

Make The Web Work for You

Effective PR and Marketing 101 Converge In Online Media Relations

Knowing how to work with reporters online is as important as getting them what they need offline. Without a Web-based tool kit to help reporters do their job, you're missing an opportunity to not only expand your media activities to 24/7 but also run a more efficient, and potentially cheaper, operation.

Staking a claim to space on your company's Web site for a useful journalists' resource center won't replace all offline media relations activities, but it will help you better allocate a valuable commodity: your time.

"Being able to satisfy most garden-variety reporter inquiries with an online media center frees up PR professionals to handle the priority, high-touch interactions that technology can't handle," says consultant Lisa Allen, a former media analyst with Forrester Research and an Emmy-winning reporter. "Tough interviews with key reporters and meetings with editorial boards get the attention they deserve while ministerial requests for photos are handled via autopilot."

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A recent survey of reporters trying to use the PR sections of corporate Web sites, however, reveals that about one third of journalists couldn't find what they were looking for. The Nielsen Norman Group study showed that the basics eluded reporters — the correct spelling of an executive's name and a media contact's phone number. The result? Reporters "go" with what they've got or shop elsewhere, perhaps highlighting a competitor in a feature story — placement you would have loved. Or, they eat up time you should be spending prepping your CEO for an interview.

Allen advises clients to "think like a reporter" when designing their online media centers. "A great customer experience in this instance means an easy way for reporters to find what they need, when they need it. Mission statements and

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Digital delivery of media collateral helps ensure that reporters get the most up-to-date material to fold into their stories, material that can be less expensive to produce online than to print and mail. With even the most rudimentary tools, media relations departments also are able to gather data about which resources reporters use most frequently—a helpful guidepost at budget time when deciding where to devote more, or less, attention.

Data gathering doubles as an important relationship-building tool too. By inviting reporters who visit their online media center to take a brief survey and indicate what information they're interested in receiving, media departments can successfully market themselves to their target audience by providing the right product — the right information — at the right time.