

The Modern Marketing Fulcrum: Balancing Content & Big Data to Power PR Results

The Modern Marketing Fulcrum

It is no secret that a variety of technology-inspired forces are rapidly and permanently changing the brand-consumer dynamic. The one-to-many information exchange that once favored brands (particularly in the hands of their skilled PR agencies) has turned 180 degrees.

On one side of this new equation sits an information-empowered public, which increasingly uses the Web, social channels, peer networks, industry experts, mobile tools, and other interconnected devices to investigate and engage brands on its own terms. If direct engagement is sought, it likely will come late in the process and usually after conclusions largely have been drawn. And this applies to all consumers of information—the general public, members of the media, industry thought leaders, etc.

On the other side sit corporate marketing organizations and the PR agencies that serve them, eager to leverage those same technologies and their digital footprints (aka data) to detect, monitor, influence, and reintroduce themselves wherever, whenever, and however those information consumers most need them.

So if technology is the fulcrum upon which the new tactics and strategies of modern marketing and PR are to be built, the counterweights it supports could be said to be content and Big Data. The former constitutes the marketing information created and distributed across these emerging channels and tools; the latter represents the digital evidence of its consumption.

And content, as we all know, is not the challenge. If nothing else, PR agencies and their marketing clients are content experts. Indeed, many are thrilled at this era's abundance of creative and distributive technology. Instead, the challenge lies with data and, specifically, the data today's marketing executives most need.



“Whenever I meet CMOs who don't work closely with their companies' CIOs, I consider shorting their stock.”

— Tom Davenport

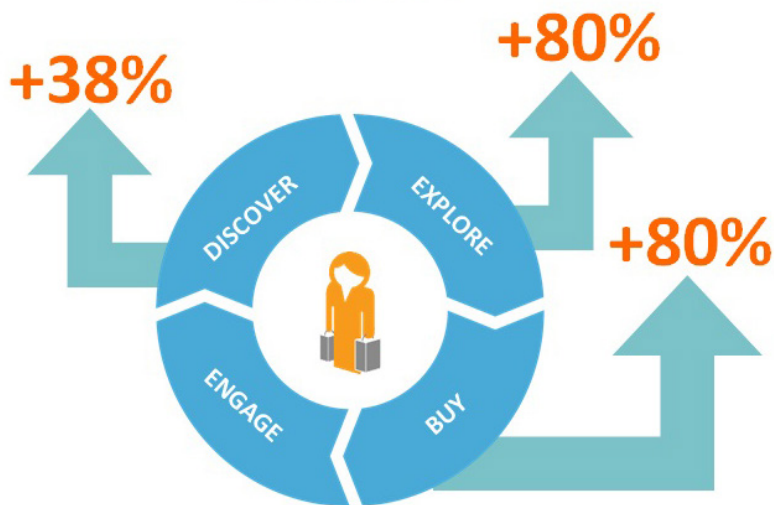
Rise of the Data-Driven CMO

To understand precisely why today's CMOs are so data-hungry, let's start with PR's strong suit: content. Over the years these organizations have accumulated unparalleled expertise in the development and deployment of content through which audiences and opinion leaders can be engaged, influenced, and driven to act.

Even in this era when every company is a publisher/storyteller/content marketer (pick your term), it's worth noting that modern audiences still prefer and trust the earned media and expert content created and distributed by third-party experts versus the organic content churned out by brands themselves. In other words, the content expertise of PR remains as potent as ever.¹



Expert content *more effective* than branded content



Source: In-lab study by Nielsen, commissioned by inPowered, March 2014

But there is a darker side to all of this promotional productivity: an explosion in 'noise' coupled with a consumer class increasingly conditioned to chart its own course to brand and product decision making. Meaning that today's content consumer is willfully blind to undifferentiated, one-to-many messaging and instead expecting personally relevant brand experiences that support their self-orchestrated, clandestine 'buyer's journey.'

As we say, that's the PR world's strong suit. Content and distribution and new devices and channels are not the issue. The scale is tipped, however, when it comes to data and reporting, in demonstrating the efficacy of PR marketing efforts, in finding balance between content

1 Nielsen: The Role of Content, March 2014

marketing and the reporting today's CMOs desperately need. More specifically, CMOs aren't just after data, they're looking for the contextual, multi-channel business intelligence lurking within that data.

Remember, all of these content-generating technologies are creating enormous volumes of 'noise' coupled with a consumer class increasingly conditioned to chart its own course toward brand and product decision making. These individuals are purposely blind to undifferentiated, one-to-many content. Instead, they expect personally relevant brand experiences that support their self-orchestrated, clandestine 'buyer's journey.'

All of which equates to marketing organizations tasked with—and at this point we've all heard this refrain—delivering the right content to the right individual at the right time in a form and format of their choosing. How do these organizations do this? In a word, data. And their PR agents are expected to help in this cause.

For example, no longer is it sufficient merely to fire off a press release and report back distribution counts or contacts. Today's CMO needs to tie those initial touches to deeper stages of the buyer's journey, to connect the dots with corporate KPIs, to allocate resources based on performance.

In other words, the new marketing fulcrum must be in balance, the CMO's goals in line with those of the CIO, content strategies and tactics reinforced, refined, or retired based on data-driven insights. Or as industry guru Tom Davenport offers: "Whenever I meet CMOs who don't work closely with their companies' CIOs, I consider shorting their stock. I can't imagine the companies will be successful if marketing and IT don't get along."



RIGHT CONTENT.

Create eye-catching visual content that *demand*s audience attention.



RIGHT PLACE.

Distribute your content to *all the destinations that engage* your audience.



RIGHT TIME.

Organize and schedule your content for *fresh, consistent coverage*.

Today's marketing organization and the PR agencies that support them need to be equally comfortable navigating the old-school practices of content, creative arts, media positioning, campaign management, etc., as well as data collection, aggregation, mining, and reporting borne of those efforts. One begets the other which begets the other, a dynamic feedback loop which, in synch, leads to that Holy Grail of the right messaging to the right people....



Ensuring the Right Balance

So if data reporting is the counterbalance to a successful PR-driven content marketing effort, what should you and your PR team be measuring and reporting up the chain to the CMO? Which metrics are most important in linking PR-related activities to KPIs? How can you employ those reports to drive the results your organization needs?

For starters, today's PR organization needs to augment and reprioritize the data it thinks is most important. Our own surveys show that many of the criteria esteemed by PR managers no longer jibe with their marketing counterparts, as seen below.

How Communicator Measurement Priorities Stack Up



In an era when more and more marketing efforts are being transitioned to the digital realm, for example, conversions are a far more valuable metric to marketers eager to connect the dots between content and KPIs.

To kick start this process, first ensure that you have access to analytical systems through which your data can be captured, aggregated, analyzed and reported. Google Analytics is an obvious choice, but there are many other industry tools from which to choose. Similarly, build into your tactics the links, URL shorteners, social triggers, and other more analytical fodder to feed that analytical engine (this especially applies to more traditional offline PR activities that otherwise are difficult to monitor).

Next, build a baseline against which goals and benchmarks can be measured, beginning with a historical reference point that can be compared to future PR efforts. Then determine your brand goal(s). Do you want to build awareness, generate leads, ramp up sales, become an institutional thought leader, etc.?

The answer to this question will dictate the KPIs against which progress toward that goal can be consistently measured. For example, a brand aiming at becoming an industry leader likely will want to look at the *quality* of its media coverage or social media responses and the *caliber* of those who are influenced rather than raw numerical data such as mentions or likes.

Don't overreach—set your expectations in relation to the size, reach, and abilities of your brand. Many organizations' PR-related activities have been limited to the occasional press release. Meaning it is important to remember this is an evolutionary process, with your content strategies and conversion tactics both built toward intelligently and inexorably driving customers forward in your own unique sales education process.

With your analytical engine tuned and the measurement criteria in place (the technology fulcrum), the next step is to align those two counterweights—content and data—along three principal categories: **Output, Outtakes, and Outcomes.**



OUTPUT

Output refers to the content and PR activities that are created and distributed in pursuit of the brand's goals. This is where all of that initial planning is put to use. In other words, while the most obvious metrics (e.g. distribution counts, ad placements, blogs, social media campaigns, phone calls, interviews, in-person visits, etc.) are recorded, this also is where those first connect-the-dot conversions are discovered (website and landing page traffic, PPC and ad click-thrus, organic search keywords, number of blog or email subscriptions, and so on).

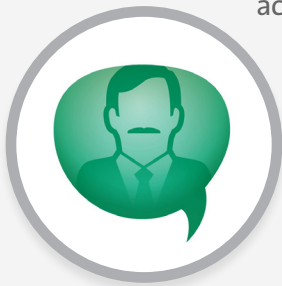


Particularly for organizations with limited PR backgrounds, the data here is early engagement (first-touch engagements). Thus a brand's awareness-building campaign built on a PR-driven social media campaign would look for evidence of Facebook likes, comments, and shares; spikes in website or blog traffic; coupon redemptions; retweets.

The point being that all PR-related output must be engineered (both in content and analytics) toward driving consumers toward sales education channels over which the brand possesses greater control (less noise, competition).

OUTTAKES

This data speaks to what, if anything, the brand's target audience took away from its initial output (e.g. the degree to which the content was understood,



accepted, retained, shared, and otherwise acted upon in ways desirable to the brand). In short, have your PR efforts led to some modicum of lead qualification.

This is the stage where a brand needs to move from

quantity to quality. Here it is important not merely to measure media mentions, site traffic, and retweets, but to associate those numbers with share of voice and consumer sentiment. The consumer has not merely converted by action but also by volition.

Useful reports will show a brand the number of online articles that include its name or its unique brand of messaging; shared social media references; the ratio of positive-to-neutral reactions to content; keyword references in search or online communities; etc. It is at this stage that the brand wants to know whether visitors are arriving at its site via targeted keyword and long-tail search terms or more generic terminology; whether customers are arriving (online or call centers) with educated questions; or on-site conversions are executed in seconds versus minutes (or not at all).

OUTCOMES

This is the Holy Grail of data-driven marketing, the point at which a brand's PR activities can directly be attributed to changes in opinion or behavior, new leads, an uptick in sales and increased revenue—where those early outbound efforts eventually influence business goals.

This also can be the most difficult to report, primarily because many brands—particularly those relatively new to PR-related activities—are still wedded to 'last-touch' metrics that give sales credit to whichever channel carried the sale across the threshold.



All of which is why those early efforts to calibrate analytical reporting with brand goals and benchmarks were so important. If

you've done your work correctly, those early PR efforts generated output data that correlated with site traffic or keyword searches or social media likes; which in turn led to customer outtakes that confirmed some of those prospects not only 'got it' but responded to it, shared it, acted on it in the form of subscriptions, positive mentions, quotes, inbound inquiries and more.

All of which, in turn, should lead to first-hand feedback and reports from marketing (faster conversions) and sales (shorter sales cycle) and in some cases even investor relations (investor inquiries) and the C-Suite (influencer mentions). But these dots only can be connected when the mindset, tools, and measurement criteria are all put in place.



Conclusion

As it has with so many other industries, technology is foisting unparalleled change on the PR industry. But from our perspective, these changes are good—and in some cases, long overdue. Because today, at last, our industry is able to start showing direct correlations between the important work it does, and the results it generates.

What we hope you've taken away from this paper is the picture of technology as a fulcrum upon which rest twin counterweights: content, which is our industry's specialty; and data, which increasingly is the fuel that powers modern marketing.

It is incumbent on our industry to master both arms of this lever so that we can create balanced campaigns that meet all of our customers' needs—the content that drives results and the data that confirms it.

ABOUT PR NEWSWIRE

For more than 60 years, PR Newswire has helped PR, corporate and marketing communications, and investor relations professionals achieve their communications goals – from building awareness with new audiences and gaining media pickup, to managing reputation and inspiring investor confidence – by sharing, targeting, tracking and enhancing their messages to make the most of their communications campaigns and content investments.

