

Can PR pros afford not to be social experts?

Social media disruption of PR is real and it's happening now. PR might traditionally have been tasked with messaging while social media handled distribution and engagement but this model of separation no longer works. Lines are increasingly blurred and integration is rapidly becoming non-negotiable.

While the print industry is filled with tales of newsroom layoffs, social media is thriving. Facebook has racked up more than 1.65 billion monthly active users¹ - a community greater than the entire population of China. Instagram has more than 500 million active monthly users and Twitter 320 million.

Fuelled by smartphones, the social media revolution takes place around the clock. Networks are always on and so are consumers. 40% of Facebook users log in several times a day compared with 32% of Instagram users and 22% of Twitter users. In the face of this constant connectivity and voracious user appetite, social media all too easily takes on the spectre of grim reaper for traditional PR activity. Some argue that social is leading the death knoll for PR, shaking its foundations and challenging practices at every turn. We see examples of this shift every day, as the unstoppable force of social media erodes PR processes on multiple fronts.

Communication Consistency

PRs look to maintain a consistent message rather than encourage a dialogue, advocating for monologue in place of discussion. In contrast, social media thrives on community and encouraging conversation is the name of the game. There's a lack of control and a role to play managing perceptions following a live post which many PRs find unsettling, with the message taking on a life of its own as soon as the social floodgates are opened. Without a structure in place to manage the audience's immediate response, PRs could be left vulnerable.

Target Audience

As a PR pro you build your audience carefully, one recipient and publication at a time. The luxury of precision means you can hand pick outlets and identify journalists to receive your story first. If PR is the invite-only front row, social media is the open-to-all school reunion. Messages are aimed at communities, rather than individuals. Social experts sniff out the channels and influencers that will find their message interesting and ultimately pass that message on to their friends, then wait with bated breath for it to spread like wildfire. Clearly there are PR benefits to be had and it pays to work with social counterparts to determine which approach fits a particular campaign best.

Back in February, Motorola turned not to a traditional public relations strategy to launch its latest smartphone, the Moto E but to Instagram. The telecoms brand racked up an impressive 55,000+ consumer engagements on day one alone. This was the right call, with the content creation possibilities of Instagram offering the perfect platform to showcase the Moto E. This decision wouldn't

¹ <http://venturebeat.com/2016/04/27/facebook-passes-1-65-billion-monthly-active-users-54-access-the-service-only-on-mobile/>

have been possible without audience and message input from the PR team so keep in mind the road runs both ways.

Channel Reach

Motorola's success demonstrates the important role social can play in channel selection. While PR channels are direct and often limited, social channels are built on networks, which tap into other networks and intersect with still more.

Self-styled rock star swimmer, Ryan Lochte felt the aftershocks of just how extensive social channel reach can be when the story of how he was held up at gunpoint in Rio during the Olympic Games went viral. International scandal, arrest warrants and lost sponsorship agreements quickly followed, all dominoes sparked by a single tweet from Fox Sports reporter, Ben Way. Lochte's PR team was forced onto the defensive, issuing apologies and arranging interviews to take back control of the narrative.

Whether it's a time of crisis or not, PR and social teams need to connect and adapt to deliver impactful campaigns and message consistency.

So what's the answer?

PR pros need to adopt a social mind set and leverage the many opportunities platforms like Facebook and Instagram offer. Up-to-date takes on a new meaning on social, with an abundance of data to monitor behaviour, track trending topics, stay abreast of sentiment and see what's dominating public interest, headlines and conversations at any given minute.

For the new generation of PR pro, social media is a fast track to success. Of course, this success only comes if you can navigate the sheer volume of social content and pick out the information that will really inform your campaigns.

Generate media coverage: Use social media listening to find new influencers and develop relationships with them. Use these powerful new contacts to target messages on social platforms.

Stay ahead of the trending curve: How often have you seen a hashtag featured on the news? Or logged into Twitter to see thousands of mentions for a particular term? Use social listening to find industry themes and emerging trending topics sooner for stronger thought leadership positioning.

Better crisis management: Keep tabs on negative brand sentiment by knowing exactly what's being said and stop a potential crisis in its tracks before it takes root.

Go global: Know the minute your brand receives an organic brand mention anywhere in the world. Link these mentions and sentiments together to create more buzz with targeted PR in those countries.

Develop more integrated campaigns:

- Identify clear objectives and set a cohesive direction
- Ensure social activity is aligned with strategic objectives and other marketing activity

- Use trending topics to hold regular brainstorming sessions
- PR and social teams using social media listening in synergy are more likely to find influencers, identify brand advocates, understand audience brand sentiment and whether messages are resonating

Meltwater Engage is an essential tool for PR professionals seeking closer integration with social media. Engage makes it easy to assign tasks to specific team members, thanks to unified inboxes and automated communication chains.

Use Engage's powerful social listening functionality to see what influencers are writing about right now, and identify where you can contribute to the conversation. Build and maintain meaningful relationships, whether you're connecting on social or distributing releases to targeted influencer lists. With Engage you can also schedule posts and press releases for maximum impact, making it easy to reach out at the optimal moment.