

Five Tips for Delivering Great PR for Less Money



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Introduction

Bailouts, budgets and buyouts are all over the news. Every dollar counts in this turbulent economy, and doing more with less is on everyone's mind. With tightening budgets, Public Relations professionals are tasked with finding ways to cut back spending without sacrificing results.

The analysis of spending during the 2001-2002 post-dot.com bubble showed that companies which continued investing in public relations were better positioned when markets recovered than their peers who cut back on corporate communications. Most experts now agree that PR is one of the most cost-effective ways to promote your company, but the reality of budget pressure necessitates delivering results while spending less. Fortunately, the latest tools can help PR professionals accelerate the impact of their initiatives while being budget conscious. Using five key cost-cutting measures outlined below, you can still accomplish your Public Relations objectives in a tough economy, out-maneuver your competitors and position your organization for the inevitable economic rebound.

"In a sluggish economy, maintaining a strong, positive image can differentiate your company (or client) from competitors and send a strong message that you are not only weathering the storm, but also performing in spite of obstacles."

- As published in PRWeek Op-Ed by Shannon Troughton at WellPoint, October 11, 2008

Tip #1 Automate Manual Tasks to Reduce 3rd Party Fees

For many companies, agency retainers are a large portion of their PR budget. Agencies can indeed be a critical strategic element to a successful PR program. Unfortunately, many companies focus their agencies on the wrong things, using them to build media lists, monitor news and create custom reports highlighting the results of their PR initiatives. By automating these tasks your organization can reduce the amount of money being spent each month on 3rd parties and instead focus these valuable resources on developing strategic initiatives to help set your organization apart from the competition. For example, integrated PR software can help automate three areas that have traditionally been time and resource drains on internal and agency resources:

- **Researching & Building Media lists-** One of the staples of your programs and one of the most time consuming. An up-to-date, accurate list of journalists that write about your company or your industry is a valuable commodity, but building and maintaining targeted lists to reach your key media is a task in itself. Building these lists from disparate sources, including hard copy list books and websites requires hours of your time and with the rapid changes in the media, your list can be out of date before you even finish. Today's tools not only provide the information and resources to easily build a targeted media list but automate the updating process as well.
- **News Monitoring-** Monitoring the news and current headlines keeps your company in-tune with the industry, big players and current trends. With a 24/7 news cycle and a growing list of outlets to track, monitoring the news can be a daunting (and expensive) task. PR management systems provide much needed relief. Enabling you to automatically search on your keywords, a solution like Vocus searches over 50,000 print, online and broadcast outlets worldwide to bring you the news that is important to you. Clips can also be collected and archived within the PR system for future reference and for measurement and reporting. Using a system such as Vocus, you also have full control of which search terms you use at anytime and virtually no limit to the number of competitors, products or message search terms you can monitor. Instead of hours being spent each morning building a clip book, online news monitoring services such as Vocus provide a timely and accurate assessment of your coverage in just a few minutes.
- **Measurement and Reporting-** Today's tools can create professional-looking reports in seconds, including executive briefing documents that highlight your results and impact to the organization. For instance, Vocus offers over 140 different charts that measure such things as your organization's share of voice, coverage momentum, ad value and much, much more. It can even provide an instant assessment of the quality of coverage, including the prominence of your organization and the positive or negative tone of your news. Your third party resources shouldn't spend time developing a report that you will ultimately spend hours reformatting to meet your preferences. Choose a report structure that works for you and use the tools to automate the process.

In short, integrated PR software allows you to reduce the time and budget spent on manual tasks and instead allows you and your agency to focus on developing and deploying strategies with long term benefits.

Tip #2 Reducing Press Release Cost while Increasing their Impact

Traditional newswires have long been the primary avenue for reaching the media. However, with each release costing anywhere from \$500 to \$1,500 and most companies issuing dozens of releases per year, it's not uncommon for an organization to spend upwards of \$50,000 or more per year on wire distribution. Even more problematic, the vast majority of these releases don't reach the right journalist and never result in any coverage. Fortunately, techniques exist that can help organizations greatly reduce their dependency on expensive wire services while increasing the value and visibility of their press releases.

- **Direct-to-Journalist News Distribution-** While wire services blast press releases to newsrooms, many PR professionals are taking a more surgical approach to reach the media. Having used a journalist database to identify and target the right journalists, PR professionals can use PR software to email their press release directly to those journalists. Equally important, integrated software such as Vocus allows the PR team to track which journalists opened the press release, requested more information or wrote a story. Not only can organizations save money, but they can actually track the impact of their news and build more personal relationships with journalists.
- **Online Press Release Distribution-** The Internet has significantly changed the structure of communications. Comprising an audience of nearly four out of five adults (2007, Harris Interactive Study) and consisting of consumers, media, investors and more, the Internet has greatly enhanced the amount and availability of information. For a fraction of the cost of traditional wire services, you can distribute a press release via an online service like PRWeb (www.prweb.com) and ensure your news appears in search engine results, is featured on top news sites like Yahoo! News and is distributed directly to bloggers and potential customers interested in your news. Costs typically range from \$80 to \$200 per release, a significant savings over traditional wire services. There are even free sites that allow organizations to post press releases, although many of these sites have little or no distribution and are not highly ranked by search engines like Google and Yahoo!. An added feature of sites like PRWeb is that they allow you to embed links, images, attachments and even video into your release, all of which help increase the visibility of your news and drive traffic to your website.

With software like Vocus and services like PRWeb, organizations can save thousands on press release distribution while still reaching the media and increasing both the visibility and impact of their news.

Tip #3 Increase Productivity and Reduce Costs

While automating some of the manual tasks discussed above is a great way to save money without sacrificing results, increasing the productivity of your resources can have an equally dramatic impact. Whether it is managing the various PR initiatives underway or improving the collaboration between staff and external resources, using software designed specifically for PR professionals can help. In one place, you can see a calendar of upcoming activities, manage various projects and tasks and track results. Even if you are a PR team of one, today's PR software can allow you to deploy public relations initiatives as if you had a team of people on your staff.

Tip #4 Leveraging the Internet to Reach Your Audience

Social media has a tremendous viral ability to reach wide audiences in just a short amount of time—presenting a substantial opportunity and also posing a significant threat for communications professionals. Through social media, organizations can now communicate and get immediate feedback from users, encouraging a process of dialogue between user and organization. Enabling comments on a corporate blog, for example, has resulted in a positive impact for many organizations that have been able to gain valuable customer feedback from the practice.

- **Blogs-** If you haven't started a corporate blog, now may be the perfect time. For little or no costs, you can set up a blog using software such as WordPress (www.wordpress.org) that increases your organization's visibility online. Doing so can also help position your organization's management as thought leaders and raise their profile on important issues. It may also help attract the attention of search engines and drive more traffic to your corporate website—all good things that can be done for very little. If you decide the time is right to launch a blog, there are plenty of experts who have published guidelines on the internet designed to help you get started.
- **Multimedia-** Incorporating video and other multimedia elements is a way to really engage your audience and drive attention for integrated campaigns. Building a strategy that incorporates multimedia, whether video or audio, into your PR activity will complement the traditional approaches you already use.

- **Podcasts-** Look for opportunities to engage with those already active with multimedia. Thousands of podcasts are currently active throughout the Web, focused on a countless array of topics. Find podcasters who focus on your subject, and reach out to them. Before you spend the time and effort required to create and promote your own podcasts, see what resources exist and use them to help spread your message. Services like PRWeb even allow you to attach a podcast to your press releases.

Leverage social media tools, blogs and other online sources to distribute your message and monitor the activities of your competitors. Target and engage the new media to help them work for you. One last thing—if you jump into the social media world be careful that you have a service which can provide you with background on key bloggers and monitor top blogs. Remember, monitoring and managing your reputation is especially critical as you become more active in the 24x7 world of social media.

Tip #5 Demonstrating Results and Maximizing Impact

Nothing helps keep your budget intact like demonstrating results. Fortunately, with the growing adoption of public relations software, professionals are not only able to automate and manage communication processes more easily but demonstrate measurable results from their efforts to management. Traditionally, PR professionals have relied on less tangible and more time-consuming methods to prove their value to the business. Now PR professionals have the tools to easily analyze campaigns, offer insight and demonstrate the impact PR is having on the bottom-line.

- **Determine Success-** Every company has different criteria for success and it's critical to find a solution that is flexible enough to provide an array of measurement options so you can ultimately select what is important to your organization. Deciding what it is you want to measure is critical, as most good PR analysis tools today can automatically track news by company, product, spokespeople and competitors—giving you the insight most important to your organization.
- **Drive Revenue-** With tools like PRWeb, PR professionals are now in the position to leverage their news to increase traffic to their website, directly drive buyer behaviors and demonstrate how something as seemingly benign as a press release can drive revenue. By getting your news in places like Google and Yahoo!, where millions of potential customers are searching every day, you can use press releases to highlight new products, seasonal promotions or even new content like a whitepaper to attract potential customers. Whether you are a Business-to-Business or Business-to-Consumer company, it is time to rethink the traditional press release and demonstrate to management that PR can not just drive awareness, but increase revenue as well.
- **Follow Message-** Knowing where to place your efforts is great, but you also need to know how to tailor them to ensure the message isn't lost. Using the analytic solutions available, you can ensure the results you are getting are those that will help your message penetrate and equal success for the organization. The latest PR software provides PR professionals with the ability to not only keep track of their clips but also the messages each contain to ensure you are getting the right results for the organization.
- **Adjust Strategies-** PR professionals can also use this data to gauge what activities are most effective in helping land those messages in stories and subsequently adjust all their strategies to mimic the results and maximize impact. News monitoring is an integral component to this. Use this information to determine where your message has penetrated. By looking at the outlets and Designated Market Areas (DMA), you can see where you have succeeded and more importantly where you need to focus.
- **Monitor Impacts-** It's important that your analytic tools can measure more than just how many clips you receive. As we all know, not all outlets and articles are created equal so why would the front page of a daily newspaper and a brief in an obscure blog with limited readership, each count the same. The prominence and tone of your coverage makes all the difference. With the sophisticated measurement functionality available in leading PR management tools, companies can now track where and how often their news appears in an article, rank or score the impact of the outlet by assigning a weight based on importance to the organization and determine if the stories are positive, negative or neutral.

At the end of the day, it really is all about results. Planning and executing perfectly mean nothing if you come up empty. With PR analytic tools you can find out how your programs are performing practically in real time. You can not only show the clips and link each back to actual dollar value. Companies can now measure how much traffic PR activities drive to the website, where the traffic is coming from and, most importantly, if that traffic is leading to sales. Organizations can also compare the

PR results to advertising to estimate how many ad dollars would have been needed to produce the same results. For public companies, you can link the stock performance directly to the news coverage and announcements. Remember to showcase your results. Provide your executives with a dashboard so they can immediately see just how much of an impact PR has had on their business.

Conclusion

Today's economy means every company must measure PR to highlight its contribution to the bottom line. Analytic capabilities within PR management technology can help industry-leading organizations better manage and measure their PR efforts. If you have not already established an effective PR management solution that incorporates metrics to increase and demonstrate your positive impact on the business, now is the time.

The methods outlined above will help you save money and get more from your public relations campaigns. By adopting some of these tips and having the discipline to measure the myriad of PR programs, PR professionals are able to optimize their campaigns, maximize their results and cut back on costs, all while simultaneously proving PR's value to the business.

About Vocus, Inc.

Vocus, Inc. (NASDAQ: VOCS) is a leading provider of on-demand software for public relations management. Our web-based software suite helps organizations of all sizes to fundamentally change the way they communicate with both the media and the public, optimizing their public relations and increasing their ability to measure its impact. Our on-demand software addresses the critical functions of public relations including media relations, news distribution and news monitoring. Vocus is used by over 2,900 organizations worldwide and is available in five languages. Vocus is based in Lanham, MD, with offices in North America, Europe, and Asia. For more information please visit www.vocus.com or call 800.345.5572.