growth and expansion.

While advertising is still the best way to reach a broad audience quickly, PR has proven itself as the best solution for companies that demand measurable returns on a tight budget. In a world where trust and transparency rules, PR should be the one partner in the marketing mix you never say goodbye to.

ABOUT JUDITH MIDDLETON

Judith Middleton, CEO of DUO Marketing + Communications which she founded in 2004, has extensive experience in strategic marketing and business development. She spent five years as the marketing manager for Africa's premier tech start-up incubator, the Bandwidth Barn, before establishing DUO Marketing + Communications. She was also a director of CTI, Calling the Cape (Call Centre Investment Initiative) and a board of advisors member for the Cape Manufacturing Advisory Committee. Email her at judith@duomarketing.co.za. [View my profile and articles...](#)

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