

PR swaggers in as content loses its crown

By Sasha Kupritz, issued by TenacityPR

8 Oct 2020

An article by Damon Stapleton on *Bizcommunity* made me laugh; his reference to the word "content" was hilarious, as he says, "In the good old days, it began with some classics. Words like mobile, digital, apps and then we moved on to the incomprehensible 'content.'"



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Damon Stapleton 30 Sep 2020



This made me think of a term I often use even though it's a cliché, Bill Gates referred to it in a 1996 essay; “content is king”, the PR and media industry should have been celebrating since Gates’ reference of content was based on editorial in mass media.



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Since a survey back in 2015 by *PR Week*, public relations has been accused of having an ‘inferiority’ complex, and in due course was also criticised for not publicising the PR industry better, in an ironic twist of fate. More recently, buzzwords in the marketing industry such as “content management” amongst newish terms like traditional PR and digital PR are often used to replace public relations.

PR should be at the heart of any content-led initiative

However, for the most powerful communications strategy, content management should be based on editorial, and PR should be at the heart of any content-led initiative. It could be argued that a lot of content management and marketing is in fact PR-lite in the first place.

Even paid media or advertising depends on content. There may be some creative involved, but ads are a kind of content. As the mixture of paid, owned, and earned is becoming more complex and creating new marketing buzzwords it's never been more important to create a united industry of content creators and communicators, the original PR roots.

The public relations industry was first and foremost founded by people who were in the media industry, journalists and scholars such as Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, and Daniel Edelman. Edelman coined the portmanteau 'Advertorial' in the 1940s, a mainstay in the PR industry ever since. However, if the use of advertorial or paid-for continues to blur the lines between PR and advertising should PR professionals only be responsible for editorial... Or should PR have access to marketing budgets?

Public relations exist in real-time

Whether we like it or not, fake news now has a spot on the table, the Achilles heel of the PR profession. This grey-area propaganda, with the democratisation of the media industry, is unstoppable. PR pros can only hope that our efforts at securing vetted, third-party endorsed content in the form of editorial is appreciated for its honesty, transparency and newsworthiness.



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Infamously the mother of PR, Helen Woodward, stated in 1938 that:

“ Advertising is what you pay for, publicity is what you pray for. ”

Yet measuring PR success is still debatable. Priceless doesn't make business sense since it's unmeasurable, and so without any other options, we turn to advertising value equivalent (AVE), comparing the amount of ad spend vs PR free editorial, centimetre by centimetre squared. This is generally frowned upon because it's looking at the wrong data.

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So, what still makes public relations unique compared to the rest of the marketing industries? It is that as communicators we work closest to the media industries. I often explain to new clients that public relations exist in real-time, what is considered newsworthy now is old in a day, there are only two options, either create a news story or join a conversation that is currently trending.

PR should adopt some swagger

PR people are storytellers. They create narratives and contextualise content. A great idiom of the 21st Century is,

“ If content is king then context must be queen. ”

In 2020 we are seeing the rise in the culture of content because as channels and platforms are exponential, PR communicators are becoming better able to be the voice of the brand.

The PR industry has evolved into an industry (ies), there are many differently talented people working in it, as ex-Fleishman Hillard CEO, Dave Senay, once said: "PR should adopt some "swagger" and get on the front foot in the way it presents itself.

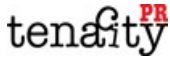
No longer should PR folks be the needy children pressing their noses up against the window while their advertising colleagues party inside." Instead of seeing PR as an outsider, in the 21st Century, PR works with advertising and marketing to generate ideas, craft messages, engineer news, and amplify information.

ABOUT SASHA KUPRITZ

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