

Chapter 7

Social Media



Rogers' company blog, RedBoard, helped build its relationship with its customers and improve its online reputation.

Source: © Sam Dao/Alamy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 Explain why social media has not changed the fundamentals of public relations and why the technologies of social media are tools to be used in a PR campaign.
- 2 Define the guiding principles of social media.
- 3 Explain how individuals become trusted sources of information in the digital age.
- 4 Describe some of the challenges and opportunities that social media creates for public relations practitioners.
- 5 Identify the different types of social media tools available.

Rogers Communications and the Launch of REDBOARD

Rogers Communications, Canada's largest wireless voice and data communications provider, recognized that it needed to amp up its efforts to develop meaningful relationships with its customers and improve its online reputation. This insight led to the launch of a company blog called *RedBoard* (redboard.rogers.com), which was created as the online persona of the Rogers brand.

RedBoard was launched a year after Rogers formed its social media team, which was dedicated to participating in online conversations that were already taking place about the brand. However, the company quickly realized that many of the online conversations around the brand were negative. Because of this, Rogers recognized that it needed an online space where it could share its news and have a dialogue with consumers. It also wanted to drive customers to its e-commerce site.

When launching the blog, Rogers had several key decisions to make. The company did not want to attempt to be everything to everyone and end up being nothing to anyone. The company decided to focus on the "early to middle adopters" of technology as its audience. These customers tend to be Millennial and Gen Y demographics and are often smartphone users. Since this segment tends to be interested in the latest gadgets and intolerant of "corporate speak," Rogers believed they would be the most responsive to open, transparent online dialogues.

Recognizing that, for *RedBoard* to be a success, other online stakeholders would need to validate it, Rogers actively sought the support of journalists, bloggers, and employees. The company encouraged both its external and internal communications teams to engage these secondary audiences. It was more important to Rogers to have engaged readers than to have a large number of followers. Knowing that other company blogs average 16 comments per post, the goal for *RedBoard*, a brand-new site, was 10 in the first year.

Based on the objectives of deepening customer relationships and improving its online reputation, *RedBoard* was a great success for Rogers. Following its launch, the negative online comments about Rogers fell by half and the positive comments almost doubled. The company had also projected 880 published comments in 44 weeks. Instead, the site achieved 10,423 comments. Today, the blog is a dynamic, interactive space, which houses video content and streams Twitter comments live.

Social media is changing the practice of public relations. This is especially true in Canada, which has the most social network users per capita in the world. In 2011, 47.4 per cent of Canadians were active on social media, with 45 per cent of the population on Facebook.¹ This number is expected to increase by 800,000 users a year, representing too many opportunities to reach your target audiences to ignore.²

While many of the communications principles remain the same with social media, PR practitioners need to be participating in the online conversation 24/7. No longer can communicators provide information to consumers only when it's convenient to them.

Gone is the standard news cycle—the dialogue never stops. As we have just seen in the opening vignette, conversations about Rogers were already ongoing online before the organization joined in. With *RedBoard*, Rogers began participating in the dialogue and engaging readers with great success, almost doubling positive comments and improving its online reputation.

Social media offers the PR practitioner more tools to create content and share information with the audiences they are trying to reach and engage. It also provides a listening and research tool to find out audiences' opinions or thoughts on various issues and topics.

In the digital age, public relations is no longer simply a matter of transmitting messages to key audiences. These audiences now communicate back to you and talk to one another about your organization, and they are doing so in increasing numbers. This presents new opportunities for PR practitioners, as well as some challenges.

Many new public relations positions are being created because of social media. Newly created titles include social media manager and digital expert, to name a few. Sometimes people outside of the industry think they would be good at social media because they use Facebook or Twitter personally. This assumption is typically false. Social media, like public relations in general, requires communication skills, education, and experience. The complexities of handling social media as part of an organization's communications strategy are very different from having a personal online presence.

There is one point above all to remember about social media from a PR perspective: social media is about people first. The technologies and tools used to reach these people are secondary, as is exemplified by the *RedBoard* blog. Rogers determined exactly who its target audiences were—in this case young, early to middle adopters of technology—and then created the blog and its content specifically for them.

In this chapter we will begin by examining PR in the social media age by looking first at the principles that have not changed and then studying how PR has evolved. We will also learn about the new opportunities that social media offers PR practitioners, as well as the challenges it presents. Finally, we will examine some of the most popular social media tools that are presently being used by PR practitioners. The technologies of social media, which are ever changing, include such applications as Facebook, Twitter, and wikis.

PR in the Social Media Age ¹

Social media can be defined as digital media that is both created and consumed by users. Its advent has created a very exciting time for public relations and has opened up a score of opportunities to reach target audiences in ways that were previously unimaginable. PR practitioners now create their own media content and share this information with local communities and niche audience segments. The Rogers *RedBoard* blog is a perfect example of this. Rogers was able to communicate directly with a targeted audience of Millennial and Gen Y technology users. Digital media, with its borderless, ownerless diversity of opinions and voices, is bringing profound changes to the way we communicate.

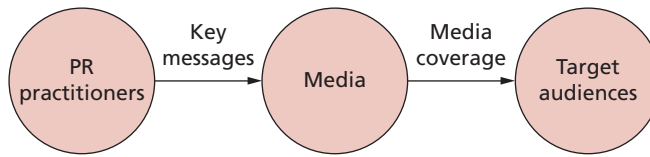


Figure 7.1 Traditional Model of Public Relations

Traditionally, public relations practitioners communicated with their target audiences in the way shown in Figure 7.1.

PR practitioners drafted the message and communicated it to their target audiences, using the media as a conduit. They often depended on the media, such as newspaper reporters, to pick up the message and transmit it to key audiences. In most cases, the public provided very little feedback, with the exception of limited traditional channels of communication, such as customer service lines or letters to the editor.

As social media’s popularity has increased, the public are no longer quiet consumers of media and messages. Audiences are now full participants in the transmission of information and producers of media. They respond to organizations and share information with one another. They create **user-generated content**, which they share peer to peer.

An interesting example of this development is what is referred to as “mommy bloggers.” Popular mommy blogs include *yoyomama.ca* and *urbanmommies.com*. Mothers are an active and powerful force in digital media, as they share information with one another on everything from baby product reviews to the best medical care. They influence one another’s decisions because one mother will tend to trust the words of another. Effectively outreaching to

mommy bloggers is now highlighted in PR events such as the ShesConnected conference in Canada.

The clothing retailer H&M learned just how quickly and effectively mothers share peer to peer, setting **viral campaigns**—campaigns that are shared quickly and widely through social media—into motion. After one mother was asked to stop breastfeeding in the company’s Vancouver store and was ushered into a dressing room against her will, a large group of women showed up at the store to publicly breastfeed in what was called a “nurse in.” The event attracted national media coverage, featuring the retailer in an unfavourable light.



Mommy blogs, such as the popular *yoyomama*, are an effective way to reach mothers in Canada.

Source: Stuart Monk/Shutterstock

WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED IN PR: THE FUNDAMENTALS

As exciting as this digital revolution is, the fundamentals of public relations remain unchanged. The practice of public relations still centres around defining objectives and identifying target audiences and influencers. Social media, like all other types of communications, is about putting people first. This principle of public relations has not changed in the digital age. One of the first steps in any campaign is to consider your target audiences: the people you are trying to reach, to engage, and to communicate with. It is essential to know your audiences well so that you can decide how best to reach them and which tactics to use, whether that be YouTube, newspapers, or a combination of both, for example.

In making this decision, as in formulating all PR plans, you need to ask, Who is the audience that you are trying to reach? Once the target audiences are identified and researched, the decisions about key messages need to be made. What messaging will be most appealing to the audience, and what information could you provide that will be of interest or of value to them?

At this point, decisions about the best social media tools and technologies to use come into play. Where will you find your target audiences—i.e., what social media tools do they use? Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and wikis are simply tools that public relations practitioners can use to communicate with their target audiences. These technologies come and go; they rise and fall in popularity. However, the foundation of solid communication will never change. Remember that the tools of social media are technologies that can be learned. The crucial skills to develop are the principles of good communication and the expertise to apply them. Public relations remains about the ability to think strategically and to communicate effectively with your target audiences. Social media should be viewed as one tactic in a public relations strategy, never as the strategy in and of itself. See Chapter 4 for more information about strategy and the fundamentals of a PR campaign.

THE ADVANTAGE OF A PR PERSPECTIVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Social media experts come from many sectors, including information technology (IT), advertising, and customer service. The difference is that PR professionals approach social media based on the principles of public relations. PR practitioners possess an advantage in the field of social media because they understand strategy and how to target key audiences with their message. Though many people understand technology and how to use social media tools, they do not necessarily understand how to effectively share information with others, what to talk about, what messages to communicate to further the interests of the organization, or how to handle an issue or crisis.

This reality reinforces the fact that social media is about people and communication. Tools and media forms may come and go, but public relations is always about listening,

dialogue, relationships, and communication. Social media as a public relations tactic is first and foremost about the audience, not about technologies and tools.

Technological developments burst onto the scene quickly in this new digital world. Take, for example, the exploding popularity of Twitter. It grew 82 per cent in just nine months in 2011, reaching 100 million active users.³ Similarly, popular social networks, such as Myspace, might quickly fall out of fashion once new ones launch.

The future is sure to hold many more changes for social media tools. What may work effectively at one time may not work at another. It is important that PR practitioners stay up to date with these new developments so they know where they will find their target audiences next.

SOCIAL MEDIA: ONE PR TACTIC IN AN OVERALL CAMPAIGN

Though it is currently very trendy, from a PR perspective, social media is often just one component of an overall campaign or one of the many tactics available to meet your objectives. Just as event planning is but one tactic a PR practitioner may employ in a campaign (as opposed to professional event planners, who focus exclusively on this specialty), social media is one tactic in the PR practitioner's large array of tactics that can be employed to reach communication objectives.

This means that traditional media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, still has a strong role to play in public relations campaigns, but it is no longer the only option. The **media mix**, or combination of media, used by PR professionals now includes traditional and social media.

If history is any guide, social media will not bring about the disappearance of other forms of mass media. It may push them to evolve and change their content or mode of delivery, but it will not drive media, such as TV or newspapers, to extinction.⁴ Digital media provides an alternative and a complement to traditional media.

Some PR practitioners and communications agencies specialize exclusively in social media campaigns. These agencies assist organizations in finding their online communities, reaching out to them, and then measuring the impact that a campaign is having online. More commonly, though, PR agencies provide overall PR services including social media relations but do not concentrate exclusively on it.

Thinking Like a PR Practitioner

1. Describe two advantages that PR professionals have over other social media experts.
2. Explain why we say that the foundations of PR have remained the same in the digital age.
3. In the case of H&M, what would you have done if you were the public relations practitioner for the retailer?

The Evolution of PR with Social Media ²

Although the fundamentals of PR have remained the same, social media has changed the ways we engage our target audiences in the digital world. The best practices of public relations have always been concerned with listening to target audiences, but in the past PR practitioners often distributed their key messages through one-way communication. Today, two-way communication, which involves listening and interacting, is no longer just a best practice but a mandatory one to achieve success in the digital age.

Communication is not a monologue of information delivered to your audiences. Communication is an open dialogue, in which you listen, respond, and share. That is the definition of two-way communication. Social media brings this concept to an exciting new level of implementation. It is the most engaging of all PR tactics in terms of two-way communication and relationship building. As Figure 7.2 illustrates, PR practitioners used to mostly practise one-to-many communications; with the help of the media, they talked to many people at once with very little opportunity for feedback from the audience. Social media facilitates many-to-many communication. With social media, many people talk to large groups of people at once, with a lot of opportunity for feedback. Audiences are not only communicating back to the organization, but communicating with each other. While this provides an opportunity for rich dialogue, it also means that PR practitioners need to work more than ever. Gone are 9-to-5 working hours. As for taking a break during statutory holidays, Krisleigh Hoermann says, “Crises tend to occur the Friday night before a holiday, so no [you can’t take a break], but you can scale back a little and ensure you have fun.”⁵ The PR practitioner must be constantly listening and engaging with the audience when the conversation is happening.

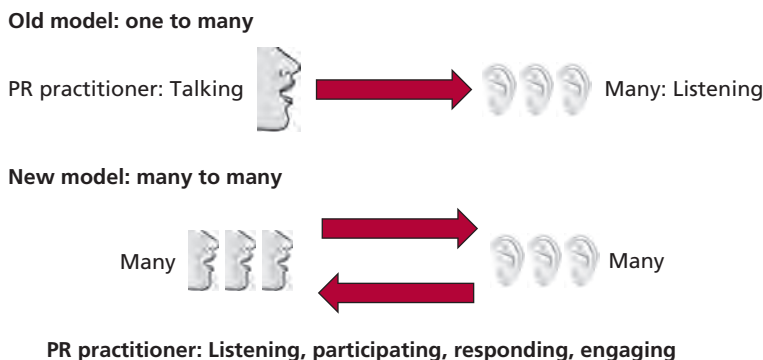


Figure 7.2 Social Media and the Opportunity for Many-to-Many Conversations

THE NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has introduced more than just two-way communication to PR. It has also introduced a host of other guiding principles that PR practitioners must embrace and follow to successfully participate in this new medium. These guiding principles are known as the **rules of engagement**. The most pertinent ones for PR practitioners include those dealing with information sharing, engagement, permission, trust, and transparency. Social media experts also talk about honesty and generosity. More than ever, the actions of the PR practitioner are guided by these principles.

Let us look first at information sharing. This involves creating relationships by thinking of people first, offering them information that will be of value to them, and being generous about it. The content of the Rogers blog is custom-written for its target audiences and provides information that will be relevant to young, early to middle adopters of technology. Adding value, either through interesting, exciting, entertaining content or through improved customer service, needs to be at the centre of any social media campaign. PR practitioners need to ask themselves, “Why would anyone want to engage with our brand online? What can we offer them?” In order to provide value to consumers, Johnson & Johnson launched a website called Healthy Essentials, which offers coupons and articles with topics such as tips on how to nurse a sick child.⁶ Shelley Kohut, director of communications and public relations for Johnson & Johnson Canada, says, “We’re going to communicate with our consumers and nurture and build that relationship with them beyond the transaction. That’s our goal.”⁷

Social media principles also include listening to your audiences and responding proactively and appropriately to their thoughts, comments, and inquiries. It is important to develop real conversations as opposed to merely delivering sales pitches. That is exactly how the social media team at Rogers manages *RedBoard*. They show their readers that they are focused on delivering value by engaging and responding to them.

One of the guiding principles of *RedBoard* was also to be as open and transparent as possible with target audiences. This helps build trust between the organization and the audiences. As we saw in the opening vignette, their target audiences are intolerant of “corporate speak” and want to have a real conversation with Rogers online.

Asking permission is another key principle of social media. As we have noted, a PR campaign may include a media mix composed of traditional journalists and digital media producers. Each should be approached with a different strategy. For a new cosmetic product launch, for example, you would send a product sample to journalists at key media outlets such as *Chatelaine* magazine, the *National Post*, and *Fashion TV*. In the new age of media, permission is key in keeping with the principle of putting people first. You must ask bloggers if they would like to receive a product sample and make it clear that there are no strings attached before sending it. You should never send it without first seeking permission.

While some bloggers are journalists, many are not, so the rules of engagement are different. Many have professions outside of their blog and run the blog from their home, so their privacy and space must be respected. They do not have an office you can call or deliver packages to, and so you must correspond with them on their terms. They also usually don’t

respond well to mass pitches and press releases. Customized, individualized messages work much better. Most people do not like a hard sell on social media. If they feel marketed to, they will simply not follow you and will block you from their social media. This is why it is important to provide value and enhance your audience's social media experience, not detract from it.

Just as you need to ask permission from bloggers before sending samples, you also must ask permission before posting others' photos or quoting them on social media. Whether it is an employee, a volunteer, or a customer, make sure you get the subject's permission before posting anything online. If the subject is a minor, make sure his or her parents also agree to the posting.

TARGETING VERY SPECIFIC AUDIENCES: HYPERNICHE AND HYPERLOCAL

Before the digital age, it was difficult for PR practitioners to identify, find, and target audiences for topics that were not mainstream. The strategy involved tactics such as identifying trade publications, newsletters, or specialized mailing lists. Now practitioners can find communities online for any topic, ranging from corkscrew collectors to health care advocates. There are many more opportunities for content placement, but the audience is more fragmented. Instead of being able to reach all audiences at once, we must now speak to them individually. While this takes more time, the payoff can be larger because you are delivering the right information to the right audience. In turn, our efforts become much more focused on targeted, or **hyperniche**, audiences. We also have more opportunities to talk to local communities, or **hyperlocal** audiences. It takes time to conduct research and find these communities, but the effort is rewarded once you have found them and started engaging with them. It is worth re-emphasizing that this task can be accomplished only by knowing your target audiences well and putting the relationship with them first.

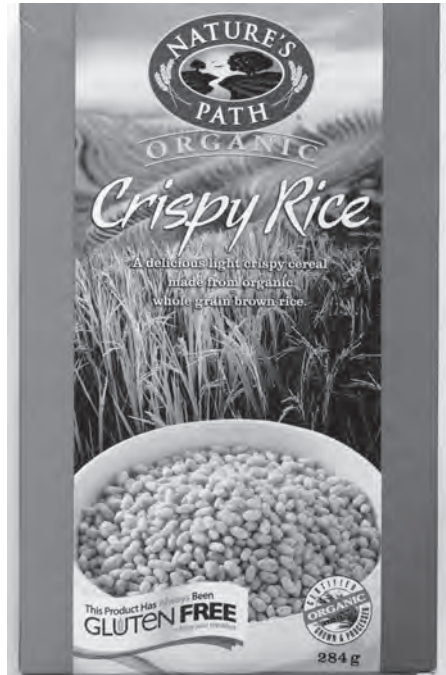
Nature's Path, North America's leading manufacturer of organic cereals, provides a great example of an organization using social media to reach its target audiences, some of which are very specialized. Nature's Path engages its audiences and establishes two-way communication, using a variety of technologies and tools to meet its PR objectives. The company is successful in the new media age because it always keeps its audiences top of mind, identifies where the audiences are interacting, and selects the best tools to reach them.

The PR team at Nature's Path employs a large portion of their overall initiatives on social media, and they expect that to grow. They have a Twitter account, a Facebook fan page, a blog, an interactive website, and a YouTube channel where they post videos they produce. They also do extensive blogger outreach, aiming to talk to about 50 bloggers a month.

"It's really amazing because we can be very specific in the communities we target," said a PR manager at Nature's Path. "When we are launching a new gluten-free cereal for children, for example, we can talk directly to the mothers and parents that are interested in this subject. Social media is about talking to less people but having a more personal connection. It's about forgetting talking points and having real conversations with people."⁸

Nature's Path uses social media to target niche audiences.

Source: © Carolyn Jenkins/Alamy



Thinking Like a PR Practitioner

1. Define two-way communication.
2. Explain the rules of engagement of social media.
3. Cite two reasons why social media producers such as bloggers are approached differently than journalists.

The New Media Influencers ³

In Chapter 2, we studied how PR practitioners identify and work with influencers to reach and influence their target audiences. The digital age has created a great number of **new media influencers**—social media users who influence others and gain followers—and given them the power to reach their peers widely and immediately.



Source: Cartoonresource/Shutterstock



Jeff Hamada's blog, *Booooooom*, is viewed as an authoritative Canadian art blog.

Source: Booooooom Design Inc.

Online influencers can include key bloggers with either large audiences or smaller but important audiences, or individuals on Twitter, Facebook, or Pinterest who have a large following. Often bloggers will have a large Facebook and Twitter following, which provides more opportunities for audiences to be exposed to information. Jeff Hamada's art blog, *Booooooom*, is seen as an authoritative figure in Canada's art scene. Because of the popularity of his blog, his Twitter and Facebook profiles also have large audiences. On the other hand, Debbie Shing, who works for Mark Anthony, a wine distributor, does not have a blog but has a large Twitter following as a result of her knowledge of the alcohol industry and important wine events. Because of her large following, she is often contacted by companies that are interested in reaching her followers.

Some new media influencers have become more trusted and respected than corporations and even traditional news organizations. The public is now more inclined to trust the individual providing them with information than the outlet where they obtained the news, especially as people now consume their news and information from so many different **touch points**—communication channels where audiences interact with brands or information. For example, we may first see a story on Twitter or on Facebook and then read something else about it in a blog. We may even follow Twitter comments about a news story that we are also simultaneously watching on the news. When evaluating these sources, we look at the trustworthiness or social capital of the content provider and not the medium or technology where it appears.

David Armano, a social media expert and communicator, calls this phenomenon the development of the “brand individual,” where trust is put in individuals as opposed to corporate brands. This means that everyday people become trusted sources of information, as they create content and publish their opinions and ideas. These new media users can have great influence on their peers and on one another.

ADVICE TO NEW PRACTITIONERS

Becoming a Trusted Brand Individual

Becoming a trusted brand individual as a PR practitioner depends upon your ability to follow social media's rules of engagement. It is about generosity: provide your audiences with information that they care about and need, as opposed to making a pitch for your organization. Two-way communication is key in creating a trusting relationship with your audiences.

Listening and responding honestly to your audience's concerns goes a long way toward becoming a trusted brand individual. It is key that both you and the organization demonstrate these values and that they are applied systematically over the long term. A public relations career is built over many years, and your reputation is essential to the success of you and your organization.

Canada has many trusted brand individuals on many different topics. Some of the most influential include Adele McAlear, who has become a trusted source for information on marketing; Kate Trgovac, on social media; Rebecca Bollwitt, on events and happenings in Vancouver; Michael Geist, on politics; and Terry Fallis, on public relations.

The impact for PR practitioners is twofold. First, they want to identify the brand individuals who can make a difference for their organizations and foster relationships with them. By providing these brand individuals with a positive experience with their product or service, they can influence their network. These influencers have the power to help PR practitioners meet their public relations objectives by talking to others about their organization. Chris Abraham, director of the online social media PR firm Abraham & Harrison and the author of a blog called *Marketing Conversation*, estimates that influencers and opinion leaders using social media each influence between 100 and 1000 people, and they can reach up to 1 million people in the case of a celebrity.⁹ Second, PR practitioners themselves can become brand individuals as they communicate on behalf of their organizations. In order to do this, they must be transparent and authentic, and provide interesting information.

Thinking Like a PR Practitioner

1. Discuss the blogs that you read regularly.
2. What makes you trust some online brand individuals and not others? Describe what differentiates them.
3. Describe how a PR practitioner can become a brand individual.

Opportunities and Challenges for PR Practitioners in the Digital Age ⁴

Social media presents many new opportunities for PR practitioners, as well as new challenges. Opportunities include reaching niche communities, communicating directly with an audience, having campaigns go viral, and being able to learn more about an organization's competitors. Some of the new challenges social media presents include losing control of the message, dealing with a fragmented audience that is time-consuming to reach, and managing issues and crises.

OPPORTUNITY: REACHING NICHE COMMUNITIES

The first opportunity results from the explosion of new media, which enables PR practitioners to reach niche communities that had never before been targeted or received regular coverage in the mainstream media. There are online communities built around almost any topic imaginable, and legions of blogs cover every subject under the sun. Stories or topics that were once considered too niche for mainstream media can be pitched and covered at length in blogs dedicated to that topic.

OPPORTUNITY: COMMUNICATING DIRECTLY WITH AUDIENCES

Another opportunity for PR practitioners is that they no longer have to depend on traditional media to pick up their stories to reach their target audiences. The middleman or gatekeeper has been removed. PR practitioners can distribute the content themselves directly to the right audiences and the right influencers through their own blogs, Facebook pages, or Twitter streams. They can then hear their audiences' feedback in order to adapt their messaging. This is exactly what Rogers did with its *RedBoard* blog. Rogers communicates directly with its target audiences of Millennial and Gen Y early to middle adopters of technology, listening and responding to them.

OPPORTUNITY: GOING GLOBAL

Another benefit of the digital age is the possibility of campaigns making a global impact on a small budget. Social media has broken through geographical boundaries. Korean pop sensation Psy demonstrated the global reach of social media with his hit song "Gangnam Style." A song that might never have become popular outside of South Korea under the old media model became a viral international hit thanks to YouTube. At the end of 2012, the video had over 1 billion views from around the world.



Psy became a worldwide celebrity after his “Gangnam Style” music video went viral.

Source: © Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

Similarly, a campaign implemented in Canada can be discussed all over the world by bloggers and users of other social media tools. An example of a Canadian viral video sensation is the video of an eagle picking up a toddler in a Montreal park. This Internet hoax was created by four Montreal students for a simulation workshop class. Their assignment was to create a video that garnered over 100,000 YouTube hits. The four students did better than that by creating a 3-D animation of an eagle picking up a toddler in a park and then dropping the toddler nearby.¹⁰ The animation looks lifelike and soon went viral. While the students quickly declared that it was a hoax, the video received tens of millions of YouTube views.

OPPORTUNITY: GAINING MARKET INTELLIGENCE

Social media also provides an abundant source of information about an organization’s competitors. Social media content is an excellent source of market intelligence that PR practitioners previously did not have access to or had to pay large sums of money to obtain. Social media is a bit like a focus group that happens in real time. So much

can be gained from looking at the competition's messaging, target audiences, and digital media tactics. PR practitioners can also hear what target audiences are saying about their own company or their competitors and find out how engaged their customers are. A warning, though, if you participate in any online discussions, always identify which company you are representing. It is highly unethical and almost always counterproductive to pretend to be someone you are not online. Do not pretend you are a passive consumer and bash your competitors or praise your own products on Facebook, on Twitter, or in the comment sections of blogs. Chances are someone will identify who you really are, causing you and your organization embarrassment.

CHALLENGE: LOSING CONTROL OF THE MESSAGE

A challenge facing public relations practitioners with the rise of social media is that they no longer have exclusive control over their organization's messaging. They are now but one voice out there talking about an organization, a product, or a good cause. With so many users talking about any given topic, or posting user-generated comments on brands, it is important that organizations participate in social media. They need to take part in the conversation that is already occurring about them. They should not try to have exclusive control over the message, as social media makes this impossible. Deleting negative comments from your site's comments section or from Facebook will seem inauthentic and not transparent. It is better to address the criticism and provide answers to people's concerns.

McDonald's Canada addresses consumers' questions and criticisms head-on with the launch of its social media campaign "Our Food. Your Questions." This started as a Canadian and digital-only campaign in which McDonald's promised to answer any questions consumers had about its products through online videos and posts. The campaign was so successful that it grew to include traditional media and gained international PR coverage.¹¹ Judy John, CEO of Leo Burnett Canada, says, "McDonald's had a business problem: People wondered about the food. The idea gets at the heart of the problem and solves it. And this idea is big, it goes beyond a program or promotional idea. It's a platform. It's authentic. It's social, it's getting buzz."¹² Like McDonald's Canada, PR practitioners should try to learn from and react from the conversations happening around their organizations.

CHALLENGE: DEALING WITH FRAGMENTED AUDIENCES

A further challenge is that audiences are much more fragmented than in the past and will become increasingly so over time. When there were fewer media, each outlet had a larger readership or audience. One message to one outlet went a long way toward helping to meet PR objectives. Now the campaign must be tailored to smaller, more focused audiences. This process can be more time-consuming and expensive but ultimately more rewarding, as there is more opportunity to tailor each message and deliver more value to each audience.

CHALLENGE: CONFRONTING ISSUES AND CRISES

Many organizations are wary of joining the digital age because they feel that they must let go of the reins—they will not be able to control the conversation as they once did. However, the conversation has already begun and is ongoing, whether an organization decides to participate or not. PR professionals and their organizations need to weigh the costs of not being involved in this conversation.

Not everything discussed online about your organization will be positive, no matter what organization you work for. Regular, ongoing monitoring of what is said on the Internet about your organization and assessment of your online reputation are essential. This monitoring enables PR practitioners to know if an issue or crisis is brewing and if action is needed. Free services like Google Alerts or the search functions in Twitter or HootSuite, a social media-monitoring dashboard, can help you monitor the conversations for potential issues.

It is beneficial to be part of the conversation even when what is being said about your organization is negative. In terms of social media, the key actions to consider are collaborating, engaging, and participating. These objectives can generally be achieved even during an issue or crisis. Just by having a presence online, and by listening to and

participating in the conversation, you can raise the **social capital** of your organization—the worth of your social network in terms of influence and sharing. In some cases, these actions may bring a favourable resolution to the issue and turn the situation around. By being part of the conversation, you can also manage issues that might become larger without intervention. For example, as we saw with McDonald's Canada's "Our Food. Your Questions." campaign, the company was able to address concerns about its food publicly, potentially stopping misinformation about its products. For more information on issues and crisis communications, see Chapter 11.



McDonald's "Our Food. Your Questions." campaign is a good example of transparency on social media.

Source: © Caro/Alamy

Thinking Like a PR Practitioner

1. After reviewing all the opportunities and challenges, judge whether practising PR has become easier or harder in the digital age.
2. What kinds of information can you gather about your competitors through social media? Why might this be beneficial?
3. What does it mean to have a more fragmented audience?

The Tools and Technologies of Social Media ⁵

The last subject we will cover in this chapter is the tools and technologies of social media that practitioners use to communicate with target audiences. As we explored earlier, the decision regarding which tools to use is based on whom we are trying to reach and how we can engage them.

In an interview on *fastcompany.com*, Charlene Li, the author of the book *Groundswell* and a social media consultant, advises that the first step in a social media campaign is to think about the relationship an organization wants to create with its target audiences.

Companies will come to us and say, “We need a blog.” Ok, great. Why do you want a blog? They go, “Well, our competition has a blog. Or my CEO wants a blog.” It’s rarely with a good understanding of what kind of relationship they want to build with the people they’re trying to reach. Focus on the relationship first.¹³

Keep in mind, once again, that these technologies change and evolve quickly, with new developments bursting onto the scene regularly.

Going back to the example of Nature’s Path, the decision about which technologies to employ was based on researching where people who are interested in gluten-free products talk to one another and share information. There is no point in being on Pinterest if gluten-free conversations are not happening there. For a new gluten-free cereal launch, product giveaways were conducted on Twitter and Facebook, and information and products were sent to gluten-free bloggers, including *The Celiac Maniac*, *Gluten Free Expedition*, and *Gluten Free Betsy*.

BLOGS

A blog is a contraction of the term *Web log*. A blog is similar to an opinion column in the sense that a person writes his or her own personal commentary or curates content from other places. There are individual blogs and corporate or organizational blogs, such as Rogers Communications’ *RedBoard*.

Blogs can be approached in two basic ways, and your PR strategy can include one or both. The first is to create a blog for your organization, and the second is to have a blogger outreach program, one similar to media relations, in which you contact bloggers instead of or in addition to journalists.

Blogger Outreach

Blogs are one of the most exciting developments in public relations. The advent of blogs created countless new avenues through which to disseminate information and reach target audiences. There are blogs for every topic under the sun, many of which have a dedicated community following them. The audience may be more fragmented than ever

ADVICE TO NEW PRACTITIONERS

Writing Blogs

- Remember that a blog is only the technology. You should never start one just because it is trendy. You must decide on and commit to the editorial content of your blog.
- Make sure you have the time and resources to support a blog. Blogs can be time-consuming, as they must be updated regularly to be effective—at least once a week. If you go too long between updates, you risk having your audience lose interest.
- If you are doing the writing on behalf of someone else, acknowledge it. Ghost writing should be disclosed.
- Be aware that a blog on a specific topic can be short term. For example, a three-week blog on the rebranding taking place at your organization can work well.
- Ask yourself this question first: What information can I offer in terms of contributing to the communities I am trying to engage with my blog?

as a result, but it also can be targeted in a way never seen before. Traditional media outlets may still have a larger audience, but a blog's audience of 1000 fervent followers can be as or even more powerful in helping you meet your PR objectives than a national newspaper with a wider readership.

Example of How to Approach a Blogger Outreach Campaign

The first step in a blogger outreach campaign is to conduct research to find out which bloggers are talking about your topic or organization. If you have not been participating, you will probably find that there is a whole conversation already taking place without you. Some of it may be positive and some may be negative. You want to be engaged and part of the conversation. The more engaged you are, the higher your social capital will rise.

To find blogs, start with a Google search or a site like Technorati, which is a blog aggregate site that carries the most popular blogs by subject. Another great research tool is to look at **blog rolls**—the lists of all the blogs that other bloggers follow. A good blog roll is a precious commodity.

As with traditional publications, you must get to know these blogs. Read many current and archived entries to get a good sense of editorial content and what will be of interest to a blogger. Next, compile a database of appropriate bloggers and start engaging them and building a relationship with them.

Unlike your relationship with traditional media, you will need to introduce yourself and seek permission before you start pitching to bloggers or sending them product samples. Your pitches must all be custom-written for each blogger. You can use the same key messages but tailor the message for each blog. You should aim to engage and build a relationship with 12 to 20 bloggers per topic. It is difficult to maintain a relationship

with more than that, especially at the beginning. A good way to begin a relationship with bloggers is to offer them a product or service to give away to their readers. Many bloggers build their followers through giveaways, and so they appreciate the opportunity to provide something of value to their community.

Negative Blogs

There will likely be times when your organization will be negatively discussed online by a blogger. As in issues and crisis management, further discussed in Chapter 11, the way you handle the situation will make all the difference. Some of the worst cases turn into positive relationship building when an organization listens, interacts, and takes action to remedy what went wrong. You may want to contact the blogger directly to see what you can do to fix things, as it is quicker and more personal. A best practice for public relations professionals is always to stay calm and listen, as in all issues and crisis situations, no matter what the other party says or does.

In his blog, PR practitioner Tom Lyons recommends the following to turn a negative situation into positive outcome:

When handing a negative blog, what not to do is just as important as what to do. Unless you are clearly dealing with someone less than honest, do not:

- Ignore the post and hope it just goes away. Even if it does not go viral, it will live on the Internet indefinitely, waiting for someone to discover it.
- Be defensive or challenge her version of what occurred. Again, think about how you'd like to be treated if you had a legitimate complaint.
- Expect that what you say is just between you two. Everything you say or imply is likely to end up posted. Speak accordingly.¹⁴

Source: Negative Blogs: How to make lemonade from lemons December 1, 2009. Used by permission by Tom Lyons.

Organizational Blogs

Another tactic you can employ is to create a blog for your organization, as Rogers Communications did with *RedBoard*. This can be an efficient tool to communicate directly with your target audiences and make sure that you are part of the conversation.

Blogs can be written from many different perspectives. For instance, an organization can have a blog from its CEO, one from a top researcher, and one from someone working in customer relations. A blog can also have one author or multiple authors.



The telecommunications company Rogers uses its company blog, *Redboard*, to provide useful content to its target audiences.

Source: © Mark Blinch/Reuters/Corbis

ADVICE TO NEW PRACTITIONERS

Pitching Bloggers

- Customize your pitch for each blogger. Read what they wrote as far back as you can and position your story in a way that will be of interest to them.
- Make sure they cover the topic you are pitching on and explain clearly why you think this story will interest them.
- Engage them before you pitch. Introduce yourself and let them know which organization you represent. It is imperative that you be transparent and honest. All information is public in the media age.
- Offer your assistance. Many bloggers are single-person operations. Maybe they'll take you up on your offer.
- Never mass email.
- It takes more time to build a blogger database than a media database, but it is worth the effort. A great way to find bloggers on a certain topic is look at a blogger's blog roll. It can be a very valuable source of information.

During a speaking engagement on best practices in the digital world, Kate Trgovac, owner of the social media consultancy LintBucket Media and a well-known blogger, recommended having a team of corporate bloggers so if one individual leaves, the campaign will not collapse.

From a PR perspective, it is important to know what the editorial content of your blog will be and what direction it will take. To be effective, blogs need to appeal to and engage your target audiences, so you must consider what topics will be of interest to them. One recommendation is to write out a list of all topics you want to cover over a period of time and have several entries written before going live. Sites such as WordPress and Blogger are easy tools for creating organizational and corporate blogs. Also, remember that building readership takes time. Make sure you set realistic goals for how many people you want reading your blog, and communicate those goals internally, both to avoid getting discouraged and to make sure everyone has realistic expectations.

OTHER TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Blogs are just one tool that can be used in a social media campaign. In public relations, rarely is only one tactic used to reach your communication objectives. It should also be noted that not every tool is right for every campaign or every organization. A Pinterest page might not be right for an organization that does not operate in a highly visual space but might be the perfect platform for an interior design firm. The following are other tools that can be effective.

Your Own Website

One of the first elements to consider in social media is the website of your organization. After all, it remains one of the most powerful tools for sharing information with consumers and the media. Also, many of the initiatives that you will be undertaking with social media will result, if you are successful, in driving traffic to your organization's website, where your audience can learn more information, purchase your product, or donate to your organization.

Whereas before, a website was a vehicle to share company information and messaging, it is now an interactive tool for a two-way conversation with your target audiences. The key is to make the website interactive, with opportunities for feedback and posting, and to include multimedia aspects such as videos, blogs, and links to your accounts such as Facebook, Digg, and Twitter.

A well-thought-out, up-to-date media section on your website can also be a great resource for journalists and bloggers. Key contacts, past media releases, bios, fact sheets, backgrounders, and easily downloadable images can be housed there to make it easy for the media to find the information they need to create their story.

Wikis

A wiki is a collaborative website containing pages that are written and edited by groups of people. The most well known wiki is Wikipedia, although there are many more wikis, some of which are highly specialized, like wikicars.org for automobile enthusiasts. Wikis can be an effective tool to reach specialized and influential audiences. The key is to be open, to be completely transparent, and to contribute and share information. Wikis are not the forum to talk about your brand or organization, but rather to provide information and educate and engage your audience.

Miniblogs

There are also miniblog technologies such as Twitter. The shortness of the texts (140 characters or less for Twitter) allows messages to transmit quickly from user to user. Users reply to and forward one another's messages in a public manner.

Twitter can be a valuable listening and customer service tool. Through Twitter, companies that have customers who benefit from regular updates, such as transit companies or airlines, can provide up-to-the minute information on topics such as flight delays or route detours. If you hear of individuals on Twitter experiencing a problem with your product, you can help them through Twitter. This public exercise might also assist others who are having the same problem.

The Salt Spring Coffee Company ran a campaign called “#needalift?” that aimed to help customers having a lousy day. The first phase involved searching for local Tweets where individuals wrote that they were having a bad day. These people were then sent a bag of coffee and a tumbler, which generated a lot of positive tweets and retweets about the organization.¹⁵

Many individuals are now receiving their news from sites such as Twitter. Thirty-three per cent of adults under 30 report that they receive their news from a social networking site—almost as many as those who receive their news from television (34 per cent) and more than those who receive their news from print (13 per cent).¹⁶ Also, because news on Twitter can travel so fast, a negative or incorrect news story can gain traction quickly. This is why it is important that even if an organization doesn't have a Twitter account, its communications team is still monitoring what is being said.

PRACTITIONER INTERVIEW

Michael Gleboff, Social Media Specialist

Michael Gleboff is a social media PR specialist who has worked in-house conducting campaigns in the animation, video game, and mobile industries, as well as in a PR agency.

Question: What kind of social media tactics have you used?

Answer: Research and planning are the most important aspects of a successful social media campaign. Once you know what you want to achieve and who you want to reach, you utilize tactics that best fit those goals. Most importantly, you want to be proactive and not reactive. Social media is about outreach and engagement, so you want to always be aware of what people are saying about your brand and working to influence it. To do that, you need to be reaching others through as many platforms as you can—Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, etc. Always be creating content that's compelling and can incentivize action, and craft it to best fit the channel you're distributing on (i.e., you shouldn't be broadcasting long-form content as multiple posts on Twitter).

Search engine optimization is another a key tactic in getting your work noticed. Using key words and planning ensures you're receiving the broadest reach with your content and pulling in unique views from search engines like Google and Bing. Finally, enable and encourage your community to share your content. Web tools

like a "Share button" will provide greater ease for users to aid in distribution and gaining solid word-of-mouth traction. You're working to make yourself more visible and available, so any help is always effective and appreciated.

Question: What kind of results can you achieve with social media?

Answer: There's a lot you can achieve with social media so long as you've established goals and the means with which you'd like to reach them. Whether that's improved customer service, a wider reach of brand awareness, or even just more views on your blog posts, it's an incredibly versatile tool that can get you where you want to go in terms of digital representation. Ultimately, though, your results will focus on finding new ways to engage your customers and keep them coming back.

Question: What aspects motivate you?

Answer: I love the immediacy of social media. To be able to make an effort in engaging someone or a group of people and see the direct result is an incredibly thrilling opportunity, especially matched with social media's creative and two-way nature. You're putting yourself out there, like you would in real life, and connecting with others in a much more visceral way than standard marketing that aims more toward numbered results. And I'm in social media because I thrive in working with others, so the social aspect is definitely

PRACTITIONER INTERVIEW (Continued)

Michael Gleboff, Social Media Specialist

an incentive for me. It's a job where you try and make others excited about what you're excited about, and I find that pretty great.

Question: What is a typical day like?

Answer: A typical day usually involves a large range of tasks and contributions from different teams. Often social media specialists will spend a good portion of their day doing research and gathering data that can be applied across the organization. As well, a strategist's job includes creating solid content to be published across multiple online platforms in many different formats. This could be anything from scheduling and posting a series of blog entries to filming a video for the company's website. You'll also be constantly checking and managing social media accounts, ensuring that customer questions are being answered and discussion is being generated. Aside from that, you'll be on top of current trends and always looking for new ways to reach out to your public effectively.

Question: What are the challenges in working in social media?

Answer: Personally, I think the biggest challenge is understanding how to use it properly. Being a relatively new tool with a large capacity for unique application, it's easy to lose sight of your objectives and how social media platforms can best achieve them. Figuring out what works for your organization, your strategy, and your public is key to running successful campaigns and it's not an easy thing to do. Obstacles that can clutter your vision and act as challenges in themselves include a lack of time and preparation, creating a realistic strategy, and figuring out your core targets—these things that are meant to build toward your goals, and if not properly considered, can be what turns a great idea into an unsuccessful campaign.

Question: What advice would you give anyone who wants to work in this field?

Answer: You have to be loud. Social media is a field that's easy to quantify, so all it takes for someone to see your passion is a quick Google search and a look at your online profiles. You want to stand out and show that you're comfortable saying something. Don't be afraid to show personality, but know when to use discretion. Reach out to everyone you can and find online communities that you can be involved in—networking goes a long way in social media and all it takes is a simple "hello." And know your stuff when it comes to the online environment. Things like basic programming and web design can make a huge difference in your appeal to potential employers. Finally, have fun with it. Personality is the key to success and there's no better way to get noticed than by being genuine and enjoying what you do.

Question: What has been a favourite campaign?

Answer: While working at a video game studio, our marketing team was tasked with launching a social media campaign around an upcoming title being released. It was an online game targeted at kids between the ages of 12 to 15, a demographic not likely to be on something like Twitter. Our goal was to encourage players to create accounts and support our social media efforts for the launch, and as well have them engaging each other outside of the game. To do this we started by looking to our established customer base and those of similar products and organizations. We learned that we needed to incentivize: give users a reason to follow you, and a reason to keep coming back.

Knowing that our fans and the general gaming community were passionate about the development process, we worked with the art

(Continued)

team to create a contest that would allow three creative fans the chance to have a design they created implemented in the game. Users were encouraged to share entries and accumulate support for their piece through coordinated social media and at the same time spreading word about our upcoming launch. They would

then vote and curate on our official forums and begin to establish a base for the community. In the end, we had successfully launched our social media accounts as platforms for community managers to continue to engage the community and support it through new content and similar events.

Social Networking Sites

Facebook, Myspace, and LinkedIn are some of the most popular examples of social networking sites. Organizations, brands, and causes participate and become users by creating a page. Pages include videos, photos, and links, as well as discussion groups that can be used to engage with your audience and respond to individual inquiries and concerns. Keys to maintaining your page include updating it regularly, responding in a timely manner to comments and inquiries, and keeping it current. Google is highly responsive to Facebook, and your pages can be indexed in the same way as web pages.

Podcasts and Vodcasts

Podcasts (audio) and vodcasts (video) are recordings edited to be in the same format as radio or television programs on certain topics or commentaries. These tools enable you to produce your own radio or TV shows and disseminate them via the Internet directly to

Facebook is an example of a highly popular social networking site.

Source: MCT/Newscom





Jian Ghomeshi’s *Q* on CBC Radio is also a popular podcast.

Source: From the Twitter service @jianghomeshi

your target audiences. People either listen to them online or download them directly to their players or computers. You can also pitch story ideas and suggest names of potential guests to be interviewed by the hosts. This can provide excellent coverage for spokespersons from your organization. Many radio shows are also run as podcasts, including *Under the Influence*, *Q*, and *WireTap*, all from CBC Radio.

Video-Sharing Sites

Video-sharing sites such as YouTube are a popular tool to share and view video clips. On YouTube, companies can create their own channel to share videos on, such as corporate videos, commercials, video news releases, and vodcasts. Videos are a great way to share useful information, entertaining videos, or how-to videos with an audience. In its “Our Food. Your Questions.” campaign, McDonald’s used online videos to answer consumers’ questions about its food, such as, “Why does your food look different in ads than in your restaurants?”¹⁷ The clothing retailer Mexx also used English and French YouTube videos to raise awareness of its brand. These how-to videos offered useful fashion lessons, such as the “how to tie a tie” video.¹⁸

As discussed in Chapter 11, Maple Leaf Foods effectively used YouTube when listeria was found in its foods, resulting in illness and the death of several customers. The

crisis strategy the company employed included video messages from president and CEO Michael McCain expressing how sorry he was and explaining what Maple Leaf Foods was doing to remedy the situation.

Forums

Forums are online discussion groups and communities where people who share the same interests get together to share information and socialize. They generally form around specific topics, such as pregnancy, fitness, or hobbies. They can be an effective way to reach a very targeted, niche, or local community. You can either join a forum or start your own. Sites such as Yahoo! host a number of forums.

Bookmarking

Bookmarking on sites such as Delicious.com and Digg.com allows members to submit stories and information on their favourite sites, which can then be shared with all members. These bookmarking sites can do wonders to drive traffic to your website if a story about your organization appears on one of them. On some, such as Digg.com, people vote on their favourite stories, providing additional endorsement. In terms of influence, the homepage of Digg.com receives substantially more visitors than that of the websites of Canada's top media such as *The Globe and Mail*.

Photo Sharing

Flicker and Instagram are examples of photo-sharing sites where users can upload their photos and share them with others. Many of the photos on these sites can be used by others free of charge as long as credit is given to the photo provider. Sites like Instagram allow you to easily post your photo to social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. An example of a company doing interesting things on Instagram is Sharpie, the maker of markers. The company posts photos of images hand-drawn with its markers to its account.¹⁹

Thinking Like a PR Practitioner

1. You have been assigned to create a blog for your organization and need to compile the subject of the first five entries. Brainstorm what they can be for:
 - The Royal Canadian Air Force (target audience: new recruits): www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca
 - Canadian Blood Services (target audience: blood donors): www.blood.ca
2. Discuss how you would decide which social media tools to use in a campaign.
3. Explain how to approach a blogger.

Sites like Pinterest are similar to Flickr or Instagram, but instead of sharing their own images, users share images collected from online sources. Users share photos, videos, and other content on their boards for others to see. Organizations can use Pinterest to provide content to their customers. For example, *Flare Magazine* pins fashion- and beauty-related photos that readers would enjoy.

CASE STUDY SAVING THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST



A social media campaign was devised to save the Great Bear Rainforest.

Source: © Steven J. Kazlowski/Alamy

The following case study illustrates how a campaign can reach and engage its target audiences by using multiple social media platforms. The campaign messages were all actionable, easily enabling the public to support the cause.

A consortium of environmental groups retained Capulet Communications, a digital communication agency, to pressure the B.C. government to ratify an agreement to create a nature conservancy. Capulet's role was to raise online awareness of the campaign and get signatures for a petition to be sent to the B.C. government. The campaign was titled "Keep the Promise: Save the Great Bear Rainforest."

British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest is the world's largest intact coastal temperate rainforest. It is a precious piece of land since it is home to a large number of animals and plants, such as migratory birds, salmon, and the unique white spirit bear.

Capulet employed several online tactics to meet its objectives. The agency created a Facebook group, which recruited 4000 members. The page encouraged members to sign an online petition. It also asked them to donate their own Facebook status message to the campaign for one day. Capulet organized a photo contest in which 200 Flickr users submitted photos related to the reasons why the government needed to keep its promise to conserve this ecologically significant rainforest. The agency also pitched the story to bloggers who cover environmental issues, resulting in positive social media coverage. Other PR tactics included a Twitter feed and the online promotion of a YouTube video.

Success for the campaign was measured in the number of emails that were sent to the government through the official campaign website (100 a day at its height) and the number of people who signed the petition (16,000). As a result of the campaign, the B.C. government kept its promise and ratified the agreement.

Questions

1. Discuss how social media tools were used in this campaign. What other platforms would work?
2. Explain what is meant by "the campaign messages were all actionable."

AUTHOR'S OWN EXPERIENCE

Habitat JAM

My public relations agency was retained by Habitat JAM for a 72-hour online event and conversation on urban sustainability issues sponsored by the Canadian Government, UN-HABITAT, and IBM. The objective was to provide a forum where people all over the world could share best practices on different urban topics, such as affordable housing, safety, and sustainable development. The goal was to create a global problem-solving session in which practical solutions successfully tested in some cities, such as ways to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers or cost-effective water filtration systems, could then be

shared and implemented by others. We decided to employ a strategy using a media mix that included traditional media and social media.

A media conference was organized to reach international journalists at Canada House in London, England. We also targeted digital media, bloggers, and online communities by distributing information to them in many different languages. Results included coverage that was global and that appeared in print, broadcast, and online media in a variety of languages and countries, resulting in tens of thousands of people around the globe signing up for Habitat JAM.

tools

- photo & video sharing
- forums
- bookmarking
- podcasts & vodcasts
- social networking
- blogs
- outreach
- organizational

- niche
- hyperniche
- hyperlocal

opportunities

- global
- market intelligence
- competition
- direct
- target audiences

fundamentals

- key messages
- objectives
- target audiences
- strategy
- media mix

rules of

engagement

- two-way communication
- transparency
- trust
- permission
- sharing

new media

- influencers
- brand individuals
- trusted

challenges

- many voices
- fragmented audiences
- issues & crises

Social Media

Key Terms

blog roll A list of all the blogs another blogger follows.

media mix A combination of different media.

new media influencers Social media users whom others follow and who influence others.

hyperlocal Extremely local communities.

hyperniche Extremely targeted audiences.

rules of engagement Practices and behaviours expected of social media participants.

social capital The worth of a social network with regards to influence and sharing.

social media Digital media that are both created and consumed by users.

touch points Communication channels where audiences interact with brands or information.

user-generated content Information that is created by social media users.

viral campaign A popular campaign that is quickly and widely shared among viewers through social media.

Weblinks

Booooooom

www.booooooom.com

Capulet Communications

www.capulet.com

Charlene Li interview in *Fastcompany.com*

www.fastcompany.com/articles/2008/06/interview-charlene-li.html

David Armano

darmano.typepad.com/

Directions4Success

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"Golden Eagle Snatches Kid" Internet Hoax Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CE0Q904gtMI>

Groundswell book

www.forrester.com/Groundswell

Habitat JAM

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LintBucket Media

www.lintbucket.com

Maple Leaf Foods Listeria Recall video

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Marketing Conversation

www.marketingconversation.com

Nature's Path

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Entry-Level Positions

In our agency, new recruits were responsible for creating and updating media databases, organizing media coverage, sourcing materials such as creative content for media information kits, conducting market research, and identifying industry trends, in addition to some administrative duties such as photocopying, coordinating couriers, and running errands.

The most common job title for entry-level positions in public relations is coordinator or assistant. It generally means that the job involves working with a more senior person and assisting him or her with projects and campaigns. Coordinators and assistants are expected to be organized, detail oriented, deadline driven, and to provide general assistance even for tasks that do not fall under their job description. The tasks you will perform upon first being hired in a public relations capacity will vary depending on the size of the organization that you join.

It is important to remember that public relations is a fast-moving field and that opportunities for promotions are numerous for a hard-working, fast learner. Managers are quick to reward new practitioners who show many of the personality skills described in this book.

The following are examples of entry-level tasks and responsibilities:

- Attending industry functions
- Performing administrative duties
- Sourcing materials for a variety of applications
- Obtaining quotes
- Taking on any task that senior practitioners do not have time for
- Responding to requests for information from the public
- Researching and writing media materials
- Updating social media tools
- Updating websites
- Pitching story ideas to the media
- Media monitoring
- Competition monitoring and market intelligence gathering
- Assisting senior practitioners with campaigns
- Creating and maintaining media lists and other contact databases
- Assisting with or planning events
- Providing on-site assistance at events
- Sourcing all kinds of materials
- Conducting research
- Performing administrative tasks such as filing, photocopying, and assembling media information kits