

PR aims at the buyers

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The Web has opened an enormous opportunity to reach niche buyers directly with targeted messages, and although blogs still play an inferior role in the biotech industry this will definitely change and public relations managers should be prepared for what surely approaches.

PRIOR TO THE WEB, companies had only two significant choices to attract attention: by expensive advertising or get coverage from print media. Today, in the age of internet, the rules have changed tremendously. Yes, advertising is still a very effective way to reach broad groups of people and surely works in many trade publications. However, for niche product and technology companies, traditional advertising is generally so wide and broad that it is ineffective.

The Web has opened an enormous opportunity to reach niche buyers directly with targeted messages. Of course, the trade media is still an important component of a successful public relations programme. But public relations work has changed. Now, successful PR should include strategies to reach buyers directly.

Have a continuous news flow

When your buyer is on the Web browsing for something, he is bombarded with content. This content will drive his action. When your primary PR goal is to increase the sales then you want try to direct the buyers to your website, the location where you are most probably able to convert a hit into a sales lead. This means that you should try to generate content that directs buyers to where you want them. If your organisation is a technology and product company, a steady news flow is a valuable tool to get more traffic on your website. But be careful, unless your site makes money through advertising, so that mere traffic adds revenue (which I assume is unlikely unless your business plan considers revenues through Google Ads) traffic alone is not all. Traffic should result in driving the sales process and therefore you should consider creating content that really matters to your buyers.

When people go to your online newsroom and find an absence of up-to-date news releases, they might assume that you are not moving forward or that you have nothing to contribute to the industry. In the new world of PR and marketing, con-

sistent and high-quality news releases position a company as a busy market player and as a trusted resource to turn to. And as enjoyable secondary effect of an active news room: as news release pages update more often than any other part of your website they trigger the search engines to rank your website higher.

Excel with targeted PR distribution

With news releases you have two choices: a) direct-to-customer news releases targeted directly to your past and present buyers. They allow you to exactly measure how many recipients reach your website after the campaign and b) news releases targeted to the trade and/or financial media. Whatever kind of news release you choose, try to include keywords and links from the news release to specific landing pages on your website. This helps not only drive the buyers into the sales process but also increases the search engine ranking of your website, because search engines consider inbound links an important criteria for the page ranking of websites. Bear always in mind which buyers you want to target and how you can most probably reach them.

You want to tell your story to investors? Then craft your news release with messages an investor wants to hear and target the financial media. You have a product launch to announce? Then try to imagine what an editor of the trade press would like to read (surely not, that your company is 'leading' because you have a 'cutting-edge' product that 'streamlines processes') and use an industry-specific distribution service that targets the relevant trade media.

Bypass the media filter

PR today aims at the buyers. Besides the trade media, you should target bloggers, forums, specialised industry websites and vertical market sites to get your message through. You need no longer wait until a journalist is picking up your story. With blogs and podcasts you can even communicate with your target audience, bypassing the media filter completely. It's all about

being found in Google, Yahoo! and vertical sites and RSS feeds. So, distribute your news release so that your buyers can find them on the search engines and vertical content sites.

Sure it would be great to have our businesses profiled in the Wall Street Journal. But unless you have a big budget that allows you to put efforts on PR aims that can most likely not be achieved, wouldn't it be better to get dozens of the most influential forums, vertical sites and perhaps bloggers tell your story directly to the niche buyers that are looking for what you have to offer?

Drive the sales process with a content rich website

As anyone who has built a website knows, there is much more to think about than just the content. Design, colour, navigation and suitable technology are all aspects of a good website. Unfortunately, in many companies these concerns dominate. Why? Probably because it is easier to focus on a site's design or technology than on its content. Content is king as it is only compelling content that drives buyers to action. When you understand your audience, you can create a content strategy just for them.

What works is a focus on your buyers and their problems. What fails is a self-centred display of your products and services. When your website content effectively drives action, the next step in the sales process might be that the buyer browses the download area of your website to get a white paper or specialised article or, of course, that he picks up the telephone to discuss his problem directly with you.

Brand your company as a trusted source

Blogs, podcasts, white papers, webinars or email newsletters – all these media contribute to the thought leadership of your company. An excellent webinar or white paper adds to a company's positive reputation and brands a company as a trusted resource. Imagine that you run a local architect's office and you have a blog or a

website. The topics on your website could include 'What you need to know when you consider buying a house in need of renovation' or 'The most common pitfalls when you have a new house built'.

The content that you create will be a solution to your target group's problem and will not mention your company or products at all! The idea is that people who learn through the architect's information are more likely to hire that architect office when the time comes.

Email newsletters as well have an enormous value to deliver regular series of thought leadership content if you avoid using it for advertising your company's products and services. Imagine the architect office doing a monthly newsletter on house building or renovation! The same is with webinars. A webinar is an online seminar typically based on PowerPoint slides or video files including audio track. Webinars are often used by technology companies to demonstrate how a technology can solve a specific problem and are ideally suited to position your company as a thought leader!



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Less known are wikis and online forums as a tool to create thought leadership. In wikis and forums customers can share experience and knowledge to help each other thus creating a dynamic community of people using a company's products or services. This is great marketing so why hiding it somewhere on your website where buyers need to log in or be customers to enter?

Monitor blogs to get customer's feedback

Reputation management and measuring what's going on with blogs will gain importance in the daily business of public relations. Text mining technologies extract content from millions of blogs so you can instantly read what customers are saying. Did you ever go to a blog search engine

and run a query on your company's name, products and services? Technorati is an excellent blog search engine. It allows you instantly to see, if any of the 112 million blogs that it tracks have any information you need to know. Although blogs still play an inferior role in the biotech industry this will definitely change and public relations managers should be prepared to what surely approaches.

The Web has changed the rules. Today marketing and PR professionals are able to use the Web to reach buyers directly. This does not mean that media relations with the trade press and advertising are no longer important but they must be part of an overall online communications strategy. ❖

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