

Working with Bloggers Takes Traditional PR to a Not-So-Traditional Playing Field

By Anne-Marie Walworth

Whether fresh in the field out of school or a seasoned professional with years under your belt, by calling yourself a “public relations professional” you are immediately flagging yourself as someone who is supposed to uphold the golden rules of media relations.

We all live by the same inherent nature of relationship building and pitching, and we do our best to live them out in our practice. However, many of us in the field—new and old—still struggle with applying these rules to media of all shapes and sizes, from *The New York Times* to bloggers. As PR professionals, it has become imperative for us to understand how to maneuver in that landscape and build success for our clients and brands.

Guess what? It’s different from what we learned in school, but it isn’t all that different.

Following some guidelines will help you head out onto the digital battlefield equipped with understanding while still making our forefather PR gurus proud.

Relationships Aren’t Built on a Pitch

Journalists and bloggers are human, and they will be receptive to others if they have a relationship with them. Even though the digital world has made it easier for us to be less personal, that doesn’t mean we should be. While we may not be in the era of taking our journalistic brothers and sisters out to dinner or sending them handwritten notes, we certainly can work to understand them to the point of supporting one another equally and respecting the work they do.

Digital Influencer Vetting Checklist:

- Unique Monthly Visitors (UMV)
- Frequency of updates to site or blog
- Audience engagement
- Perceived influence by subject matter
- Social Footprint
- Quality of content

That same digital world that made relationships less personal is the same world that makes it easier for us to understand our media targets. Here are some tips for dealing with journalists:

- **Do your research by exploring their content and following them socially.** This will allow you to see what kind of writer they are, what kind of approach they are receptive to and what makes them tick. Listening to their voice is one of the most critical pieces to the media relations puzzle.
- **Be an active member of their community.** Share their content and give them the

Additional Practices for Building and Sustaining Digital Influencer Relationships:

- Personalized communications
- Welcome and thank you notes
- In person meet-ups
- Quarterly check-ins focused on blogger satisfaction and improved collaboration

credit—it is amazing what a simple mention on **Twitter** will do. You promote things for a living, think of it as some pro bono work that takes seconds of your time in order to reap major rewards.

- **Become friends.** That means more than a “like.” Engage with them directly about their industry and share interesting dialogue that isn’t directly related to your brand. Show them that you care about the industry you promote—that is what they care about, too, otherwise you wouldn’t be targeting them in the first place.
- **Always remember to correlate your pitch with their interests.** Driving home why they should care is paramount.

Why Bloggers?

Digital influencers are everything from bloggers to online journalists, really anyone with powerful followings on social platforms who publish interactive content online.

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As we adjust to the media landscape of the digital world, we often forget that those principles of relationship building are just as important (if not more so) with bloggers as they are with a reporter at *The New York Times*. It does take some time to embrace the digital influencers as part of our PR strategy, but it’s a necessary component of success.

There are an estimated 31 million bloggers in the United States, and they have become a significant source of consumer research. Bloggers are more likely to influence a consumer’s purchase decision than any other social channel—including **Facebook**. A recent study found, that

Measuring the Success by Looking Beyond Numbers

- **Reader Engagement**

- How influential is the site’s voice among its readers and beyond?
- Do the site’s articles/posts inspire comments and sharing?
- Does the conversation go beyond the post itself to other platforms or posts?

- **Quality of Post**

- Does the post organically incorporate the client’s message and goals into the rest of the post?
- Is the post visually stimulating?
- Does the post invite social sharing?
- Was the post shared on another network or the brand’s website or social platforms?

moms place higher priority on the opinions of bloggers for food- and nutrition-based products and advice than those of experts like doctors and dieticians.

What’s the Difference?

The truth is that digital PR isn’t a cookie cutter replica of the traditional space, especially when it comes to compensation. As PR people, the work we do is constantly referred to as “earned media” or media that you didn’t pay for. We are always working hand in hand with those who are strictly in the paid space and those in the owned space. The digital world and the transformation of the journalistic profession has shaped our work to be something more of a hybrid between all three media types.

Today’s blogger expects to be compensated for working with a brand, for leveraging the trust they have developed with their readers, and for the time it takes to create sharable, engaging content. We can now work to reach consumers with reviews from top tier influencers—and while their reviews are often paid for, they are still respected and truthful.

Most bloggers aren't in it for the money. Rather, they have a passion for what they are discussing.

There is no set price tag for the value of a blog post. Blogger programs vary depending on the size and influence of the blogger, the product or client you are working to promote, and the time commitment of the ask. Just remember that this is a small price to pay for a large return of qualified impressions and high visibility.

Most bloggers aren't in it for the money. Rather, they have a passion for what they are discussing. Still, many if not most bloggers generate revenue from their sites, in the form of ad revenue, sponsored posts, content partnerships, affiliate networks and free merchandise. Many bloggers have turned their blogging hobby into a full-time career.

Brands become the source of their income, and the level of service they provide through content development and sharing within their own network is paid accordingly.

Maintain Professionalism

Whether or not you are ready to explore the wide world of the blogosphere, it's smart to remember that there is a need for professionalism in digital influencer outreach of all kinds. Communication has changed, and so has the way we promote our brands.

That doesn't change the need for professionalism with your contacts. While change is good (and inevitable), one thing is paramount in being an effective PR professional in the new digital world—maintain an understanding that even though bloggers are next door, they still appreciate strong grammar, clear research and sound understanding of their interests. **PRN**

Anne-Marie Walworth is a digital publicist at MXM Social.