



7 WAYS SOCIAL MEDIA HAS CHANGED PR

INTRODUCTION

As digital technology advances and becomes the backbone of every industry, social media too has evolved from a networking tool to a marketing function. Social media is now as cool as it is compulsory for businesses who are embracing smart technology in smart ways to become, well, smarter.

While social media posts, with the help of exclamation marks, hashtags and emoticons, continue to ease communications, the purpose it serves is moving towards optimising business strategy, giving PRs new responsibilities and added pressures.

To analyse the full impact social media has had on PR, Vuelio in collaboration with Canterbury Christ Church University, has conducted a survey among UK PR professionals, the results of which formed our first Social PR Study 2015.

Drawing on the findings of the study, below are the seven ways that social media has changed PR as we know it with essential tips on how PRs can get around it:

1. TURNAROUND TIME



Digital media has accelerated the news cycle, pushing journalists to turnaround stories in a much shorter time. This in turn has forced PRs to keep up. Gone are the days of long lunches between journalists and PRs. It's as much about reporting real-time as it is about pitching. Our Social PR Study found that only 8% of the PRs surveyed still meet journalists face-to-face regarding a brief. Social media meanwhile, is the third most common method used to contact journalists, after email and telephone, with 30% of PRs opting for this route.

What's more, journalists welcome the approach taken and are increasingly leaning towards social media to contact PRs as well. According to the study, the majority (57%) of PRs agree that journalists are receptive to being contacted on social media.

TIP

It's time for PRs to ditch the phone and use social media instead. When comparing the Social PR Study results to our Social Journalism Study, published earlier this year, we found there exists a massive gap in the way journalists like to be contacted and methods used by PR professionals to pitch their stories. While email and telephone are the most popular channels of communication used, the greatest disagreement is over the use of the telephone: 49% of PRs preferred to use telephone to pitch a story, while only 23% of journalists wanted to be pitched this way. This gap in the way PRs prefer to contact journalists and the way journalists like to be approached needs to be addressed if PR professionals want to maintain positive working relationships with the media. This is where social media is key.



2. THE PR ROLE



82% of PRs surveyed indicated that social media has changed the work they do to some extent. But what does this ‘work’ consist of? Everything PR was about and more. Apart from pitching stories, writing and distributing press releases and maintaining media relationships, social media has made sure PRs do their bit in building the brand’s voice online by way of content sharing, managing and protecting the online reputation. As a result, tasks like content promotion, publishing, media monitoring, community engagement and measurement have all been added to the PR remit.

This explains why while nearly two thirds (64%) of the survey respondents agreed that social media has improved their productivity, nearly 70% believe that social media use has not decreased their workload, but rather added a new layer of work for them.

TIP

PRs should invest in the right tools to meet the new wave of social media responsibilities expected of them. Companies such as Vuelio offer comprehensive social media analysis, monitoring and measurement services that allow PRs to reach out to people who are talking about their brand and transform fleeting mentions into conversations and relationships.

Moreover, added features like an online newsroom become a one-stop shop for PRs to distribute press releases, photos, videos and infographics to the right audiences, on the right social platforms - opening up the viral dimension of their news.



3. DEPENDENCY ON MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

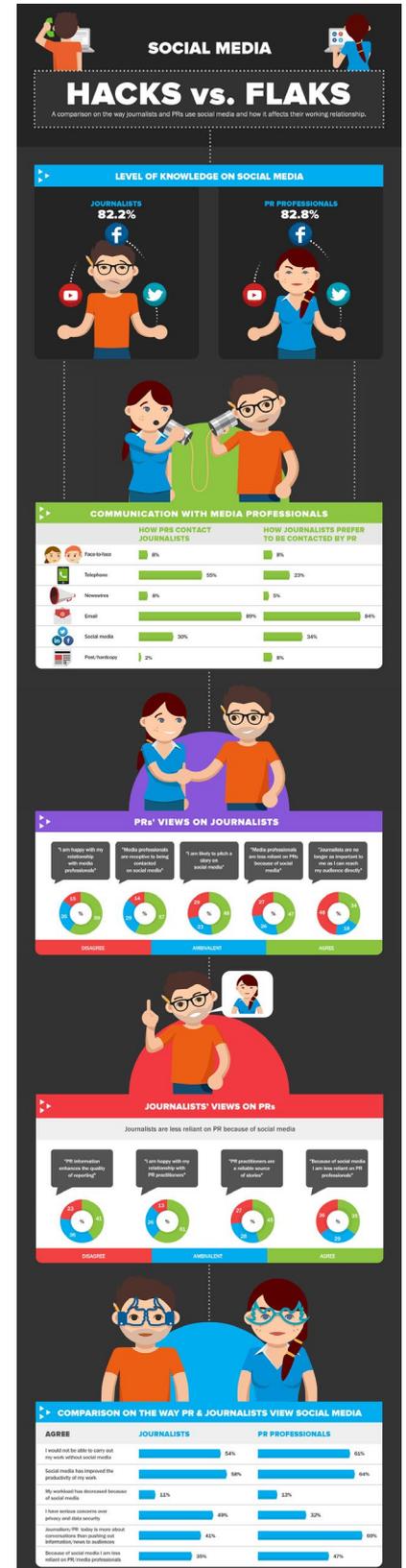


Social media has added a new dimension to the long-standing love-hate relationship between hacks and flaks. Can they finally part ways amicably because of social media? Far from it. But flaks now certainly have an alternate medium to communicate with their audiences if they're given the dreaded cold-shoulder.

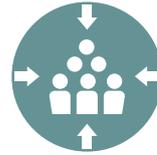
The Study pointed out nearly half of all respondents said that they are less reliant on journalists because of social media. A further 34% of PRs agreed outright that journalists were no longer as important to them because of social media.

TIP

While social media is clearly an important part of the comms mix, any increasing dependence on social media as a primary medium of communication can be hazardous. PRs should leverage the strengths of networking platforms to interact and engage media professionals – but it is still too early to go it alone.



4. CONNECTING WITH THE AUDIENCE



Building on the point above, it is first important to note that PRs still believe that journalists are the most important channel of communication for them. The study found that the majority of PRs (59%) are happy with their relationship with media professionals. However, 87% of PR professionals agree (to some extent) that social media has impacted their relationship with the audience. This also explains why PRs at public sector and not-for-profit teams are the most optimistic about social media, as it lets them directly engage with audiences at a relatively low cost.

TIP Communicating directly with audiences is definitely an added benefit of social media as it lifts the so-called 'media filter'. However, really connecting with audiences via networking platforms is not as easy as it looks. Sure, social media has given everyone with access to a computer and Internet the power to be a publisher. But with this power comes great responsibility – one that a brand's online reputation rests on. Understanding your audience, developing a clear social media strategy and following company-wide guidelines can make this interaction with the audience fruitful and in line with the overall business objectives.



5. PUBLISHING CONTENT



According to the Study, PRs use social media most for publishing content. Sharing and retweeting posts on Twitter and publishing original comments on networking sites are the two most popular uses of social media for PRs. This is because PRs (69%) believe that social media is now no longer just about pushing out information and news to audiences but more about conversations.

Whether it is a press release, corporate announcement or some other interesting piece of content, PRs know that social media is now very much a part of the integrated content marketing mix.

TIP Publishing content on social media is the way forward but unless it is optimised for this medium, it will be of little use. As Tony Coll, a Bristol-based communications specialist said: 'A boring message spread through social media is still a boring message. It will die unless it is interesting enough to be passed on by a critical mass of people.'

The language and tone used on social media should not replicate the press release, email or other communication. Simply put, PRs need to bring out the 'social' element, making people want to see, share and engage with their content.



6. RESPONSE TO QUERIES



Social media is demanding more time from PR professionals with 60% of PRs using social media for more than one hour per day. However, upon deeper analysis of social media use among industry professionals, it is clear that despite their faith in 'the conversation', PRs are still not using the channel to its full potential. The study found that while there is a strong awareness of the importance of building conversations, 38% of PR professionals admitted they never respond to questions from the media on networking platforms, and 21% said they never respond to queries from consumers/community outreach.

TIP The poor response rate of PRs on social media raises questions and concerns about the nature and extent of conversations PRs are having online, and if it is worth the time spent. It also highlights a contradiction that exists within PRs on what they believe they should be using social media for and what they are actually doing about it.

It is understandable that not all PR teams have the personnel, tools or even time to dedicate solely to social media management, yet if businesses are on social media, they should be smart about their presence. Don't share and retweet any and all content that relates to the industry. Focus on quality rather than quantity. Most importantly, set out some time daily to respond to queries and engage with audiences - it takes the anti out of anti-social.



7. CHANNELS



The press release has been sent, the emails and follow-up calls made, what next? This is when social comes into its own, and it doesn't just stop at the most popular of channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn alone. In fact the study shows that while the above mentioned networking giants are favoured by PRs to promote and publish content, they also rely on 50 other social tools including YouTube, Google +, Instagram, and some other less-likely suspects such as Ping.It, Topsy, Banjo, Tango, Vimeo etc.

TIP

Using a number of social media platforms increases the reach and scope of the content shared.

However, it is important to understand the strengths of individual platforms and put it to use accordingly. Audiences on Facebook are after different content than those that are on LinkedIn or Instagram. The one-size-fits-all approach just doesn't fit.



SOCIAL PR STUDY



- 1



PRs can't carry out their work without social media.
More than two thirds of PR professionals use social media daily, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are the social media tools of choice.
- 2

Promoting and reposting content are the most important reasons for social media use.
74% of PR professionals use social media to promote content.


- 3



63% of PR professionals say that social media has increased their productivity but it hasn't reduced the workload.
Rather, it has added new responsibilities.
- 4

PR professionals strongly believe that social media is about conversations.
Yet there remains a high number of PRs who are not responding to comments or engaging with conversations, posts and discussions on social media.


- 5



PRs at public sector and not-for-profit teams are most optimistic about the impact social media has had on PR.
Social media has made it possible for PRs in the public sector and not-for-profits to directly engage with audiences at a relatively low cost.
- 6



55% of respondents
89% of respondents

Email and telephone are the most common and preferred forms of communication with journalists.
- 7

Social media has changed the journalist-PR dialogue.
Nearly half of PR professionals believe social media has made them less reliant on journalists to get their story out.


- 8

A quarter of PR professionals report their relationship with their audience has changed fundamentally as a result of social media.





CONCLUSION:

So there you have it, seven ways that social media is influencing the very nature of PR. While the effects social media has had on the profession are mostly positive, patterns show PRs are yet to understand and implement the full potential of social media for work. Whether it is responding to queries from consumers, media professionals or using it to build brand awareness, PRs would do better to view social media as a channel that complements their overall outreach efforts.

As Michael Taylor, a communications consultant, pointed out:

'Social media is exciting but let's not forget that it is another channel not a replacement. In the same way that the arrival of radio did not destroy newspapers, TV did not destroy radio, then neither will social media be the replacement for all our communications activity.'

He's right; social media has added new life to PR – it's given small unknown brands the potential to become a viral phenomenon at the cost of a single tweet or post, or conversely, die anonymously. It's all out there; PRs now just need to learn how to navigate it to their advantage.

ABOUT THE SURVEY:

Vuelio and Canterbury Christ Church University conducted an online survey about the social media use among PR professionals. The survey is based on 748 responses from PR professionals collected during March 2015. To conduct this research 8,000 verified PR professionals were contacted through the Vuelio database, giving a response rate of 9.35%.

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