

PR News

Friend of PR News,

Savvy brands are aware of the value of good content in this time of skeletal newsrooms. They know that their target audiences will share good content, whether it's produced by a b2c or b2b brand or by an agency or by an established news brand. And savvy brands also aren't worried about who's responsible for creating that content. Marketing, advertising, PR—it's all the same to a content-savvy C-suite. They just need to get the good content out there.

If you're a PR practitioner, you may assume that content marketing belongs to another function—somebody else in your organization or a rival agency. PR News has programmed its June 18 Content Marketing Boot Camp in New York City to make the case that in the fast-changing Wild West landscape of content marketing, you, as a PR practitioner, are already in the business of content. You always have been. You just need some expert guidance and case studies from content strategists who have already broken down silos and expanded their own conception of the role of a communications professional.

The Huffington Post, JetBlue Airways, BuzzFeed, Waggener Edstrom Worldwide, McMurry/TMG, Time Inc. News & Sports, Hotwire PR, Peppercomm and Gibbs & Soell will present case study examples of successful content marketing programs, share tips on how to find and create content affordably, and discuss how to integrate content marketing and promoted social posts into your overall communications strategy and how to produce shareable content.

This day of learning will include the opportunity to network with these content strategists and with your peers. It will also feature a luncheon keynote from Janis Forman of UCLA's Anderson School of Management and author of the new book "Storytelling in Business: The Authentic and Fluent Organization." Dr. Forman will make clear the connection between strong storytelling skills and successful enterprises.

So I hope to see you in New York on June 18 for this day that will show PR practitioners how they can play a bigger role in the evolution of content marketing.

The complete agenda and registration information can be found at:
www.prnewsonline.com/events/content-marketing.

All the best,



Steve Goldstein
Editorial Director, Events
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PR News

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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PR Pros Look to the Mommy Track To Jumpstart Brand Communication

Trish Taylor, PR and marketing events manager for floor-care company **Bissell**, didn't know what to expect when she attended the **Mom 2.0 Summit** last month in Laguna Niguel, California. The event, which is designed to facilitate conversation between moms and marketers regarding opportuni-

ties in social media, attracted nearly 500 PR and marketing execs and moms who are constantly online, blogging, creating content or checking to see if certain products pass the mom test. "Sometimes you go to events and attendees just want free stuff," Taylor says. "But this is a very engaging audience, which asks questions about your products and wants information about the heritage of the company. We're into the

fourth generation of family leadership and that's something that resonates" with moms.

In the last two years Bissell has started to tap into the rapidly growing number of moms who are blogging, Taylor says. Via networks like **Mom Central**, Bissell reaches out to about 50 moms to review the company's products.

"We're getting first-hand testimonials that we can then go back and distribute to our

sales force and marketing department," she adds. "The bloggers often post stories about using the products that we can then share on our social channels. [With moms] it's all about give and take."

In the social marketing universe, every day is starting to resemble Mother's Day.

This year there are 4.2 million moms who blog, up from 3.9 million in 2010, according

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(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn in This Week's Issue of PR News

1. Mom bloggers have become some of the biggest influencers on social channels. (p. 1)
2. Cultivating relationships with mom bloggers is all about give and take. (p. 1)
3. There tends to be no inter-linking and uniform database for data capture on social and environmental metrics. (p. 2)
4. Just 18% of executives believe that their innovation strategy is "delivering a competitive advantage." (p. 3)
5. "Virtual" and physical purses were a key element in Allstate Foundation's PR campaign designed to combat domestic violence. (p. 4)
6. Don't let growth get in the way of dealing with clients on a day-to-day basis. (p. 7)
7. PR and public affairs professionals evaluate agency services differently than ad professionals. (p. 8)

► Workflow

By Indra Gardiner Bowers

What Would You Do Differently If You Were Launching Your Agency Today?



One of the benefits of age is experience. It may be one of the few benefits, but we'll take it. Most members of PRSA's Counselors Academy section have been around the sun more times than they will admit.

This group of senior-level agency owners and managers get together once a year at their Spring Conference to learn best practices in agency management and get inspired by some of the top practitioners in the field. In the weeks leading up to this year's conference in Austin we asked a few agency leaders: "What is the one thing you wish you had known before starting your agency?"

Their answers were diverse and insightful. They point to some of the key lessons experience brings in the challenging and rewarding work of managing an agency.

Scott W. Allison, Chairman & CEO, Allison+Partners

I do wish I had known how challenging it would be to constantly motivate and retain top employees and also the dramatic changes that would come about in our industry.

I often say that PR didn't change that much from 1965 to 1990. The real dramatic changes took place between 1997 and 2010. I would have liked to know about this

seismic shift and the investments needed to prosper.



Ann Barks, Ann Barks Public Relations

If I were going at it all again, I wish I'd known this in advance: Don't be too conservative early on. Embrace challenging clients or projects.

Letting the fear of failure hold you back from taking on projects that seem too risky means you pass up the chance to do what you know you can make possible. Be ready to take a leap of faith in yourself.

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▶ How To...

CSR

PR Measurement

By Susan Nickbarg

Succeed in CSR and Sustainability



As discussed in *PR News* last week, the recent debut of the SPI (Social Progress Index) has major repercussions for the communications industry.

The SPI is designed to measure countries' social and environmental progress as a complement to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which measures the value of all the products and services produced in one year.

Below are a few guidelines (with subheads) on how to help your organization excel in different aspects of social responsibility and sustainability communications:

▶ Management communications:

A key challenge is that not all leaders are aware of what metrics to use to measure, benchmark and communicate in ways that demonstrate progress with corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability. In today's landscape, where there is also an evolutionary course from informal statements to formal sustainability reporting, PR and marketing can collaborate and help to:

Figure out which social and environmental metrics are important to your organization's stakeholders.

Communicators no longer have to rely solely on opinion and story telling about social and environment impacts.

There are outside standards-setting organizations with frameworks and processes that can be adapted, such as the GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) or CDP (Carbon Disclosure Project) that provide focus to sustainability reporting benchmarks and communications.

Monitor global stock exchanges for listed companies in terms of social and environmental corporate governance and disclosure requirements. New requirements related to corporate responsibility have been introduced in Scandinavian countries as well as the Shenzhen and Shanghai Stock Exchanges (China), and the Bovespa Stock Exchange (Brazil).

By monitoring exchanges of interest you can be ready to advise your company what it must do to qualify.

Track which customers face amended "greener" sourcing requirements when they purchase goods and services.

Collaborate with colleagues on the types of communications messages, documentation materials, and channels needed among your organizations' vendors and partners to describe "greener" production and sales in areas including sourcing, recycling, and waste management.

▶ Marketing communications:

Challenges for external marketing communications generally refer to the 'consumer' and/or 'NGOs' and 'crisis management.'

A key challenge is showing that content is material, transparent and validated. Here, PR and marketing can collaborate several ways to:

Engage third-party auditing of CSR reports. The impact of external reporting assurance not only builds trust, but also can impact selection into prestigious lists such as *Newsweek's* Greenest Companies or CRO 100 Best Citizens.

PR and marketing can be advisors when deciding which social and environmental goals and metrics to publicize.

Have a sustainability-related crisis management communications sub-plan embedded into the corporate disaster recovery plan. This would include a chain-of-call-command and action plan for sustainability-related crisis and disaster for when ethical, environment, activist or labor strike crises could arise.

▶ Organizational communications: A key challenge facing many companies is that usually there is no inter-linking and uniform database for data capture on social and environmental metrics.

Therefore PR and marketing can help raise internal awareness to create uniform databases for capturing social and environmental data metrics.

Set up NGO stakeholder discussion councils and meet with SRI analysts on social and environmental issues in regular briefings. Building stakeholder councils with specific communities and/or with NGOs and SRI analysts on social and environmental impact fosters working relationships and obtains important feedback loops.

Being a part of culture change to help reconfigure from old to new requires some PR mojo. By leveraging a few of these practices, you can power up tangible actions and be ready to engage in planning and sustainability communications that create an effective and material dialog. **PRN**

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Innovation Sounds Great (Until You Have to Pay For It); And Yet Another Sign That the Post-PC Era is Upon Us

► **Innovation is on Everyone's Mind (Sort of):**

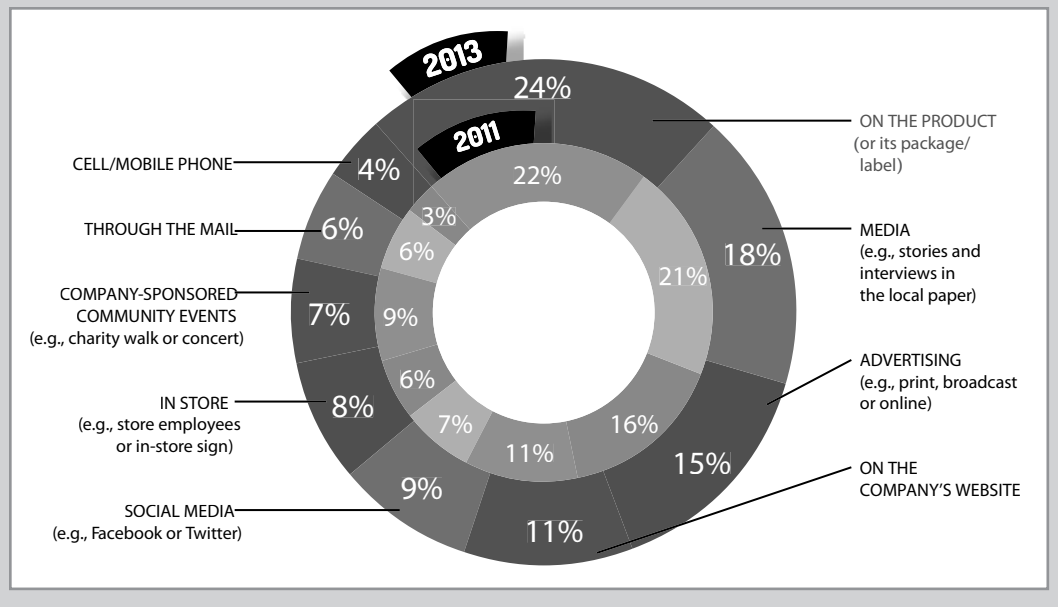
Despite the growing importance of innovation, line extensions continue to take precedence over product development, according to a recent study by **Accenture**.

The study, which took the pulse of 519 executives at large U.S., UK and French organizations with revenues exceeding \$100 million, reveals that there are two major obstacles standing in the way of bolstering revenue returns from innovation: companies being too conservative and the so-called "invention trap" (or lack of infrastructure to bring a new product to market efficiently).

Here are some other stats from the survey:

- 70% of respondents say that innovation is among their top priorities, with 18% saying it is the top priority.
- 52% of respondents from the communications sector consider innovation "extremely important."
- 51% of respondents report an increase in funding for new products and services, versus 10% who scaled back.
- 60% of respondents state their company has a chief innovation officer, up 6% from 2009.

Most effective communication channels for information about social and environmental programs and products



Traditional channels continue to reign supreme when it comes to reaching consumers about your CSR initiatives, according to the 2013 Cone Communications/Echo Global Study. On-pack (24%), in the media (18%) and advertising (15%) were deemed the most effective conduits for CSR communications, the study said.

• Only 18% of respondents believe their innovation strategy is "delivering a competitive advantage," despite 93% indicating long-term success is dependent upon innovation.

Source: Accenture

► **No Longer Exotic, Tablets Go Mainstream:**
Tablets and mobile devices,

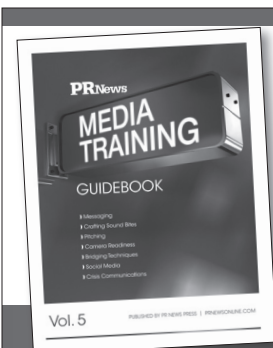
of course, rate as one of the biggest innovations in the last decade.

According to recent NPD Group and IDC studies, there are upwards of 32 million Web-accessible tablets in the hands of consumers right now, while shipments of tablets were projected to grow by 142% in the first quarter of this year.

Below are some other nuggets from the studies:

- 93% of U.S. households are now connected to the Internet.
- Smartphones are now in the hands of 57% of cell phone users, up 5% compared with 2012.
- 53% of Internet households now own tablets, up 18% compared with 2012. **PRN**

Sources: IDC, NPD Group



PR News Media Training Guidebook

In this must-read edition, top media trainers share their insights and tips to help you set the agenda when dealing with the media.

Chapters Include:

- Overview
- Journalist Relations
- Messaging
- Game Day Prep
- Prepping the C-Suite & Other Spokespeople
- Before and During the Interview
- Social Media
- Crisis Management

Take this opportunity to increase your chances of success as you send your messages out into the 24/7 media cycle. Order your copy at store.prnnews.com/media-training-guidebook-vol-5.html or call Client Services at 888-707-5814.

Allstate Foundation Builds A PR Campaign To Take The Conversation About Domestic Violence To A Higher Level

Company: Allstate Foundation
Agency: Zeno Group
Timeframe: October 2012

Allstate Insurance Co. sees all sorts of claims submitted each year that the insurer decides whether it should pay out. The Allstate Foundation, however, picks its issues and can offer up big bucks in support.

Last year, the Allstate Foundation didn't just throw money and energy at the problem of domestic violence in America—an issue that the company has been combating since at least 2005—but, with an assist from the **Zeno Group**, helped to drive discussion about a topic that most people prefer not to talk about.

The PR vehicle was the Purple Purse, the foundation's symbol for domestic violence that launched in 2011.

In 2012, the goal was not only to get people to talk about the subject but use the Purse to inspire conversation

and show that the Allstate group is a leader in driving the overall awareness about domestic violence.

"Domestic violence has been called the No. 1 human rights issue of our time," says Kyle Donash, communication manager, media relations and issues management at Allstate. "Furthermore, lacking financial knowledge and resources is cited as the number-one indicator of whether a domestic violence victim will stay, leave or return to an abusive relationship."

PURSE STRINGS

According to PurplePurse.com, one in four women are subjected to domestic violence in their lifetime yet more than one third of Americans have never discussed the issue at all.

With stats like that to consider, the Foundation offered \$175,000 to the YWCA for programs to help domestic-violence survivors.

However, Allstate didn't just fork over the cash. People had to "pass" virtual and physical



Photo courtesy: Allstate Foundation

Purple Purse Signage and Purple Purse Facebook Application: Zeno developed a wide variety of Purple Purse signage to make the message more shareable on social media.

purses (filled with information about domestic violence) to one another, with each pass triggering another small donation.

The campaign reached its goal in the first two weeks of October, and the total amount garnered was \$250,000.

"Zeno and the Foundation literally put the purple purse

into the hands of Americans to get involved. Purse sharing, both physically and virtually, was critical in achieving our campaign goals," says Danny Cohn, senior VP of Zeno Group. "Virtual and physical purses will be used in the 2013 campaign."

There were 500 physical purses stuffed with information about domestic violence; each purse was passed between thousands of people throughout the campaign.

These were distributed across the country to key stakeholders, such as 75 Allstate agents, advocates for educating people about domestic violence and journalists.

"Agency owners were selected to participate based on involvement in the Allstate Against Abuse Team, a group of agency owners who use their financial expertise to help sur-

4 Tips on Generating Good PR Out of a Tough Subject

Getting involved with a difficult subject can lend an organization a sense of seriousness and empathy, but it can also weigh down brand image. Zeno Group shared its thoughts on how best to turn tough subjects into good PR:

1. **Get creative.** Further engage the general public by making it easier to talk about difficult topics in a creative, relatable way. We put a powerful, physical resource into the hands of Americans, helping reinforce the icon and need to raise awareness (about domestic violence). Also distributing signage and media toolkits to key stakeholders you involve helps spread awareness in an effective and meaningful way.

2. **Think about partnering** with a celebrity spokesperson to discuss the topic in the mainstream media.
3. **Develop both online and offline elements** to your campaign, giving people a chance to get involved in the cause and initiative.
4. **Use your network and relationships.** Most time, people want to get involved and help out. Engage key stakeholders, such as employees, media reps and key opinion leaders, to help spread the word.

vivors achieve their financial goals and stay free from violence,” Donash says.

PURPLE PASSION

With each purse, there was a constant drumbeat to “pass it on,” because every purse registered at purplepurse.com earned \$10 for the YWCA each time [a purse] was passed to a new registered user.

Fourteen local YWCAs were selected to raise money directly for their organizations, with each outlet given 10 purses to pass around. On Facebook.com/PurplePurse, each virtual pass earned YWCA \$5.

Helping to spread the word was celebrity spokesperson Rosario Dawson, (“Kids,” “Men In Black II”) who is an active board member of V-Day, a global organization that works to end violence against women and girls.

Domestic violence is particularly resonant for Dawson; during her childhood her mother worked in a New York City shelter.

She kicked off the campaign with satellite-media interviews early in the month, followed by a PSA. She also taped an Audio News Release in both English and Spanish.

“In the communities where I grew up there was a lot of violence. It keeps people from being able to do better for themselves - work wise, dropping out of school, missing workdays,” Dawson told the *Times of India*.

She adds, “The financial strain that it puts on people is really the culprit, these are not people who are not worthy and can’t do better for themselves. They are people who want to do better and just don’t have the tools and resources, so for me, it’s really personal. It’s a cycle that needs to be stopped.”

Zeno aimed its media outreach at national morning and

daytime talk shows, newspapers in the top 100 media markets, online news websites, women’s lifestyle publications and Hispanic media.

IN MOM WE TRUST

But while the presence of Dawson got the campaign play in some major media outlets, she certainly wasn’t enough to carry it.

The Allstate Foundation also partnered with Social Moms—a highly influential online network with more than 30,000 members—to increase online conversation about Purple Purse.

That group held a Twitter Party, using #PurplePurse, to share info. To aid purse passing via social media, the foundation created an inspirational video as well an informational article to share.

Back in the physical world, the foundation passed along signage, media toolkits and detailed instructional playbooks on how to get folks to “pass it on” to all YWCAs as well as Allstate agents who were involved.

THE TAKEAWAY

The media goal of the program was 117 million impressions, but it topped out at 155.8 million impressions through more than 1,550 placements. Interviews with Dawson ended up on such media outlets as **Access Hollywood**, **CNN Showbiz Tonight**, **FoxNews.com**, and **The Huffington Post**.

Social Moms made a huge impact with their online conversations, resulting in 41,114,863 impressions.

Other results included:

- #PurplePurse reached 1,751,467 unique people and achieved a trending status.
- More than 1,100 Twitter users sent more than 4,000 tweets using #PurplePurse.



Photo courtesy: Allstate Foundation

Actress Rosario Dawson (*Kids*, *Rent*, *Men in Black II*) had some investment in the issue because her mother had worked in a shelter when Dawson was younger. She became an ideal spokesperson.

- The editorial article produced by the foundation also collected 72,318 social media impressions, 453 shares, 395 comments and 247 “like” results on comments.

- Purple purses were passed more than 37,000 times and \$250,000 was donated to the YWCA to fight domestic violence.

Most important, though, was that Zeno and the Foundation were successful in getting the conversation started. “Thousands of conversations took place about domestic violence because of this campaign,” Donash says.

Since the donation goal went up to \$250,000, the local YWCAs that had been expecting to receive \$10,000 apiece instead received \$15,000 to help domestic violence survivors and other women.

And even though the \$250,000 goal was met before the month ended, the purses continued to be passed both online and offline, resulting in even more people being exposed to the campaign’s ideas and the possibility of pushing aside society’s unwillingness to talk about such a important and pervasive issue.

The PurplePurse.com site also provides a way for the conversation to continue long past the campaign’s October timeframe. Users post photos of themselves on one page of the site with purple purses. Another page featured a slew of **YouTube** videos dealing with domestic violence. The campaign also included user-submit videos, such as employees in a CPA office passing a purse along to one another.

Other pages feature dynamically loading **Twitter** and **Facebook** feeds. Throughout the site, visitors are encouraged to discuss and share information dealing with domestic violence, and to share the site with others.

“Domestic violence can be a difficult topic for many people to discuss with their friends and family,” Donash says. “Purple Purse made having those conversations easier. When more people start talking about this cause, everyone benefits.” PRN

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Messaging to Moms

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to eMarketer.com. (These are moms with kids under the age of 18 who write about any subject, and at least monthly.)

THE NEW INFLUENCERS

No longer a novelty, mommy bloggers have quickly morphed into some of the biggest influencers when it comes to how communicators can leverage their social channels.

Through social-networking platforms such as **CafeMom**, **Mom Central** and **Mom It Forward**, brands are increasingly engaging moms to give their imprimatur for a new product that is about to go to market, or help develop specific PR campaigns that can appeal to moms of all stripes.

"People realize the influence of family and friends and that, taken together, is a powerful impetus for brands, particularly those brands looking to market to moms," says Maggie O'Neill, partner and senior director at **Peppercomm**.

While there are similarities between reaching out to moms and traditional media

relations, there are some crucial distinctions. "With moms I need to find out whether she's married or single. Does she live in a house or an apartment?" O'Neill says. PR pros "need to understand the intricacies of her personal life, which is different from dealing with the media."

She adds that it's also important that PR reps understand where moms fit within a particular blogging network and the extent of their influence.

"Moms are often used to being catered to, so you have to make sure the content is relevant to their needs," O'Neill says. "If not, you're just going to get lost in the noise."

Alex Nicholson, VP of new and social media at **Cone Communications**, says that PR execs need to keep three things in mind when they reach out to moms on behalf of their brands or clients:

1. Include a "call to action," such as having respondents participate in a contest

regarding the brand or take part in a product trial.

2. Ask moms if they are interested in producing content that can help to expand the message about the brand.

3. Gauge if there are any "paid opportunities" with the various mom networks online, in terms of creating branded content on behalf of the brand on the mom networks' channels.

PAID AND EARNED

The mom market "sits nicely in the space between paid media and earned media," Nicholson says. "You need to approach them as partners and make sure you're leveraging them in a unique way."

For example, in May Cone partnered with **ModernMom** to engage with the website's readers regarding its client, **Nestle Pure Life**.

The partnership, which focused on healthy hydration and lifestyle tips, included:

► Social content posted by **ModernMom** on **Facebook**,

3 Ways To Tell 'Mom' That You Love Her

We've all heard it before. Women, and mothers, hold the power of the purse. Moms represent a \$2.4 trillion dollar market, per askingsmarterquestions.com. That's a lot of shopping. Having spent the last several years marketing to moms (and spending as one), following are insights on how to truly engage with moms:

- 1. Stop marketing and start listening:** Too often brands are focused on what they want to say, not what their audiences want to hear. For example, I haven't purchased diapers in about five years, yet I still get coupons from several well-known brands. When engaging with any target audience, the key is to listen. What's important? How do moms gather information and where? The answers to these questions should inform your strategy.
- 2. Become a resource:** It's not just about providing information on the next hot new thing. How can

brands become a source of useful information likes, tips, recipes, a POV on education or parenting issues? If a brand is viewed as a thought leader, it will be top of mind when it comes time to consider a purchase.

- 3. Make Friends:** By focusing on building real relationships, brands can amplify their voices and create ambassadors that will tell their story for them. Moms are fierce brand loyalists who mention brand more often than their male counterparts, but it's not just about reviews. Engaging in-person should be a key tenet of an influencer strategy (conferences like the Mom 2.0 Summit are a great example). Secondly, it is critical to engage with partners that are brand-right, whose message and mission are similar to yours. Just because you want to reach moms does not mean that every parenting blog fits.



Melissa Vigue

Melissa Vigue is director at Peppercomm.

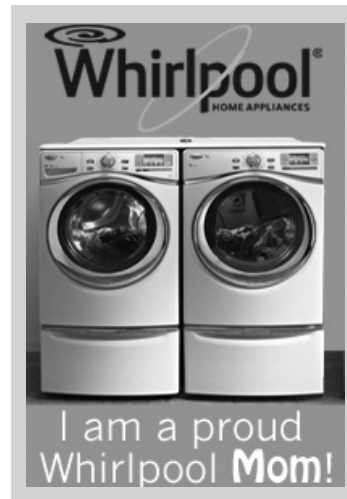


Photo courtesy: Peppercomm

For its client Whirlpool, PR agency Peppercomm created the "Whirlpool Mom" badge, which was distributed to MomCentral Mom bloggers taking part in the Whirlpool Mom's review program. The badge was used to post to the moms' social pages and blogs.

Google+, Pinterest and Twitter.

- Four blog posts incorporating the brand and key messages.
- Four newsletters revolving around the brand's attributes.
- A custom contest for ModernMom's readers to win a year's supply of bottled water.

"There a lot of tools to deliver to moms [but communicators] shouldn't ignore dads," Nicholson says. "We're starting to see a lot of spending power among dads and it will be interesting to see if they organize and develop formal communications in the same way that moms have." PRN

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Change Agents

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I'm actually glad I didn't know how difficult it would be in advance of starting my company because I might not have done it. Simply put, sometimes having naïve optimism is what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur.



Steve Cody,
co-founder and
managing partner,
Peppercomm

The one thing I wish I'd known was how many, and how difficult, the human resource challenges would be. When we started Peppercomm in 1995, I just assumed it would be [co-founder] Ed [Moed], me, and a few other, true believers.

But, by the time the dotcom craze came around and employee entitlement became a rite of passage, I'd learned differently. Now, with nearly 100 employees, I'd still say it's my number one challenge.

Rick French,
Chairman-CEO, French West
Vaughn

How growth can take you so far away from working with clients on a daily basis, which is really what most of us love.

As you grow larger, running the agency and attending to its needs becomes inherently more complicated and time-consuming and what often gives is the CEO's ability to engage with clients the way he or she once did.

**Jon Goldberg, Chief
Reputation Architect,
Reputation Architects**

Coming from more than 20 years in big agencies, I wish I had more fully appreciated just how much having great people in accounting, IT and other "back office" areas contributes to success, not to mention

one's sanity. There are countless critical decisions to make right out of the blocks—from choosing an accounting system and setting up administrative procedures to picking the right phone system. They all have to be done and done right at the very point when you need to be laser-focused on clients and building business.

In a different setting, it's all too easy to dismiss them as the people who hound us for spreadsheets on Friday afternoon or always pick the worst possible time to upgrade the network.

When it's your own show, however, you can't live without them. They're the unsung heroes of entrepreneurship.



**Martin
Waxman, principal,
Martin Waxman
Communications**

When I started my agency, I wish I had a crystal ball to see how much the media and business landscapes would be disrupted and how that would turn the status quo completely on its head.

I wish I was able to grasp how the changes would cause me to refocus, master a new skill set and fall in love with learning and training in a way I'd never before imagined.

Had I been more gutsy when I attended my first Counselors Academy conference and heard Giovanni Rodriguez talk about the potential of blogs, digital and social communications, I would have created an agency based more on flexibility and less on bricks and mortar.

But it was the early years of my firm and I was building it based on what I knew worked in the past and not on a possibility for the future. It took me a few more years to figure out

With a New PR Agency, One Size Does Not Fit All



Michael Lasky

Executives starting PR firms should make sure that they start out with a strategic focus and remain disciplined enough to execute against that strategic focus. That strategic focus may be adjusted from time to time, but executives should hit the ground running with having a focus. This is more important than ever, given the increased convergence and integration of the communication disciplines as well as the increased specialization of competing firms.

Many considerations affect a firm's choice of its strategic focus. One key consideration is an assessment of the needs of companies in the local market in which a firm is opening, which is especially important in the early days of the firm.

Another key influencing factor is you, the agency owner. In what aspect of the business are you most skilled and most passionate? Is it telling your client's story in words or through using video and graphics? Is it research and measurement? Is it organizing and influencing online communities or is it something else entirely? Most successful entrepreneurs say that the key to their success is that they learned how to "play to their strengths," to follow their passions and not try to be something they are not.

So don't even try to do everything well especially when you are just starting out. It is likely you will only be the proverbial "jack of all trades, and master of none." Instead, just figure out what is your personal and professional competitive advantage. In other words, put yourself in the shoes of your prospective client and ask yourself why should the prospective client hire you. If you figure that out successfully, everything else will take care of itself.

Michael C. Lasky is a partner at Davis & Gilbert LLP

what I didn't know about social media and how to apply it strategically. I wonder how much I don't know now.



**Mary Beth
West, Principal
Mary Beth West
Communications**

One of the knowledge points that would have been most valuable to me would have been strategies and approaches necessary to achieve ideal team dynamics.

My team is now at a point where we've really hit a terrific stride, but in the earlier days, I was often guilty of operating solely in the "here-and-now" when making team-building decisions.

It's critically important to overlay the broader team culture you want to lead and develop, as well as the long-term direction associated with supporting it. Some of these insights are best learned through experience, but it's a knowledge base that I'm trying to be more purposeful about developing. **PRN**

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Authenticity, Agility and Pursuit of Brand Clarity



As communications professionals, we position clients to appeal to and influence a diverse range of audiences while retaining their singular authentic brand. Although those two objectives are not mutually exclusive, accomplishing them requires dexterity and discipline.

Self-awareness is a key to successfully maintaining that balance. Oftentimes, we find that our clients are the last ones to recognize when their external messaging is ineffective or, worse, damaging to their brand.

But what happens when PR execs are faced with the need to follow our own advice and in essence become our own client? We faced that dilemma and here's how we tackled it:

▶ **Perception = Reality:**

Like other communications operations that integrate multiple practice areas such as PR and public affairs, advertising, marketing and interactive services, we are greater than the sum of our parts. Collectively, we are creative problem solvers who combine those skills to meet our clients' needs.

Those same clients have preconceived notions about what type of agency they need and the disciplines they offer. Public relations and public affairs professionals evaluate, rationalize and ultimately buy

agency services differently than advertising professionals.

But for an agency like ours that has built its business model to address clients' needs through integrated delivery of a portfolio of communications services, this can be a bitter truth.

▶ **Be dynamic, stay authentic:**

The grouping of dynamic professionals who can create an award-winning TV spot and can also stop the bleeding and start the healing in the midst of a client's crisis, is what makes an agency versatile and effective. The team that will design that commercial and the group that will address the crisis will not necessarily think, act or even dress the same, nor should they.

As an agency we had to change the virtual handshake we extend to current and prospective clients.

A demonstration of the shift in our approach was the launch of a dedicated website specific to our public relations and public affairs practice.

While our previous Web presence did include our public relations and public affairs capacity, it did not manifest itself in a way that responded to the expectations of the end user.

Our website, for example, was not instilling requisite con-

fidence in the external/government affairs executives shopping for agencies. Loyalty to selling our own strategy should never be a reason to miss opportunities. A client's issue may ultimately be addressed through a combination of earned and paid media, but we have learned that different clients need different entry points into our agency.

▶ **Get up close and personal:**

When extending that virtual handshake via your online presence, care must be taken to lean forward, highlight your assets and eliminate ambiguity.

We want to illustrate the diversity in experience and the accompanying approach that allow us to not only meet any client's needs but also identify and explore additional opportunities that might not have been realized at the beginning of the relationship.

The approach to our website is simple. We let clients know what we do, how we do it, who will be doing it for them and who we're currently doing it for. We highlight who we are, right down to the details about every member of our team.

We illustrate what we do, with clear and concise language about each line of service and how they are mixed and matched to meet clients' needs. Referencing our current client

list gives visitors to the site a sense of the varied issues we tackle and the diverse companies and organizations we work for.

▶ **Don't assume, ensure:**

While it's flattering in the moment when a referred prospect exclaims, "Wow, we had no idea you offered this capacity and level of expertise," that statement illustrates the challenge. It also begs the question: How much business have we lost, or worse, were never even in the game to land, because of this lack of outward clarity?

The first step at a solution is admitting there is a problem, or better yet, an opportunity. The solution doesn't necessitate blowing up the current structure and changing our identity.

Nothing is more counterproductive than working to develop the resources that prospective clients need and not presenting those resources in the most efficient and effective way. **PRN**

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