



thenetworkone

PR: social and branding



*a collection of essays from
independent PR agencies*

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If you are a marketer and would like impartial advice on how leading independent agencies could help you, contact

Julian Boulding
Tel: +44 (0)20 7240 7117
julian.boulding@thenetworkone.com

If you work for a leading independent agency and would like to connect with great agency partners in other countries, contact

Paul Squirrell
Tel: +44 (0)20 7240 7117
paul.squirrell@thenetworkone.com

PR: Surviving and thriving in the digital revolution



Stephanie Geisler,
Agency Services Co-Ordinator,
thenetworkkone

What is PR? The PR world is adapting so quickly that it is becoming hard to define.

Today, we are more likely to listen to the opinions of influencers and friends on Twitter and Facebook than journalists in newspapers. As a result, the PR industry has had to adapt quickly. In the new digital world, PR, social and branding are intrinsically linked.

It's impossible to ignore the global impact that social media has had, from promoting brands to influencing elections. However, this still varies from country to country. For example, Italy has the fifth oldest population in the world, with an average lifespan of 83 years. Therefore, in Italy, it's still important not to overlook traditional means of communication that a large portion of the population is comfortable with. By contrast, Latin America has the world's fastest growing online population. The median age in South America is only 30.6 years old. The population is not only young, but digitally native, and modern PR agencies need to be able to reach this audience.

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Whilst it seems that everyone is going digital, it's important not to dive in head first.

Overall, the PR industry feels more creative today than ever before. Brands are able to stay on top of current events and respond to them in real time, with the help of their PR team. They are also able to provide bite-size news and remain ever present. A lot is changing, but this change has brought a wealth of opportunities for PR agencies.

In this essays collection, you will hear from public relations experts from Latin America, the Middle East, the US and Europe. They will discuss how they've adapted to the evolution of PR in their markets, the daily challenges they face and the solutions they've found to tackle them.



Spain

Adapting to digital platforms

It was Charles Darwin who once put it very properly: “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, but the most adaptable”. Back in 2008 I had the privilege to attend an internal gathering organised by Edelman in Berlin to pretty much discuss the title of this same article ‘PR Social and Branding’ or, in other words, where will the new digital platforms and technologies be taking us in the future of the communications industry.

The meeting was a great opportunity to learn from representatives of various PR agencies about the experiences and learnings of the then called new PR 2.0 world, soon to become better known as social media. These were the early days of Facebook and Twitter, where attendees would fearlessly post live their first comments and opinions as public contributions for everybody else in the conference room to see and enjoy. Everybody there knew that big changes were coming in our way of operating our own agencies and relationships with both clients and stakeholders. Nobody knew, however, that those changes were going to be that big.

Almost a decade has gone after those initial encounters with the now omnipresent digital economy and technology savvy public. In our industry, the transition from offline to online communications has been abrupt (to say the least), but despite this massive transformation, there is no escape or a good substitute to the essence of basic quality communications and PR. Exceptional writing, broad relationships and a sharp nose for where the story is, continue to be the quintessential skills in this business.

In the Spanish speaking worlds, both in Spain and the rest of Latin America together with the Spanish speaking US, the consumer is also starting to lead the conversation. They have the tools, the knowledge and the creativity to make the headlines and change the wording as necessary. Yes, the client and his priorities are still there as is the agency to encapsulate those ideas into news stories. But the customer, the consumer, is now the Citizen Kane, the real influencer of social media.

Citizens from Mexico, Brazil, Spain, Argentina, Peru and dozens of other countries in the Americas and Europe rely now more than ever on what their neighbor or classmate has to say in his or her social media platforms than what the news anchor wants to transmit in the evening TV newscast. Credibility is in the process of being relocated.

Where are we as agencies in this new picture? Do we have the permission from that unknown neighbor or classmate to get into their lives and conversations? How can we do that without becoming intrusive or interfering? Chances are that they will love us if we allow them to do what we best can do. That is, seeding the path with those creative ideas, visual and written materials that will open up and encourage those key conversations.

We continue to explore new ways and strategies to deliver our clients’ messages. Sometimes they are complex ideas or difficult to digest annual results figures and stats. We cannot just sit around and expect that we will get people’s attention just because our client is a leading technology company or brand. The challenge is much bigger. We want to have an impact, and we also want to make a measurable difference in the way we communicate. Yes, we want to interact and create a conversation, but we also want to be remembered for what we – the client – say. That is the real challenge.

“In the Spanish speaking worlds, both in Spain and the rest of Latin America together with the Spanish speaking US, the consumer is also starting to lead the conversation.”

There was this day when we were working with one of our clients in our Mexican office when the world suddenly seemed to have come to a stop. News arrived about another terrorist attack in France. The company had interests in France and the reputation of the entire brand was somehow at stake due to the consequences of all those tragic deaths. Miraculously for all of us, social media emerged as the most efficient platform to reach out to stakeholders and the public in general with the exact same clarification message the client wanted to transmit. Despite the difficulty of the situation and the loss of human life, the target was reached and the objective was met rapidly and very efficiently. A faxed press release to all most influential newsrooms around the world could not have achieved the same result...

Darwin was right.

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Fran Valmana is Founding Partner at FJ Communications, Madrid, Spain



PR is dead! Long live New PR.

After more than 30 years in the PR and communication business, I thought I'd never write this: PR is dead. Long live New PR. But either I do admit and adjust or we as an agency will be dead, too.

As painful as it may be for some of us to undergo an operation of mind change in the PR approach, the industry transformation now taking place adds both value and credibility to us and our clients. At the same time, we need to challenge our professional domain, broaden our professional spheres, and open our minds to the new world of social media, marketing and branding. The profession is changing. For the better.

The New PR is taking place as a result of the democratic revolution that social media has brought to communications – like it or not. It is now broadening our strategic communication scope, deepening our ability to listen to the needs and voices of consumers in the market, and helping us to better understand and use the mechanisms of buyers.

The most exciting part of New PR is that we as PR practitioners need to become more capable and knowledgeable in more disciplines. We need to master, mix and exploit traditional PR, sales and marketing strategy, Internet campaigns, social media, and business/market intelligence.



All those new possibilities are great, but higher requirements on us in the PR industry also come with risks. We need to invent and learn how to interpret and create clear strategies and to define the communication purposes so that the whole organization is working towards the same goals. Our content needs to become more relevant to the consumer, and we need to be relevant not only through product messages but throughout the whole brand story.

The New PR changes our vocabulary and focus from traditional target groups and corporate messages to a) Personas – descriptions of individual consumer personalities of interest to our client – b) Pains and Needs of those individuals – what are their concerns, what are they interested in, and how does that affect their lives, and c) Gains – if we can help solving their concerns, what value would that bring to their lives?

We summarize these insights in Value propositions; what are the values that our client and its products or services can bring to its customers?

How can that improve the customers' lives? By personifying the customer or prospective buyer and engaging in social media life, we learn more about how we should communicate our clients' propositions – rather than transmitting messages to target groups.

PR is about telling a compelling and engaging brand story to the individual reader, communicated through words, tone of voice, video, media, influencers, and/or other visuals. We use the web – and also traditional media – to create attraction and interest for our content to individuals and public that fits our personas.

We now rely on the insights and suggestions of – not third party endorsers, that's old school – but influencers, journalists, bloggers, thought leaders, and other social media names with tens, hundreds of thousand and sometimes millions of followers. Individuals who become influential to the consumer decisions because they seem to share the same values as I, as a reader, do. Journalists become their own thought leader brands.

In fact, we need to better understand and adapt to how the new generations have changed their habits of media consumption. There is a reason why print media is losing readers. The younger consumers watch YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, and Netflix instead. It's the new TV and newspaper. They choose what kind of content they want to be attracted by. According to BCG 2016 and Ooyale 2016, the mobile online video usage is expected to increase 2,084 % in the next five years. In 2018, 80 % of media consumption will be through mobile online video.

This is where branding and sales driven communication flows together.

The new approach helps our clients to sell more, it illustrates the client company's ability to listen, understand and engage, and that clearly differentiates and helps to strengthen their brand. At the same time, the brands and companies who try to take shortcuts, treat their customers badly, or don't engage in social media opinion, may find themselves in the heat of the public, maybe condemned. Their brand names may be hurt.

Branding is the other side of this coin. We need to understand what kind of companies and products our customers like and dislike. We need to participate in, not only read or hear of, the conversation that is taking place in social media. We need to engage in the concerns of and relations to people, public, communities and individuals. That behavior matters in the public eye today and differentiates the new PR from the old, interesting brands from dull brands, and modern communication from traditional.

The New PR approach and integrated branding disciplines take communication to the next level.

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Lars-Ola Nordqvist is Managing Director at Comvision, Stockholm, Sweden

Adapting to social media in Italy

Social media has incredibly changed our daily life. Having arrived out of the blue, it penetrates almost every aspect and sphere of our lives, constantly occupying more and more space. Payments, shopping and daily activities were replaced by online practices. As a result, we are always attached to a smartphone, a tablet or a computer, unable to imagine our lives without them anymore.

It goes without saying that Italy could not escape from these dynamics and it is expected that in 2018, 38.5 percent of the Italian population will be accessing social networks, according to the Census annual report. This figure is destined to grow especially in Italy, taking into consideration some national traits, like extroversion and sociability, pointed out by sociologists.

Nevertheless, the situation with the penetration of social networks and web in the marketing mix of Italian companies is quite complicated and is far from being homogeneous. One of the reasons lies in Italy's being one of the countries with the longest lifespan (83 years). Therefore, the growing aging population is used to traditional means of communication like newspapers and TV, with only 27,8% being internet users. Thus, TV remains strong and reigns over other media and covers almost the entire population (96,7%).



Often these figures lead marketing managers to assume that we still need to concentrate on traditional media, without taking into consideration that the web users among the young population is 91,9% and whether we want it or not, the future of communication lies in web and it cannot be ignored - no matter how we try.

This drastic change, brought by the web, still hard to digest in Italy, has forced companies to look at themselves from outside, and realize (some sooner than others) that their excessive advertising pomposity – that made them declare to always be “close to the cultural background, to put people before the interests of the business, to be devoted, first and foremost, to listening to their customers” did not work out any longer. They gave promises about super savings and high values, that nobody wanted to believe

anymore. Today, the advertising pie, which was 10 billion Euros in 2008, has shrunk to 5, although this calculation does not consider some big players such as Google. To buy the same advertising space, investors now spend 50% less than before.

Some types of media have basically died (see free press), while others are slowly dying (newspapers, periodicals in particular). Old means of communication followed the traditional process in just one direction, with a single message, a channel, a code and a target. Today the “social” part of the web has rejected this old fashioned savoir fair. It has made the organizations sit at a “round table” and conduct an open and public conversation, where they find themselves talking on common terms, without any oratory podium, but trying hard to be accepted into the discussion and to be heard with a constant threat of being expelled from it. At the same time, businesses are consequently trying to “set this table”. Some more, some less with more or less success.

“the future of communications lies in web and it cannot be ignored - no matter how we try”

So, do the things work out well enough? Not at all! Just have a look at the social media channels of the main Italian companies. While managers, when asked, are boasting millions of followers and likes and are posting plenty of stuff every day, considering it to be a great ‘social’ activity, a low engagement level is way too often the case. Therefore, Italian companies are still not aware that the number of followers and likes is not synonymous to the success of the company.

Nevertheless, the recent study of the IULM University on Socialmediability of Italian companies shows a clearly positive trend, with Facebook still on the top of the social media hit parade and YouTube and Google Plus on its feet. 720 companies analysed in the course of 5 years have almost tripled their social network penetration from 32% in 2010 to 73% in 2015, having improved both quantity and quality of their presence in terms of orientation, management, reach, general engagement and caring. Thus, Italian business did not escape the social media revolution, but its climax is yet to arrive.

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Diana Shendrikova is Account Executive at Mediatyche, Milan, Italy





Online or off, our work is about influence

Latin America has the world's fastest-growing online population, which has made digital media increasingly relevant across the region. Looking ahead, with online advertising poised to exceed investments in offline media in the U.S. in 2017, we can expect a similar outcome in Latin America in the near future. But what does this mean for those of us in PR?

Digital and social media have greatly expanded the potential for PR programs with the ability to strategically target, even personalize, corporate and brand messages to make them more attractive and relevant. But while the media consumption and channels continue to evolve, the underlying philosophy remains the same. The PR agency heritage which aims to increase awareness, establish connections, inspire engagement and generate third party endorsements is more valid and important today than ever. Today's digital channels and trends, which will continue to appear, evolve and fade, are simply additional tools in our toolbox.

LatAm's Potential as the Most Social

Just 50% of Latin Americans currently have Internet access – a number that will continue to rise mostly through the expansion of mobile access. Of those with Internet access, an incredible 95% are users of social media, and recent studies have shown that Latin Americans spend more time on social media than users anywhere else in the world. Currently, Facebook is by far the leading social media platform in Latin America. A recent report by the Mexican Internet Association (AMIPCI) revealed that 92% of social media users in Mexico are on Facebook, while studies by eMarketer show Facebook with usage rates above 94% for Argentina and Mexico, and Brazil trailing not far behind at 91%.




That's not the only way people are connecting digitally. For instance, while some people may not consider the messaging application WhatsApp a social network, in Latin America it is, in a big way. AMIPCI reports that 8 out of 10 Internet users in Mexico use WhatsApp, while a 2016 eMarketer survey of Brazil smartphone users showed it as the most essential application. The potential of these messaging platforms has yet to be fully explored for social networking, marketing and commercial purposes; but it doesn't take much effort to imagine how WhatsApp could be leveraged for word-of-mouth campaigns, contests, customer service interactions and more. In 2016, Facebook (which owns WhatsApp) announced end-to-end encryption of communications on the messaging platform, possibly opening up its use for things like shopping, banking and other commercial transactions.

Engaging and Influencing

It is also important to note that compared to the U.S. and Europe, the region is relatively young. The median age of South America's population is just 30.6 years, compared to 37.6 in the U.S. and over 40 for most of Europe. Millennials and members of Generation Y – who are "digital natives" – make up a large percentage of the region's population, and companies trying to reach these audiences must meet them where and how they live. We know that these demographic groups are highly distrustful of marketing and brands, and they also hold a world view that



is more focused on social purpose, which is precisely why the PR or communications approach to marketing is so important.

At JeffreyGroup, we've had tremendous success helping companies connect with these audiences. Bayer, the German pharmaceutical giant, realized that its brand did not have a strong connection with young people in Brazil. JeffreyGroup created Bayer Jovens (Bayer Youth) to engage young Brazilians on the topics that most interest them, such as sustainability, careers, sexuality and travel. With specialized content in the form of videos, imagery, articles and posts, our agency helped Bayer create an online community through a dedicated website (owned digital channel) as well as on Facebook and Twitter. The audience size and engagement not only surpassed expectations, but recruitment for job candidates and participants in the Bayer Young Environmental Envoy program also increased as a result.

Another way we've applied PR strategies within digital environments is through online influencer programs. JeffreyGroup's proprietary Webfluentials® platform identifies the influencers (bloggers, experts, celebrities, key opinion leaders, etc.) that help our clients cut through the digital clutter and achieve their communications objectives, from awareness to engagement to call-to-action. It's important to remember that while "Latin America" may be considered a region, it is actually made up of distinct countries and cultures, and a customized approach for each market is often required. For example, we worked with KitchenAid to launch a new product across seven markets.

The key to success was identifying the Webfluentials that resonated in each market and developing customized messaging platforms. As the launch was for a kitchen appliance, the influencer program included chefs, fitness experts and even socialites to help position the premium product in the most relevant way within each country.

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Brian Burlingame is CEO of JeffreyGroup, Miami, FL, USA



Kenya

Digital Media in Kenya

In 2015, Meerkat, an app that allows you to live-stream videos to your followers on Twitter took the social media world by storm, thanks to it being talked about non-stop by influential journalists, brands and techies at South by Southwest Interactive. The app's downloads spiked and widening its user base within a short while. It seemed that everyone was talking about it or experimenting with it. But did it mean that they should have downloaded the app immediately and incorporated it to their already existing digital media strategy? Probably not.

“it’s never a good idea to be a jack-of-all-trades... it is more beneficial to focus on a few platforms and perform well on them”

Digital media is important in PR and marketing in this digital age era. Every brand should invest in digital media to create traffic, capture more leads and convert leads to customers. When brands want to promote their products or services, the first medium that comes to the mind of the owner is placing a newspaper or radio advert. Few use other traditional platforms like outdoor advertising media, including billboards, posters to market their products and services. This is despite the fact that this is a computer era, where owned media and social networks are the in-thing, presenting huge opportunities and audiences for brands to sell and promote their goods and services and engage their clients. Digital media is the next big platform for businesses to promote their wares and grow the clientele base. Digital media is instrumental in the success, sales and profit from any brand.

However, it’s never a good idea to be a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none. This concept should definitely be taken into consideration when it comes to a successful digital media strategy. It is a common misconception that we should jump onto all digital media platforms. But the truth is, it is more beneficial to focus on a few platforms and perform well on them, than to have a presence on all digital media platforms and neglect them, or worse – post subpar content.

For example, Twitter and Facebook are usually the easiest place to start at since there has been a lot of extensive research done on these two sites, and also there are a lot of resources dedicated to these platforms. Pinterest has a wide follower base, but like Instagram, brands have to have a sort of authenticity with their post and be able to seamlessly blend in with the aesthetics of the primarily feminine user base of the platform. LinkedIn on the other hand is a good platform to implement into your strategy if your strategy is geared towards being an industry leader by providing industry news or to recruit talent for your organization.

We can take a case study of Lupita Nyong’o, who at this point in her career has received over 30 awards from almost every prestigious award giving entity in Hollywood. Her name is currently being mentioned more times than seasoned Hollywood actresses, many of whom are singing her praises. Unless you have been living in the earth's core for the past three months, Lupita is showing the world that Kenya has more to offer than long distant runners, the Maasai, wildlife and being the homeland of the first black president of the U. S of A.

With an average of 18,000 Google searches per month (Google Adwords), information of this multi-award winning actress is very much sought after.

Note that this number is not inclusive of searches made on online entertainment sites and other mediums that share information about this rising celebrity.

Digital media is an important tool in PR that is misunderstood but it allows users access to information in real time. If any given person wants to know what Lupita is wearing to award ceremonies, who she has been hanging out with or what nail polish colour she fancies, a quick look at her Instagram account will answer your questions. A great deal of the information shared on social media about the star, text or visual, is not available on other sites.

It is worthy to note that Lupita does not always run her Twitter or Facebook accounts since most tweets and posts are in third person. Her certified Twitter account has only been active since early January 2014 but currently has more than 400,000 followers. Lupita has been on Instagram since December 2013 and currently has over 3,000,000 followers while her Facebook fan page that has been running since December 2012 recently reached over 2,000,000 likes.



In Lupita's case, Facebook is the preferred social media tool not only because of how long it has been running but also because Facebook allows integration with other social media sites especially Twitter and Instagram. Facebook pages also allow for more information to be shared than is possible on Twitter and users can interact freely with the information shared. However, given the numbers; Instagram is the most used social media site that fans use to gain information about the star. It could be that a picture is indeed worth a thousand words, wouldn't you agree?

In the new media age, many feel that if an event was not documented on social media then it never really happened. This could have prompted Lupita to join both Instagram and Twitter in order to remain relevant in today's fast paced society and to effectively connect with her audience.

No matter what the Digital media objectives of your brand are, research is crucial when it comes to joining social media platforms. Every move your brand makes on social media needs to be strategic and integrated to your PR objectives. And although it is important to stay up to date with digital media trends and innovations, giving yourself and your team the time it takes to fully understand an online platform and develop a thorough strategy yields the best returns for your efforts and benefits your brand in the long run.

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Mary Njoki is Managing Director at Glass House PR, Nairobi, Kenya



USA

It's all public.

The relations part is the challenge.

There are some people who continue to hang on to the notion that there is privacy on the internet. What you think is 'private' is one screenshot away from becoming public.

Therefore it's crucial to be vigilant about making sure your brand identity seeps into every single crevice of the web ... and there are a lot of crevices to cover. Our role as public relations professionals requires an extraordinary amount of diligence now more than ever.

Let's start with an operating guide.

In order to make sure that your brand guidelines permeate your social media channels, apply the same principles that you apply to your offline brand rules. Stick with the same font families, the same terminology you use to describe your products and, by all means, use the same filter on your Instagram photos. Understand the communications style that is native to each social media platform. And don't forget that social media public relations is very much about listening. Make sure your customer service team on social can respond quickly and with sincerity.

Use your social audience to increase your effective media placement reach.

So your team landed a magnificent placement in the Times Sunday Styles section. Don't let your target audience miss that article. (Yes, the Styles section isn't as much of a weekly read as it used to be for many as they forgo spending \$6 on the actual printed paper and opt for a Pumpkin Spice Latte instead.) Instead, have your client post a link to the placement and boost the post to fans/followers and their friend/followers.

In effect, it is a pay for play tactic on the part of Facebook, but we all know the media websites and bloggers have really blurred the lines of what constitutes advertorial, which is a topic that could be devoted to a separate article.

But the upside for public relations professionals is that not only do we get to reach many more consumers, we also get to frame the article on our own terms. So, if an article or segment has some quotient of negativity towards your client, you can write the lead in to the post to address or deflect that aspect.

Haters gonna hate.

The dreaded comments section of social media has become an area that can seem unwieldy to handle. How do you handle a flurry of negative comments about your client? Answer: very lightly. Last resort and/or if the commenter is using inappropriate language for any family friendly space. Instead of censoring detractors, be above them, acknowledge their feelings and restate your client's position on the issue gently. Use facts to support your counterpoint.

Get the credit you deserve.

Learn to use data to further accentuate the value of your digital media placements. Partner with your client's website firm and online advertising team to demonstrate collaboration. Don't operate independently from the overall goals of the digital marketing team. After all, paid search and organic search are intertwined and PR results help increase your clients' digital footprint and authority ranking for websites.

Make sure you can take credit for the traffic an article on Huffington Post drove. Show the amount of shares the article received on social channels. Demonstrate how much of a role your agency had in multiplying reach and fortifying engagement quality.

Think of social PR as the human element within the overall marketing communications strategy. Every touch point is an opportunity for consumers to form an emotional connection to a brand. Treat each interaction on social media as if this prospect or customer is going to tell at least 10 other people about that social interaction, whether it's a private message or a thoughtful response to their comment.

Become engrained in your clients' teams.

Even if your agency is not charged with creating the assets or social strategy directly, make sure that the careful messaging strategy you've created as part of your public relations discovery process is incorporated in the social and digital strategy. Do the headlines in your client's ads support the earned media messages? Are the graphics being used on social media in harmony with the messages sent to the press?

PR firms must nimbly navigate the cloudy areas dividing what is traditional media vs. new media. We believe it's all PR as your online and social presence is all connected to your brand image. It's a Wild Wild West on World Wide Web, but make sure you let people know there's a new sheriff in town, one who's in charge but also one who is a compassionate listener, and ultimately gets the job done for his townspeople, meaning your clients.

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Heidi Krupp is CEO of Krupp Communications, New York, NY, USA





Delivering the unexpected

Middle East communications agencies are on a roll. Business is back. But it's a battlefield out there! Hundreds of agencies are fighting to win new business and retain existing clients against fierce and continually increasing competition. PR agencies are springing up all over the place. On the surface it looks like clients are spoiled for choice and that they can pick agencies off a shelf in the Middle East Communications Supermarket, and then try a new brand next time they go shopping. Look again.

In their drive to land new accounts, larger agencies send in their heavy hitters to pitch for business, aiming to wow decision-makers with their track-records, experience and expertise into giving their company the communications contract. But once they hit that home run they tend to leave the stadium and the second stringers get off the bench and out into the field to serve the client and the game changes, usually not for the best.

Boutique agencies sometimes sell their services on the quality of their tiny but talented core team but then make the mistake of promising regional services without a regional presence, trying to cobble together a makeshift "network". Even larger agencies try to play the regional card when in actuality the best they have is one guy embedded in someone else's office with a phone and laptop. Those relationships usually don't end well either.

Another scenario is that clients sometimes have unrealistic expectations – they want their stories front page above the fold in very specific publications, or want to be prime time on the satellites. And they want everything for bargain basement prices. And, alas, some agencies in their quest to collect as many clients as possible agree.

"...the agency has to build a clear, in-depth understanding of the client - its industry, culture, history, internal challenges and long-term vision."

What clients really want, even if they sometimes don't know it, are clear, insightful, consistent, sustained strategic communications that deliver results. They want to feel that they have a tangible, measurable return on their investment. Everybody's looking at the bottom line but a wise client will understand that you get what you pay for and if you pay peanuts you get monkeys.

If a good agency gets the chance to work for a good client who understands communications and compensates according to a reasonable, planned program of deliverables, they will begin to see those results.

For agencies, the goal, the Holy Grail, is to become indispensable to their clients. This is a very tall order but there are a few things that can get them closer to the goal. First off, the agency has to build a clear, in-depth understanding of the client – its industry, culture, history, internal challenges and long-term vision. This requires sound research and serious groundwork. Secondly, is to have the right team in place – people with the right capabilities, the right chemistry and the right reach. If your client wants a regional program you'd better have the resources across the region, not a bogus phantom network. If your client wants quality Arabic editorial you'd better have a quality Arabic editorial writer on staff rather than try to get away with a jumped up Google translation.



But the secret ingredient that separates the adequate from the outstanding in this business, that brings an agency to the threshold of indispensability, is the ability to deliver the unexpected. What clients really want is to be pleasantly surprised. They don't just want their agencies to fulfill their expectations and tick off their deliverables. They want to see something that they didn't think of. It's a little like a home run, touchdown or field goal in the first two minutes of a game. You don't expect it but it's deeply satisfying. It changes the dynamic and sets the tone and momentum for what comes after.

The agency that transcends the daily grind, steps back, takes the time to think and look for creative solutions that work within the limitations of its contract, that delivers the unexpected is the agency that keeps its clients and stays in the game.

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Mohamed Al Ayed, CEO of TRACCS Public Relations, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia



UK

Ireland

How social has changed the world of PR

We all know that social media has fundamentally changed the world of how brands relate to the public. As an agency that specializes in marketing to youth audiences, we capitalized on new platforms before they were 'a thing' and certainly before our clients had any budget parked for social media.

Fast forward 11 years and, whilst the social media landscape is vastly different, our challenges remain the same – how can we connect with our brand's maximum potential audience in a compelling, bold way?

Just because today's clients are sophisticated (they understand social; have social KPI's; they have social teams; they have budgets and damn it –they have great ideas) we need to ensure that we don't stop pushing hard for innovation. Facebook and Twitter's agency partner training is great and it ensures we're using the channels to their maximum. But what about doing really new stuff, 'never done before' stuff, 'can we really do this stuff?'stuff? We need to feel uncomfortable, uneasy and starving for better ways of doing things. We need to break rules, with our clients and, through innovation, reach new heights and become bigger, better and bolder.

THINKHOUSE



Data

One of the biggest challenges for brands right now is how to connect all the dots – driving campaigns across multiple platforms in a connected, effective, platform-specific way. It's essential to use data and analytical insights to make smart decisions on what content is working and have a system that works quickly, efficiently and in a real-time, right-time way to exploit what's working and ditch what isn't worth investing in.

Social + Media Relations

Social media integrates best with media relations when media have a role to play in the brand story. They need to be treated as an audience that can impact beyond their own social media channels and media need to be understood deeply to be effective. The story is no longer 'led' by the journalist - very often, they are playing catch up. The story can be led by the client, the consumer or the agency – but fundamentally, unless there's a true role for the consumer, or a reason to engage, the story will die.

Great PR agencies really own strategic communications and they will continue delivering on what they've always done best – publicity, reputation management, stakeholder relationships, social media and crisis management.

But today, the PR industry is more creative than it's ever been before.

Owning the brand's strategic comms means having a significant influence over other agencies at the table and, with creative prowess, today's innovative PR agencies are a force to be reckoned with.

There are a number of things that contribute to the power of the creative, innovative PR agency:

The right people, saying the right thing

Advocacy-relations is a fast growing part of some of the world's biggest brand's strategies. Within this space, the rise of the micro-communities and, what we call 'credibilities' is key. Credibilities can carry a brand's message in a real, powerful, credible way to reach the most influential, early adopters and communities. The PR agency owns these relationships and has built sophisticated data-driven models to deliver hugely powerful advocacy campaigns that measurably impact on the brand's bottom line.

Getting brands in the news, whatever the length

For many years now, the dissemination of news is no longer presented in a perfectly formed press release, but instead issued through key media networks, very often with a video press release, a tweet-length news story and/or some exclusive information, content or interviews. Bite Size News. On the other hand, the return of long form news is on the horizon. Youth audiences are starved of long form content and have been reared on click bait news story that hasn't allowed them time to fully engage with anything. Brands like VICE are doing this nicely through channels like Snapchat and I think it's a hugely welcome movement that will really allow today's younger news consumers fully immerse themselves in multiple angles and feature-length exploratory news stories. The agencies that have the ability to story-tell, in short or long form, are the ones that will have huge impact.

But getting the story out there is more complex than ever.

As always, shortcuts are not the answer. When it comes to seeding stories to media, blasting out a message to hundreds of media still doesn't work! Huge emphasis needs to be placed on seeding strategies and exclusive angles – time invested in this approach always pays back in bucket-loads delivering better relationships, greater control and meaty pieces of earned coverage.

Part of that seeding strategy includes a strong understanding of today's freelancer landscape. The rapidly growing number of freelancers – specialist media eager to collaborate on great stories – allows brands to develop multiple stories for multiple media outlets with just one relationship. That's powerful.

Bold creativity and powerful stories, told well.

And finally, the business of PR has become the business of creativity. Any PR agency worth its salt has it's own planning / insights teams; data expertise, production teams, digital, creative, photography, art & design teams; and content teams. And like all great creative organisations, the best agencies are obsessed with having a diverse team that brings colour, energy and diverse cultural insights to their brand's activities.

The result is work that is planned with a deep understanding of how stories can unfold, amongst multiple audiences groups and stakeholders. The output is bold creative work and powerful stories, told well and told thoroughly.

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Jane McDaid is Founder of Thinkhouse, Dublin, Ireland

Social media in the communication industry

For consultants who have been working with social media from the beginning, say around 2007, it's frustrating to see how slow things are changing. Surely, you can point at a number of exceptions, but we meet companies every month who are still just in the beginning of their work in social media.

The social media transformation – from earned to paid reach.

In the beginning, social media belonged to the PR department as it was considered earned media. In 2013-2014, the industry suddenly changed.

Everyone who heard of Oreo's stunt at Super Bowl 2013 wanted to achieve the same viral success as they did (although it's said that their social media stunt reached less than 2% of the target audience). But in 2014, Facebook's change of their algorithms also changed the rules. After that, it became a lot harder to reach a large audience without paying for it. With this transformation, the interest in social media shifted from the PR department to the marketing department.

"A PR company working with a new client can never guarantee exposure in a newspaper. Native advertising can. Digital advertising in social media channels can as well."

Native advertising in social media

A number of new disciplines have emerged over the last years, with social media and Native advertising being two of the biggest changes. A PR company working with a new client can never guarantee exposure in a newspaper. Native advertising can. Digital advertising in social media channels can as well. The death of newspapers and a shrinking blog world, with bloggers (or Instagrammers) being less and less willing to write without getting paid, as well as the arise of Native advertising, has decreased the influence of the traditional PR industry within the companies' communication mix.

The communication confusion

What does a PR agency, an advertising agency, a media advisor, a web agency, a social media agency or a content marketing agency really offer today? All of the agencies are competing on the same field with equal offers, saying that they can provide anything that any other agency can. In the middle of all this, we have a client not knowing which agency to trust and how to make a choice.

Lack of models

Another challenge is the lack of models to use when comparing various channels. Is a reach of 100,000 people for a Facebook ad really a better deal compared to a reach of 100,000 achieved by a magazine ad, even if you pay less? The comparison is hard to do and we lack established models for it.

Adding to the confusion, as the communication industry is trying to reinvent its offer, there are a lot of conversations going on above the client's head and out of reach for the tools we use to measure traffic with, e.g. in Snapchat or chat apps as We Chat, WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. What is the real traffic and what ROI is produced?

In summary

We see a heavily shrinking market of newspapers, a near future in which young people skip linear tv and a social media industry unable to convince companies about the levels of ROI it can achieve. The client is confused and doesn't know where to spend the marketing budget. And if they decide to go all in with social media, they often don't have the organization in place to take care of all the reactions social media brings.

We feel that, at the moment, no one is in charge of developing the industry. People who are running the social media industry are not senior enough to understand the bigger picture, don't have enough brand knowledge and their creative ability is often too low. Vice versa, the experienced people within the advertising and PR industry generally don't understand social media. The same goes for the client's side.

This confusion will pass of course, but it will take a generation of consultants and clients. During this period of time, we try, fail, succeed – without really knowing the amount of the success because it's hard to measure, compare and evaluate! Eventually, we will establish a new order in which we have the models to measure and evaluate and don't divide the marketing world into old school and new school as we do today. Those are times to look forward to.

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Mats Lindborg, Copywriter and social media strategist at WHY Communicate, Stockholm, Sweden





Portugal

Digital, PR and beyond

It is everywhere. We hear/read/see every day speakers or consultants saying that we have to be digital, and how digital is going to disrupt the world. In fact, it is becoming so pervasive that it is quickly changing everything that we do. And the PR profession is, like many in the marketing and communication fields, going through a midst of changes, one that will reshape the PR profession in a way that we can't entirely grasp today.

These changes bring both threats and opportunities, and it is indeed fundamental to understand where one can be more effective. The fact of the matter is that by creating a level playing field through the reduction or outright elimination of barriers to entry, digital has created an incredible wealth of opportunities for PR companies to enter new areas, social and content being part of those. On the other hand, the challenge remains on who will be better at grabbing these new opportunities.



Big consulting firms, given their knowledge and close cooperation with boards in companies, large and small, are already there, setting shop and creating specialized units that can compete in all digital areas, with a unique proposition of both process and accountability-driven culture coupled with the acumen brought by the agencies they either buy or launch from scratch, including teams focused on content, social and many other areas that are within the operational area of PR firms. The market is too big to ignore, and everyone is trying to establish its presence.

In order to better compete, and by being credited as the experts on communicating their customer business, most PR firms can

secure a relevant business as they can be perceived as helping sustain important business for their customers. But the road to success is a long and winding one, as the rules have also changed and are forcing companies to adapt.

New channels, such as social, compete for news and viewers, and customers are forcing companies to adapt as they usually change their behaviours rapidly. Facebook is losing appeal with millennial audiences to new players such as Snapchat and Instagram, and traditional media have seen their readership numbers dwindle in almost all geographies, Portugal included.

“...digital has created an incredible wealth of opportunities for PR companies to enter new areas”

Also, the news industry has been looking at new models for engagement with its readers, and branded and sponsored content have been one such area. The challenges presented by these changes are two-fold – how to communicate in a world where so many channels are widespread used, and how to achieve relevance and stand out amidst such noise. This means that the PR profession is changing and companies have to be quick to spot the change and master concepts such as omnichannel, SEO PR, social media communication and tools, content marketing and measurement tools, amongst others.

The focus on the traditional media still is core, but it will increasingly be just one part of a communication strategy, where social will be taking an increasing role, with the challenges it creates from a more sophisticated targeting and evaluation system. Never has it been so important to be close to customers, understand their needs, and be able to provide a comprehensive response covering all the identified areas. And gain more and more competencies on digital processes and tools. The opportunity is open, let the best and nimblest competitors win.

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Rodolfo Oliveira is Managing Partner at BloomCast, Oeiras, Portugal




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