

A NEW PARADIGM FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

by Julie Gross Gelfand, APR
Executive Vice President & Director of Public Relations
Harrison Leifer DiMarco

***We can no longer rely on third-party media to carry our messaging for us.
We must carry it ourselves.***

The shifting media world is changing the way public relations gets done. The repercussions of the economic implosion of 2007, overlaid on the social media explosion that is still unfolding, have permanently altered the traditional media channels that were once the domain of public relations. We can no longer do public relations the way we once did because traditional media are in a desperate fight for survival that has simply and dramatically shrunk the category. Beat reporting is disappearing. Staff reporting is being swapped for freelancing. The paradigm is changing and we have no choice but to change with it. There is nowhere else to go.

In addition, public relations practitioners can no longer offer a “menu” approach to public relations. The traditional checklist of actionable items is no longer relevant. It is no longer possible to compartmentalize *public relations* and *digital communications* (“interactive”) as separate offerings. We cannot offer clients a core program of “public relations activities” and offer digital services as a value-add. They are one and the same. They are inseparable. Digital tools are mandatory for and intrinsic to a successful public relations program. No online press room, no publicity. No blog, no buzz. (OK, we’re not quite there yet, but we’re moving there. Might as well be ahead of the curve).

A clipping report of over 100 media hits is meaningless. A campaign that connects a client with its customers and qualified leads, and engages them in direct interactivity, both online and off, is the goal. PR pros can no longer rely on others (“the media”) to accomplish this for us. We must take charge of the mission ourselves, by utilizing the new tools available to us. That means changing the way we view public relations programming.

Strategic public relations programs link tactical activities to stated objectives. Rather than classifying activities by traditional labels – e.g., *publicity* – each tactic should be considered a strategic execution in one of three broad categories: *showcasing*, *networking* and *pointing*.

Showcasing is finding or creating platforms that publicize a client’s brand, product, service, expertise, accomplishments, contributions or leadership. It starts with a company’s Web site (key tool!) and may also include things like YouTube (video archive), seminars (teaching others), special events (hosting), contests (incentivizing customers), awards (receiving or giving), or other vehicles that put the client in the role of expert.

Networking is building relationships between a client and its customers, and between the client and the people who influence its customers, both on-line and off. Blogging and twittering may be foreign concepts to clients initially, but they are the best available vehicles for them to say exactly what they want without the filtering that comes with traditional media, and to build a loyal following. They are also excellent SEO channels that will drive qualified traffic to a client’s Web site, where well-conceived portals for direct engagement await them.

Which is not to say that the traditional networking channels are off the line up. Online networking does not replace more familiar activities such as deskside interviews, editorial board meetings, media tours, event sponsorships or committee appointments. It simply amplifies them.

People like to do business with people they like. A networking program that combines nontraditional and traditional engagement opportunities multiplies the opportunities clients have to build relationships that can translate into business.

Pointing is a form of chest-beating (“look at me!”). It includes the one-way (1.0) communications tactics that comprise a traditional public relations program, such as press releases, editorial calendaring and feature story pitching. But it may also include certain digital tactics such as widgets and games, because these deliverables point the customer to the brand.

Our challenge is to educate clients about the new world of public relations and get them to embrace an approach that may still be outside their natural comfort zones. In the process, we will change the way we think about and approach public relations programming, breaking out of the traditional menu approach and re-visualizing tactical opportunities for a client against the strategic framework provided by the **showcasing, networking and pointing** model. *Let the challenge begin!*

###

A New View of Public Relations

SHOWCASING...your brand, product, service, expertise, accomplishments, contributions, or leadership

- Web site (key tool)
- SEO
- Video (YouTube)
- eNewsletters
- Seminars
- Op ed articles
- Special events
- Contests
- Awards

Primary benefit: Informed brand awareness

Secondary benefit: Pointing

NETWORKING... Connecting with customers and the people who influence them (Key Opinion Leaders)

- Blog (key tool)
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Deskside interviews
- Editorial board meetings
- Media tours
- Sponsorships

- Seminars
- Special events
- Board and committee service
- Cause relationships
- Town hall meetings

Primary benefit: Engagement (people like to do business with people they know and like)

Secondary benefit: Showcasing

POINTING... self-promotion

- Press releases
- Editorial calendar placements
- Feature story pitching
- Games
- widgets

Primary benefit: third party credibility (viral)

Secondary benefit: Showcasing