



Above the FOLD

As print declines,
rethink your media relations strategies
to tap into new channels

by Linda Mastaglio, ABC, Robert Brown, ABC, and Steve Freeman

Last year was the worst yet for news publishers. Media organizations themselves were making the headlines, announcing shrinking revenues, bankruptcies, staff layoffs and closures. Several hundred U.S.-based publications, large and small, have ceased operations, and thousands of editors and reporters have lost their jobs.

Even top-tier entities were affected. The owners of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* entered bankruptcy. Magazines such as *BusinessWeek*, *PC Magazine*, *Readers Digest* and *Gourmet* either closed down, sold out or filed for bankruptcy, while revenues in the trade publications sector dropped 28.6 percent in one year,



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according to *American Business Media*. Some news agencies, such as the *Christian Science Monitor* and *U.S. News & World Report*, have switched almost exclusively to online delivery.

The media upheaval is not confined to the United States either. “It’s not quite as bad as the U.S. in Europe, but it’s definitely coming,” says Silvia Cambié, director of Chanda Communications in London. “According to Lloyds, one out of 10 print publications here will have to go online, reduce frequency or close down this year.”

As traditional print publications struggle to survive, PR professionals are feeling the urgency to reinvent approaches and reallocate resources. For Shannah Hayley, marketing director for Urban Design Group in Dallas, Texas, these circumstances affected her mission to land coverage in the general, trade and business press for her architectural firm’s design of the School of Cinematic

Arts at the University of Southern California.

“Reporters were having to get a new kind of permission from editors before they’d even consider the merits of a story—as if their jobs depended upon a newly enforced decision-making policy,” Hayley says. “And magazines and newspapers alike were guarding editorial space with increased vigor.”

Hayley says she regularly encountered editorial strategies such as content sharing (reusing articles in sister publications, which further reduces the total number of original articles possible). “Promised editorial space gets yanked at the last minute because overall publication size and/or publishing frequency has been reduced, seemingly overnight,” she notes.

With the storm far from over, how to achieve effective media relations seems to be anyone’s guess.

Case study: “A Touch of Pink” creates media buzz for a cause

In 2004, the Toronto firm Strategic Objectives had achieved stellar media inroads for client Kruger Products with an annual fashion show called the White Cashmere Collection. Originally, the fashion show was part of an effort to spread the news that the brand name Cashmere bath tissue would replace Cottonelle on Canadian store shelves by 2007. The fashion show featured Canada’s top fashion designers, models, photographers and stylists, who worked together, *Project Runway*-style, to create haute couture dresses out of—you guessed it—White Cashmere-branded bathroom tissue. In 2008, the challenge was to inspire consumers by creating a global media buzz, tying in Kruger Products’ ongoing support of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation (CBCF).



The fashion show hits YouTube again in 2009.

Research showed that despite displaying the CBCF logo on its packaging and branding, consumers remained unaware of White

Cashmere’s support of the cause. On Strategic Objectives’ recommendation, Kruger Products produced a new, limited-edition,

environmentally friendly Pink Cashmere bathroom tissue. Twenty-five cents from the sale of every package went to CBCF. To tie in with the pink bathroom tissue, the 2008 fashion show sported the theme “A Touch of Pink,” and dresses included pink accessories made with the pink tissue.

Strategic Objectives then recruited one of Toronto’s leading hair and photo stylists, Jason Kearns, to produce couture-quality photos of the event at no cost, in exchange for credit in all media materials, at the fashion show and on www.Cashmere.ca.

The team also used social media tactics to publicize the photos:

- **Embedding** the couture photos in traditional news releases for wire and e-distribution, with instructions to download

The new reality

The challenge now for PR and media relations is to achieve the same results with external audiences as they did before the media fallout. Of course, print media exposure is only one piece of today's aggressive media mix, and some practitioners have added capabilities in social media and new media production to serve clients.

Print publications aren't going to totally disappear any more than audiences will disappear. Tomorrow's typical print media news company will likely print a flagship periodical (smaller in size and/or frequency), and will leverage that content and produce new information that will be pushed out through RSS feeds, blogs, e-newsletters and tweets. Greater attention will also be paid to meeting audiences' needs through the creation of podcasts and online videos.

"The target audience that you are trying to reach through media relations has...changed its consumption patterns," says Sam Rowe of communication consultancy Cutsforth Consulting Services in Brussels, Belgium.

It's likely that many print publications will evolve into high-caliber products, such as specialty magazines that cater to elite audiences. They might be glossy, free, regional monthlies focused on real estate, weddings, entertainment or upscale lifestyles. Some predict that while a few major national or regional newspapers (such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*) will remain in print form, within 20 years most local newspapers and magazines will only be online.

Some believe that, despite changes in form, the mainstream media will retain its leadership position—and continue to be a touchstone for media

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- high-resolution photos from Strategic Objectives' FTP site
- **Including** the couture photos in a social media news release distributed by Marketwire
- **Identifying** and reaching out to 25 top Canadian fashion bloggers to spark coverage
- **Including** photography in a video news release/B-roll package distributed by CNW Group
- **Posting** a video of the fashion show on YouTube

Strategic Objectives President and CEO Deborah Weinstein says that reaching out to top Canadian fashion bloggers was one of their most successful tactics. "We got mentions and photos in top-rated fashion magazines, both in Canada and the U.K., as a direct result of our outreach to the bloggers," she says. Strategic Objectives' social media efforts



The 2009 campaign gets its own Facebook page.

resulted in the Touch of Pink couture photos being picked up

in media coverage around the world. Other results included:

- **Audience** impressions exceeded 97.3 million in Eastern Canada (population 22.8 million) where Cashmere is sold. The cost per targeted impression was CDN\$0.0025.
- **Audience** impressions worldwide exceeded 120 million—more than double the goal.
- **Sixty-one** media reports included hyperlinks to the photos on www.Cashmere.ca.
- **The web site** www.Cashmere.ca received 22,400 unique visitors in about three weeks; the White Cashmere Collection Touch of Pink page was the most visited during this period, with 55,000 page views.
- **Pink Cashmere** tissue sold out immediately after the fashion show event and raised CDN\$35,000 for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.

—L.M., R.B. & S.F.

The increase in communication vehicles and the social media phenomenon are making media relations look more like integrated marketing communication.

relations. “The traditional media still are a key gatekeeper of information,” says Stephen Farnsworth, Ph.D., assistant professor of communication at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Trade magazine editor Jay Schneider thinks that traditional media will continue to be seen as more credible compared with information generated by so-called citizen journalists.

“Having the general reader enter the conversation is not a bad thing at all,” says Schneider, senior editor of *Building, Design & Construction*, which has 74,000 subscribers. “We do want their feedback, but we are the experts delivering the news.”

A time of transition

Despite the dire predictions, the media still offer PR professionals clear advantages. These include improving the company’s brand or image, changing the attitudes of key audiences, increasing market share, influencing government policy and regulations, improving communication with stockholders, and improving linkages in a given industry.

“It’s a challenging time, but some clients tell us that media relations outcomes are still what they want,” says Michael Kuczkowski, executive vice president for global customer relationship management at Edelman in New York City. Clients still want headlines, stories and positioning in the marketplace, he says, “so we as PR people have to focus on some of the same fundamentals like messaging, transparency, etc. It’s an opportunity like never before, and it’s not dependent on media filters anymore.”

This gives PR professionals greater leverage. It’s no longer about just asking which reporter to influence, but asking what the public discourses are that need to happen, Kuczkowski says.

“The industry is going through massive changes, and yet, at the other end of the spectrum, the demand for good information is not going away, the demand for high-quality content is not going away,” says Mark Ranalli, president and CEO of Helium Inc., itself an outgrowth of the new age of media and publishing. Launched three years ago, Helium represents some 10,000 freelance writers—many of them former reporters—who get short-term

assignments for any company, organization or publisher that needs content. Revenues are up tenfold from 18 months ago, he says.

Delivering the full package

According to a 2009 Pew Research report, “The appeal of a news organization in the future increasingly will be not just the content it produces but also the fuller package of information it assembles from multiple sources.”

Since the media continue to find rewards in producing online content, PR pros have beaten a path to social networking and media tools as well. Globally, this acclimation seems smoother for some communicators than for others. “Asia is ahead of the U.S. and Europe in the use of the Internet and social media,” says Cambié. “China is No. 1 in the creation of online content, and citizen journalism started in [South] Korea. In China, people are twice as likely to be online than to watch TV.”

But with the rise of social media has come a new burden of sorts. “The current environment places wide-ranging demands on PR professionals,” says Farnsworth. “Today, the capacity has moved to the multidimensional—more people and more outlets and less time to be heard.”

Mike Orren, president and founder of Pegasus News, a large online local news and information site, agrees. “It used to be that you just wrote up your press release, faxed it to your local media outlets and hoped it got published,” he says. “Now the Internet allows you more opportunities to connect with your audience segments.”

With more and more print publications disappearing, the playing field has been leveled for many of the other channels—especially online media. For example, Mixx is a new-age news service that aggregates tweets from the microblogging service Twitter, and gives people the opportunity to vote on the important news of the day.

The traditional practice of media relations may not go away, but the increase in communication vehicles and the social media phenomenon are making media relations look more like integrated marketing communication.

“Ten years ago, we were told to measure and multiply by three [for raw number of impressions], but today editorial media is not neces-

Strategic steps to save media relations

With many firms advising their clients to put their media relations budgets on hold, it's a good time to evaluate how you do what you do.

- **Broaden your definition of media relations.** It's much more than print coverage, if it is print at all. For the foreseeable future, media relations must include the breadth of social media tools, including personalization and segmentation capabilities.
- **Think like today's reporters and editors.** Media professionals will increasingly recalibrate information to be visual, interactive and audience-specific. And with shrinking resources, they will appreciate a new form of collaboration, but only with truly helpful PR pros. "You need to really understand the sort of things they are writing about and angles they are looking for, and then come up with a well-packaged idea that could actually save them time," says Sam Rowe of Cutsforth Consulting Services in Brussels, Belgium.

- **Pitching is still in; pitching content only is out.** Think outside the press release. Engage reporters where they increasingly are—on blogs, Twitter, etc. Consider too the influence that heavyweight bloggers and industry watchers have. Their material is also read by reporters.
- **Invest in and learn new media well.** Internet components need to be added to the marketing and PR conversation every time an issue comes forward—whether it's a new project announcement, an office closure or a CEO's upcoming speaking engagement. To make sure your information gets out there, employ search engine optimization, or SEO, dynamics.
- **Get ready for what's next.** Use online video and other multimedia components to capture attention. Consumers are getting accustomed to having content delivered the way they prefer. Make sure you are catering to their needs.

- **Shift gears in how you measure outcomes.** Social media channels have proven much more difficult to measure than traditional media. One method is measurement by "share of discussion," which takes into account both paid media (mainly advertising) and unpaid or earned media (editorial coverage), as well as the competitive market. Angela Jeffrey, APR, admits, "We're still asking what metrics matter. There's not one holistic methodology anywhere like what Nielsen rolled out for television years ago."
- **Manage your clients' expectations.** Discover with your clients what the new "wins" are. Managing a client's media expectations requires a specific type of PR sophistication. Clip-counting, audience measures and media value techniques are common. Qualified-volume measures, media analysis indices and share of media coverage are on the high end.

—L.M., R.B. & S.F.

sarily that much more effective, given the circumstances," says Angela Jeffrey, APR, vice president of editorial research for VMS Inc. in Dallas, Texas. "It's holistically bringing together all media types, paid and unpaid, social and traditional."

Jeffrey attributes the best descriptor of the future of media to Tom Collinger, chair of the Medill School's Integrated Marketing Communications program at Northwestern University. Collinger is credited with dubbing the convergence of communication vehicles as the era of "and"—not print *or* online, not PR *or* advertising, but print *and* online, PR *and* advertising.

Many agree, however, that the advantages in the emerging world of institutional media outweigh the disadvantages of the current state of the news media.

"There are two or three times more opportunities to get coverage," says Schneider. "We're doing more webcasts, more weekly e-zines and more web exclusives."

Ironically, the PR firms pursuing coverage in *Building, Design & Construction* still focus almost wholly on pitching just for placement on the printed page.

"I wish we had more change on the PR side in that regard. No one's pitching video and podcasts, and that's the side we're really pumping up online," Schneider says. *Building, Design & Construction* is published 12 times a year, but his editors need quality content much more frequently for the online audience.

"Stop just pitching the print side, and think of new ways to get coverage for your story related to new media," he says.

That advice has a flip side: what to tell clients.

"Many companies continue to insist on being stuck in a world that doesn't exist anymore, but it's not right for us as communication professionals to permit them to stay stuck," says Cambié. "It is our professional responsibility to take them by the hand and lead them into new ways of reaching their audiences." •

about the authors

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The authors' original research on the changes in the media, "Silent Presses," is available online at <http://twi-pr.com/blog>.