



HOW PRS CAN STOP WASTING TIME AT WORK

[TIPSHEET]



INTRODUCTION



Do you feel as if you are wasting vital time at your job? How much time do you spend on tasks without knowing just how, exactly, they contribute to your work? Does it all feel like a waste of time? And more to the point, what would make your job more efficient?

Everybody wastes some time at work. A study by Sharp Europe revealed that 34% of respondents had fallen asleep in meetings, which says a lot about the value of those meetings. Meanwhile, chief financial officers told a survey by recruiter Robert Half that 17% of their time spent on work email is wasted.

In this tipsheet, we will look at some of the clever ways in which PRs can eliminate time-wasting tasks from their day-to-day activities and focus on their what matters most in their job - connecting with their audience.



THE BIGGEST TIME-WASTERS AT WORK



Email has a reputation as the worst time-sink of them all. Paul Sutton, a social and digital media consultant says it's "the bane of most people's working life". Amid the daily deluge of unnecessary CCs and FYIs, few would disagree. And that's before we address the perennial problem of spam.

We're also increasingly subject to high volumes of spam phone calls, most of which are an unmitigated waste of time. It feels like this has always been the case, but according to Edward Leake, managing director at Midas Media, it is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

He says: "I remember not more than a decade ago, we would run to catch the phone ringing. It was a novelty that someone wanted to talk to us. But now, with the saturation of media and technology engrained in our everyday lives, many of us find phone calls a disturbance."



THE BIGGEST TIME-WASTERS AT WORK



In this regard, it would be helpful for telemarketers to take some lessons from the PR playbook. It's widely known that the key to good PR is a thorough understanding of the needs and expectations of any journalist, blogger or influencer they're talking to.

Similarly, any commercial call will be a much more useful conversation if the caller does their research beforehand – and perhaps even has bespoke collateral/data that tangibly demonstrates how they could add value specifically for the person they're calling.

“We bloody love a meeting in agency world” says John Brown, chief engagement officer at Hotwire. “Most don't have an agenda and few have any real purpose.” The tendency to default any discussion, exchange of ideas, any ongoing uncertainty to a scheduled meeting is perhaps the biggest time-waster of all.

As Brown notes: “There seems to be this desire to send calendar invitations for meetings that have to last 30 minutes at a minimum. Why can't they be five minutes if that's all you need? Some of the best 'meetings' I've had have been a 30-second walk to the kitchen with a colleague.”



PR BLUEPRINTS



Within that broader corporate culture, there are time-wasters that are specific to PR and communications. For most organisations, it's unlikely that every external conversation will be starting from scratch. Many will be part of an ongoing dialogue between the organisation and a particular influencer, and the overwhelming majority part of a broader conversation the influencer is having with others in the industry. Building relationships without considering history and context is not only a waste of the PR's time, but also for those they're trying to engage.

The job also involves a number of basic-but-essential tasks all too often undertaken in the same way, every time. Jobs such as rounding up the latest coverage, measuring the media impact of a particular release or campaign, or creating case studies essentially follow the same blueprint every time. There's little doubt that automation of some elements saves practitioners valuable time – but many continue to do these things by hand.

And then there is social media. For most practitioners, social media is increasingly important, if not essential. But with statistics showing a third of employees distracted for up to three hours a day by social media, there are questions about its practical application. Is social helping people to do their job more effectively or is it wasting time?

Ann Pilkington, a director at the PR Academy, spells out the challenge: "You have to be selective, there's no point being on social media for the sake of it. You need to think about why you are doing it and what you want to achieve, otherwise it will be a waste of time."



USING SOCIAL MEDIA AT WORK



Whether social media is being used as part of a campaign, in building organisational or personal brands, or as a means of relationship building, the key to using time productively is knowing the right platforms to use and the right people to engage. As so much time can be spent updating profiles, asking for endorsements, creating company pages and adding content, every activity, piece of content and distribution should have a measurement of how it will contribute to ROI.

It might sound like hard work, but Laura Sutherland, chief of Aura and founder of PR Fest, reminds us: "There are tools for all of that. Don't just blanket cover every platform and especially don't use the exact same content on each." Or as Sutton succinctly puts it, "social media is only ever a waste of time if you use it badly".



EMBRACING PR AUTOMATION



“A system created specifically for PR practitioners would be amazing,” adds Sutherland. “It would need to take on everything from databases to newsrooms, to business admin and accounts, through to helping plan content.”

As to what practitioners think about how they least profitably spend their time, phone calls, emails and meetings top the list. All three are unavoidable elements of corporate life. But there are ways to increase productivity by consciously filtering out less relevant communications and sit-downs.

For dedicated PR and communications professionals, software can automate the most painful, mechanical, time consuming aspects of the job: the coverage books and measurement charts.

There’s also a proliferation of vendors claiming to help increase the efficiency of various relationship management techniques, both traditional and social. But the most efficient platforms not only combine both of these elements, they integrate them in such a way that data from one activity automatically informs other related activities.

Such real integration might be, as Sutherland says, “amazing”, but the technology is here now, and PRs are starting to take full advantage. Maybe you should join them – after all, there’s no time to waste.



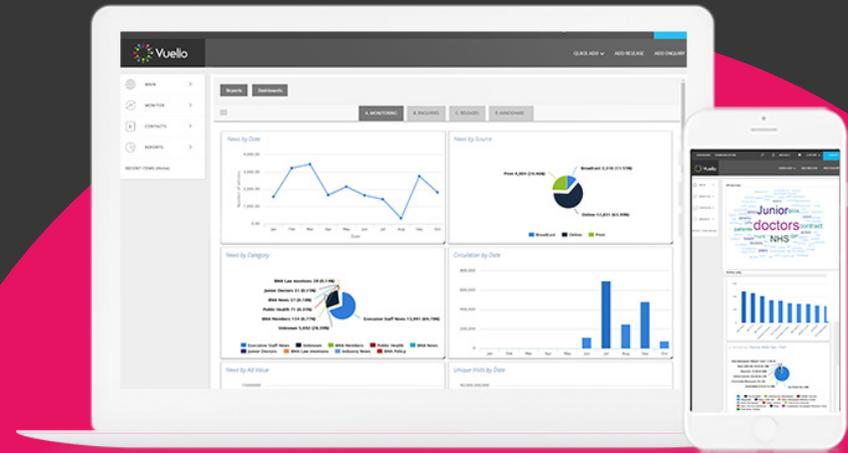
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