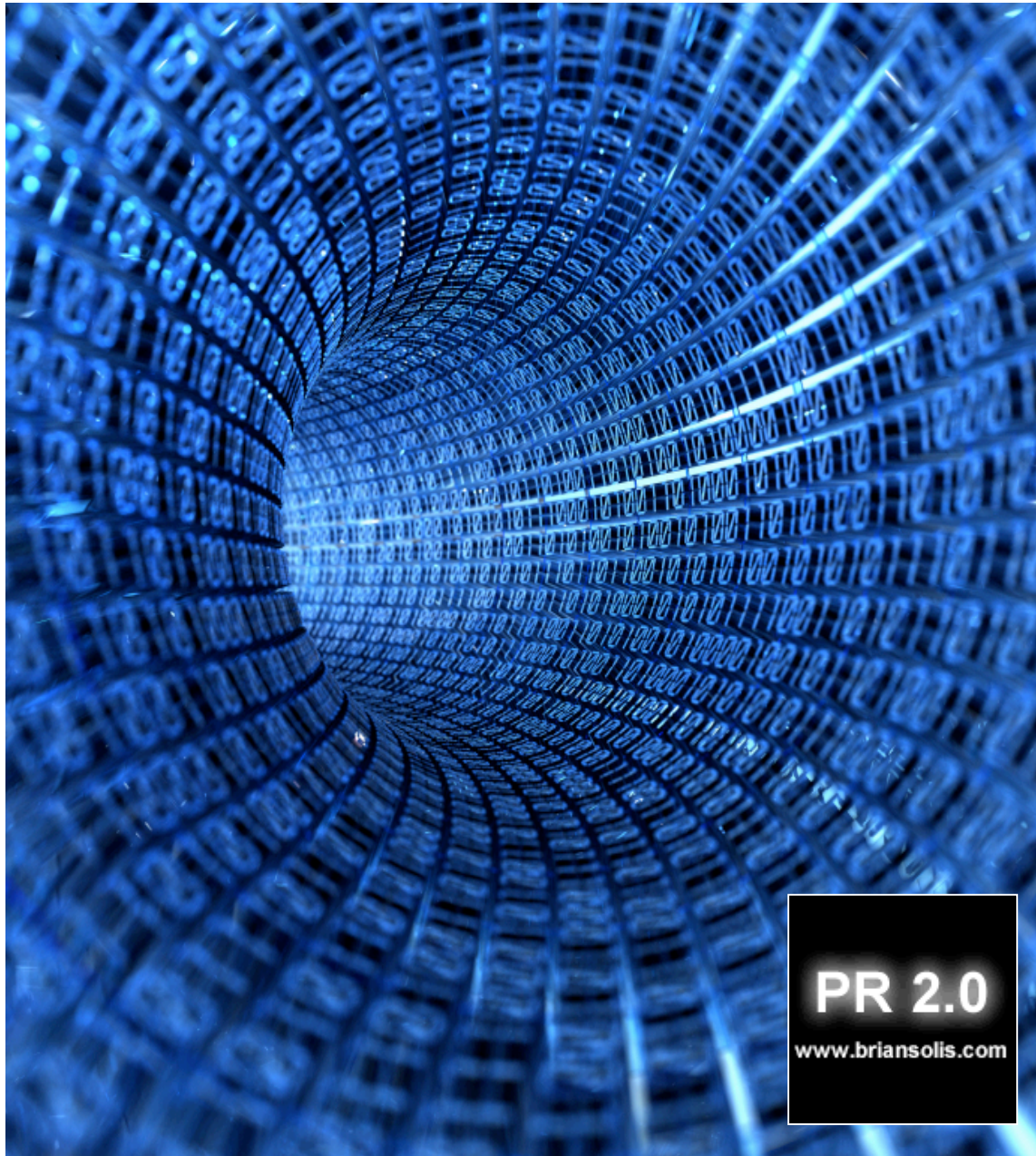

The Art and Science of Blogger Relations

An ebook by Brian Solis of [PR 2.0](#) and Co-Author of [Now is Gone](#)



PR 2.0

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The Art and Science of Blogger Relations

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This ebook is in memory of [Marc Orchant](#), an amazing friend, father, and geek, whom I will miss dearly. Marc participated in the discussion [Our prayers and support are with his family](#).

Building a Bridge Between Your Story, Bloggers, and People - Part I

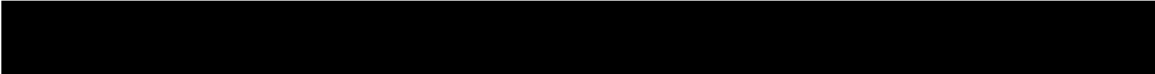


To all of you advanced new media PR professionals, this ebook may seem a bit remedial in comparison to some of more technical and exploratory subjects we usually cover.

Last year I ran a series covering blogger relations [Forward Moving](#), a specialized blog dedicated to PR education. Due to unexpected demand, I've been asked to update these posts and re-run them as an ongoing series.

I'm happy to do so. I'll try to double up on posts to make sure that we still review Social Media and other new communications subjects to advance and expand the conversation.

Before I jump in, let me just say that even though we're talking about blogger relations, we shouldn't forget that at the end of the day, we're talking about reaching out to people. This is not unlike talking to reporters. It's all based on building, investing in, and cultivating relationships. And, relationships are built on respect, understanding, communication, and information (among many other things.)



The difference between bloggers and journalists is only the medium they use to reach people. Wait. That statement is loaded! But think about it. I know I should say that the difference is a formal education in journalism (which I have, even though I've been in PR since '91), experience in the print business (or online too), and circulation through traditional channels. This is why blogging is one of the great disruptors in media. It, at its very foundation, gives a voice to anyone with an opinion and an internet connection.

In a general view, the blogosphere is simply powered by people, whether they're journalists, enthusiasts, pundits, or simply writers.

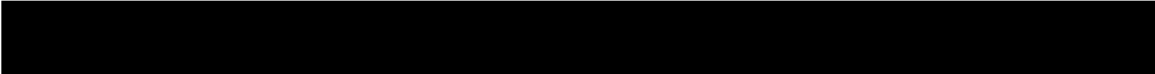
And to all those who still have yet to admit the importance of blogging, please eradicate your impression that the blogosphere is simply comprised of self-important ranters who simply keep an online presence in order to satisfy their own egos. You brush them off at your own peril.

So with that said, as one of the main drivers in the new world of Social Media, blogging has done nothing less than change everything. Even though, to this day, I am still questioned by various folks as to why I place such great emphasis and resources on bloggers, in addition to top tier press. How are they even capable of moving the needle for companies?

Well, there are bloggers in every market segment that have the sheer numbers behind them and have the ability to not only influence the people you want to reach, but also drive reporters in traditional media to cover the same topics. BusinessWeek, Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Time, Forbes, Fortune, and USA Today, among many, many more, dedicate editorial resources to monitoring the blogosphere.

Why? Because blog readers are very loyal and enthusiastic and it shows in the internet metrics and analysis each month. While others may not have volume, many smaller communities can pool together to make a big difference.

For those who are unfamiliar with the almost immeasurable level of clout many blogs



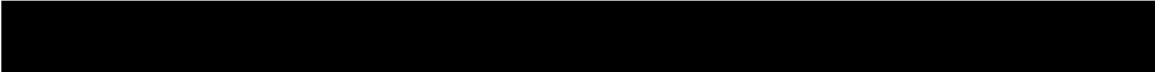
carry today, they have substantially grown from pockets of disparate musings, personal experiences, enthusiast rants, and op eds to full blown reporting across every category you could imagine – with influential pundits defining and stimulating activity in every demographic possible. And, the interconnectivity between bloggers has formed an incredibly powerful network of authority that changes how people find information and make decisions in every facet of life.

Bloggers are ranked based on the links back to them, the traffic to their site, the amount of subscribers to their feed, as well as how well they grasp the industry they represent. There are a variety of online tools (which we'll cover) that help define their reach, not necessarily their ability to impact decisions.

Remember, don't gun simply for the top ranked bloggers, they're not the only game in town, nor are they the always most beneficial or necessary target in your overall communications strategy.

Top ranked bloggers usually represent the thought leaders, held in high regard by their readers, with many creating a dedicated following that look forward to every post. When they cover a topic, it sends a flurry of online traffic, almost instantly, inciting a series of online discussions that usually extends across the blogosphere – lasting several days to several weeks. In my business, which is technology, one of the top targets is [TechCrunch](#), which is capable of sending upward of 10 - 50,000 visitors to any given Web site within 24-48 hours.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying to overlook this group. Obviously, they lend credibility to your brand, or the brand you represent – that is, as long as the exposure is representative of the story you helped to cultivate. In my experience, however, this group typically jumps from topic to topic and product to product, with very little investment in dedication or loyalty, simply because their focus is driven by activity. For the right product, story, or service, you will find that a decent percentage of these bloggers, and their readers, will keep their partial attention with you – if they like what they see.



But sometimes, it may be more meaningful, or additionally beneficial, to reach the “magic middle,” a group of passionate people dedicated to writing about topics and issues that are relevant to them personally. They tend to inspire real world customers to explore and experiment with new products and services based on the word of their peers.

Customers and people are influenced, inspired and driven by unique channels and communities. Figuring out who we want to reach, why they matter to us, and why we matter to them, is the ante in order to buy into this game. Then we reverse engineer this process of where they go for their information and discussions to learn about how to reach them. And, while there may be several horizontal mediums that overlap, the vertical avenues are usually distinct and dedicated.

BUT WAIT. Please don't think that this is your last step before you reach out to bloggers.

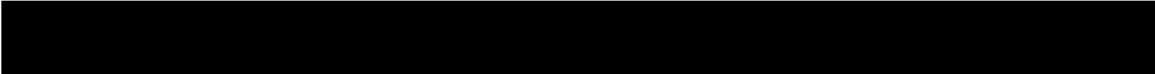
Be respectful and honest. Listen and read before you engage.

There's much to learn about each of the conversations, information and communities you wish to jump into. You'll find that more often than not, you'll change your story based on the insight garnered from simply observing. It's the difference between speaking in messages and relevance and most importantly, honesty.

This entire process is invaluable to the new world of marketing, traditional and social media alike. It forces PR to think like a customer instead of competitor.

Read this important and timely post over at [CityMama](#) and [Kimchi Mamas](#). This is an invaluable lesson of why you have to be honest, transparent and smart about how and why you're reaching out to any given blogger.

"We all know PR people don't read our blogs. I mean, if one more PR person starts and email with, 'Hey! How was Hawaii!' because a quick glance through last month's posts mentions my trip, I'm gonna scream...Tell me you looked up my stats on Alexa. Tell me



*you picked me because you *think* I may be influential. Tell me that you know mombloggers get pitched to all the time but that you'd *pretty please* like me to listen to you. Just don't bullshit me by telling me 'you read my blog.' I know you don't." - Stefania Pomponi Butler.*

Don't be that PR person.

Building a Bridge Between Your Story, Bloggers, and People - Part II



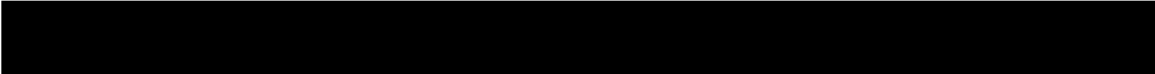
© Julia Allison

Blogger relations is a popular topic of discussion these days, not just on the blogosphere, but within the HR departments of PR agencies and businesses alike. It's something new and perceived to require a very different skill set than most PR and communications professionals possess.

Therefore new job positions are opening up in an attempt to hire people who understand the art of blogger relations and, if that doesn't work, hire anyone who blogs - regardless of industry and communications experience. After all, if you blog, then you must understand company value propositions, marketing, customer relations, and ultimately why all of this matters to the people you're trying to reach right?

Well, not exactly.

Several companies that I work with, advise, or simply know of, have hired bloggers to handle blogger relations, even if they haven't engaged in the process before. Their



thinking? Bloggers know the game, so they must understand how to get posts written on their behalf.

I can tell you from personal experience, that anyone half decent in media or blogger relations will tell you that it has less to do with the mechanics of publishing media and more to do with story telling, an understanding of what you represent, why it matters to those you're trying to reach, and a genuine intent for cultivating relationships.

I'd love to simply say that Blogger Relations is about common sense, but we all know how uncommon common sense really is.

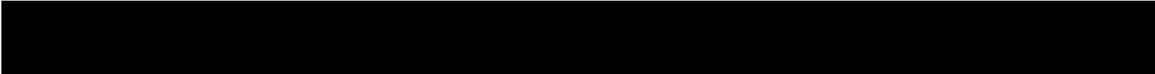
In order to genuinely approach blogger relations, or media relations for that matter, we must first deconstruct the process of the media ecosystem and reprogram ourselves to tap into the basic building blocks of what makes good content and sparks conversations, which in turn helps define why people should make the effort to talk with us.

Like the press release, the PR industry has been stuck in a rut for so long that the industry is content with the existing manufacturing line of building news, writing reports, schmoozing, and simply broadcasting messages to anyone with an inbox.

PR is experiencing some of the greatest innovations and advancements in quite some time due in large part to all things Social Media. But instead of embracing a new and improved commitment for creating and sharing news with people, we're using the same old marketing ethics and tactics to spam our recipients.

Well like good media and analyst relationships, blogger relations is about people.

First and foremost, blogger relations is about respect. It all starts with understanding what you stand for. Seriously, how many PR people actually take the time to really "get" what it is they represent and why it matters to the rest of us. And, more importantly, how will it help me?



Here's a test.

Quickly, the timer's running.

Tell me in one sentence why I should write about you and why my readers will care.

I'm listening.

It's amazing at how many "PR Pros" can't pass this test. Trust me. I am pitched every day, and it blows me away at how few people take the time to read what I write and match their products/services to the most important part of this blog, you.

That's right. It all starts with listening and reading.

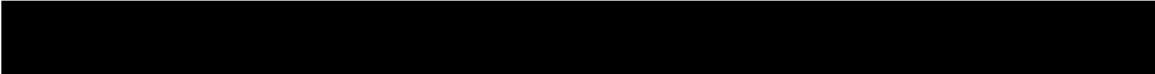
The next step is to really think about why you should reach out. What is it about what you represent that will compel someone to share it with their community. Remember, a blogger has a responsibility to their readers in order to maintain credibility, along with the trust of the community. In today's attention economy, they must actively compete for their precious time, so you can bet that any good blogger is going to be selective.

Oh trust me, I know you're thinking, "Who has time to do this? To dedicate one-on-one time with bloggers in addition to traditional media exceeds the amount of hours in a day!"

Let me say this as clear as possible, "make the time."

Just prioritize the people you want to reach.

Which reminds me of a discussion that recently played out at [TurnPRon](#), a conference in San Francisco where I recently presented on a panel discussing the future of Public Relations. At one point, someone had asked why we should "waste" our time chasing down every blogger that covers our markets when we could just focus on the top, the



cream of the crop as he said, as they are the true influencers out there.

Oh boy.

While there is an a-list for every market, trust me when I say that the a-list helps with the credibility of a brand, but does very little for generating new customers or enhancing brand loyalty. The true influencers are the peers of your customers.

The best communications strategies will envelop not only authorities in new and traditional media, but also those voices in the "Magic Middle" of the attention curve. They help carry information and discussions among your customers directly in a true peer-to-peer approach. The Magic Middle is defined as the bloggers who have from 20-1000 other people linking to them. It is this group that enables PR people to reach The Long Tail, and it's effects on the bottom line are measurable.

Your campaigns should never be limited to either blogs or press, nor should it simply focus on the Top 100 list at Techmeme, Technorati or any other service. You need to be where your customers are discovering, sharing, and talking.

Blogger relations is all about people. And sometimes the greatest influencers are those who are already among the customers you hope to reach.

The Challenge of Social Media



Aaron Brazell of [Technosailor](#) recently hosted an incredible and informative [roundtable](#) to discuss the state of PR, reporters, and bloggers. The conversation was focused on five questions and included the answers of Doug [Haslam](#), Marshall [Kirkpatrick](#), Cathryn [Hrudicka](#), Marc [Orchant](#) (rest in peace Marc), and yours truly.

The discussion was sparked by Chris Anderson's controversial post, "[Sorry PR People, You're Blocked.](#)" My reply to Chris is included on Page 43.

The roundtable set out to help PR people and Bloggers work together more effectively, while improving the foundation for each along the way.

Question #1 - What do you think the biggest challenge is for the Public Relations industry to fully embrace social media?

What if we asked the question this way, "Should the PR industry participate in Social Media at all?" There are several pundits who have flatly said that "PR is too stupid to participate in Social Media" and therefore shouldn't have a seat at the new marketing table.

After all, Social Media is about people.

In the eyes of many PR is associated with used car and snake oil salesmen or far worse, lazy flacks that have no clue what they're talking about.

Yes, it's true many PR people simply don't or won't ever get it. The other thing is that, as in any industry, there are also opportunists in PR who simply see Social Media as a new golden ticket and in turn, are selling a new portfolio of services without having a clue as to what Social Media really is and how it works.

The challenge for PR in Social Media isn't any different than the challenge that already exists for them in traditional PR. For far too long PR has taken comfort in blasting information to the masses in the hopes that something would stick. Until recently, the industry really hasn't seriously considered requiring people to learn about what it is they represent, why it matters and to whom, how it's different than anything else out there, where customers go for information, and how it benefits the customers they're ultimately trying to reach.

The lack of presence or the drive to inject these questions into the PR process and also take the time to answer them genuinely, without marketing hype, is perhaps the greatest inhibitor of PR's legitimate entrance into Social Media.



Brand in the Internet Era

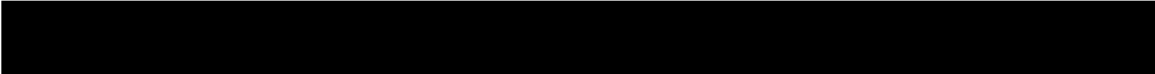


Question #2 - What does the concept of “brand” mean to you and how do you see the concept of brand protection (or the concept of “open source brand”, so to speak) being transformed in the internet age?

The brand is something altogether different today than it was BSM (before social media). The brand used to be something dictated by corporations and reinforced by marketers and ultimately evangelists.

However, these days, many marketing and business executives foolishly think that they can still solely control the brand and the corporate messages 100% when in fact people are also contributing to brand identity and resonance.

Social Media zealots preach that participation is marketing, and indeed it is, but there are ways to do it right and ways to completely f it up. One thing is for certain is that covering your ears to customer commentary taking place in social networks and the blogosphere and repeating “la la la la la” over and over pretending like it doesn’t exist IS NOT participating.



It the era of social media companies have no choice by to relinquish control, well somewhat, to those who chose to discuss it openly, in public forums that are in large part, actively contributing to the extensive influence enabled by social tools.

That doesn't mean that companies can't help chart the course of a brand, businesses just need to take into account that people now have voices and there in lies a new opportunity.

Let's not forget that a good brand, or a terrible brand for that matter, evokes an emotion bond.

The true "open source brand" will acknowledge and leverage the "voices of the crowds" in order to extend and mold brands for both now and in the future - by connecting with people.

Again, Social Media is about people, not audiences, and therefore, brands affect people and in turn evoke responses. The smart marketers will learn how a brand relates to the various markets they wish to reach, why it's important, different, and helpful, and connect with people directly to help them. This reinforces the brand and service attributes we ultimately hope to carry forward.

Read the full set of responses [here](#).

How Bloggers Can Work with PR People 101



Question 3 - How can bloggers work more effectively with PR people?

Yes it goes both ways...

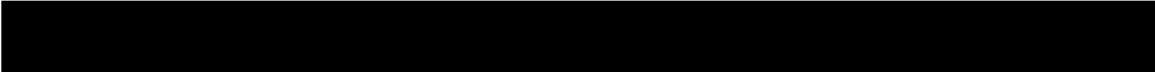
I think it all starts with couples therapy.

Blogger, "All they do is spam with me this and that! They don't care about me and my needs!"

PR, "They never listen to me...It's like whatever I say is ignored no matter how important it is to me. They just don't care!"

Seriously though, bloggers can benefit from maintaining a strategic and advantageous relationship with the right PR professionals. Love them or hate them, good PR people can still be a helpful part of the news and information process. They can and will work for you.

I think we all learned that running the names of lazy PR flacks in a public forum is definitely one way to send a clear message. Social Media is fueled by people and their



peers, so running things in the blogosphere definitely makes things very personal. But there are also other ways to ensure that PR people “think” before approaching bloggers.

One way is to send positive feedback to those that do it right. Send notes to management in regards to those who do it wrong and remind them how to do things correctly. Or, simply block the individual from contacting you again – but in the process let them know why.

We recently had a lazy PR associate who ignored repeated points of advice on how best to reach out to bloggers. Aside from the lip service we got, he continued to do things the spammy way...blasting lists of targets with impersonalized messages with irrelevant news releases. Within one week, this person was called out by two bloggers, one of whom decided to cc: everyone at my agency lambasting his approach and well, basically, calling him stupid. Names are one thing, and probably inappropriate, but the message was loud and clear and this person was now directly humbled among his peers. And, most importantly, it spotlighted a problem that required correction, while also reinforcing the need for other people on our team to remember that this entire process is about people. One news release doesn't matter to everyone! Subsequently this person is no longer with us.

Yes it takes time for bloggers to respond rather than ignore things, it also takes an extraordinary level of patience and understanding, but it helps PR adapt and learn. Using the example above, one email inspired 15 people to do things better.

Another way bloggers can work better with PR is to clearly say somewhere how they wish to be contacted, what they are looking for, and advice for cutting through the clutter. Submission forms are not helpful.

We should all be in this to learn together. And, for those that don't want to learn or embrace evolution, then they've sealed their own fate.

Outing Bad PR



Question 4: Is “outing” a wayward PR agency or individual an effective way of dealing with the problem of misfired pitches?

Quite honestly, I’m surprised this doesn’t happen more often as it has been a serious problem for decades.

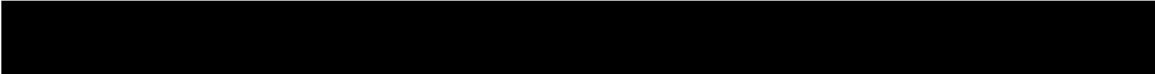
[Chris Anderson’s post](#) sent a jolt that reverberated throughout the entire industry. It was a painful reminder that complacency and spam do not belong in PR.

There are also several blogs dedicated to exposing spectacularly horrible moments in PR as well as exposing bad pitches and the people behind them – and they’re gaining in popularity.

The game of PR has largely been enjoyed the comfort of existing behind-the-scenes and this exposure and public ridicule is forcing PR out of its comfort zone, which at the end of the day will only make PR stronger and more effective.

Now whether or not running the names and email addresses on the Web was a good thing, however, is complicated to assess as there are many factors and ramifications for doing so.

On one hand, it scared the sh!t out of everyone and brought much needed attention to



the need to improve things in PR.

On the other hand, it starts to raise privacy issues and taboos that can lead down a scary path affecting everyone involved in the business of public relations and media publishing. And, all of these conversations at the moment are only addressing the symptoms of much bigger problems that face PR, including unrealistic metrics and a complete misunderstanding of how PR really works by clients and corporate execs.

Exposing names and contact information is a steep penalty to pay and quite honestly, it's somewhat irresponsible. There are other ways to get the same result and impact without forcing individuals to publicly pay the price for the ills of entire industry. Note, my only reservation here is names versus contact information. Running names is a leap, but I can support it. Running contact information crosses the line.

I think that "some" lazy flacks have learned their lesson and many more have been alerted to the fact that they are the epitome of what's wrong with PR.

Very few PR "Pros" are out there building relationships with the public or people. Most don't bother to spend the time to really learn about what they represent, why it matters, and how it's different than everything else out there. And, without that understanding how can anyone realistically believe that influential reporters and bloggers are going to pay attention to their generic pitch?

Advice on Media and Blogger Relations



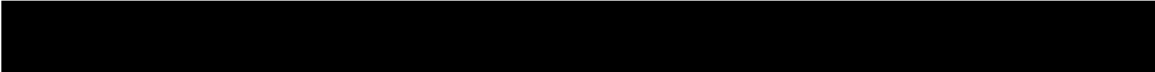
Question 5: What advice would you give to your own industry in engaging the other side?

Chris Anderson summarized it best, “I only want two kinds of email: those from people I know, and those from people who have taken the time to find out what I’m interested in and composed a note meant to appeal to that.”

What’s it going to take for PR to reflect that sentiment and honest plea for relevance? It should be common sense. But it’s not. Common sense is all too uncommon in almost everything we do these days.

So to help PR “pros” stop pissing-off bloggers and reporters and start building meaningful relationships with them, here is a list of things to live by:

Remember this is about people

- 
1. What do you stand for? Answer that first before you try to convince people that are busier than you why they should take time to stop what they're doing to pay you any attention.
 2. It's more than doing your homework. To some doing homework is building lists. Figure out what you are representing and why it matters. How does it compare to other things. What do people need? What are their pains?
 3. Practice saying it aloud in one-to-two minutes or less to a friend or in front of a mirror. Seriously. It works. If you don't get it no one else will.
 4. Less is more. Find the right people, not just because you read their profile in a database, but because you read their work and understand their perspective.
 5. Engage in conversations outside of when you need something.
 6. Build relationships not lists.
 7. Humanize the process and remember that this is about people
 8. Stop whining and making excuses. You are responsible for your actions so arm yourself with what you need to be successful.
 9. Stop sending press releases without summarizing what the news is and why it is IMPORTANT to the individual person you're sending it to.
 10. Remember the reputation and the future of PR is on you. If you're not in this to do your job better, then ask yourself why you're here. If you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem.

Blogworld Expo: Building Relationships with Bloggers



Building relationships with bloggers has been the **hot** topic of the last year, with an emphasis on the last couple of weeks. Thank you again **Chris Anderson** for sparking some of the most important and **invigorating discussions** to take place in PR in quite some time.

I was invited to join Marc Harty of **PR Traffic** to speak about how and why to build relationships with bloggers at Blogworld Expo in Las Vegas.



The room was filled with bloggers, entrepreneurs, PR people, corporate executives, and journalists, all looking to engage. I have to say that this was a pleasant surprise as it was one of the last sessions of the entire event.



The agenda for the hour was basic, but the ensuing discussions were deep and



immersive.

Remember, the point here is that while many of this seems like common sense, but it actually requires a completely different mindset for creating blogger campaigns and measuring their success.

Conversations are taking place right now about your company and your competitors. What are you going to do about it?

Blogger relations and participation are critical to the future of your business. Here are the key points from the panel to help you engage more genuinely and effectively.

1. Define Blogger Relations

- Blogger relations is about people, many of whom might be customers and peers. It is not to be underestimated.

2. The Art of Relationships

- Be knowledgeable, transparent, honest, and trustworthy. Add value or don't bother.

- You don't have the "right" to pitch bloggers, so really think about it before you approach anyone.

- Conversation seems to be the "it" word, but it all comes down to respect, articulation, and relevance. Personality helps.

- No one likes to be sold "to" or marketed "at" - each person needs to hear things differently, so think about that.

- There is no market for messages.

- You are empowered and expected, as a PR person, to know what you're talking about,



its benefits, and why it matters to the markets you're trying to reach. Become an expert.

- Less is more. This isn't about numbers, this is about doing PR in the Long Tail so that you can develop more meaningful relationships that have a more significant impact on the brand, business, and customers service. Quality vs. Quantity.

- Stop thinking about PR in terms of pitches and audience. The pitch is dead. The audience is dead.

- It's all about trust and respect

- Determine their preferred method of contact - note it might not be email, but rather various social tools.

NOTE TO BLOGGERS: Please help PR help you. Create a page or update your "about" section with tips and recommendations for developing relationships with PR people.

3. Promote and Reach Bloggers Through Social Media

- Submit their posts/articles to social networks and news aggregators such as digg and reddit.

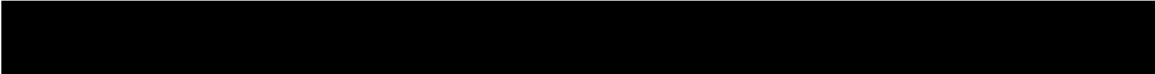
- Link to them.

- Comment before reaching out with meaningful content - participation is marketing.

- Leverage personal networks.

4. Utilize Social Tools

- There are alternative contact channels to email and forms (*No spam or invasive tactics allowed*)



- Social networks such as Facebook, Yahoo Mash, LinkedIn, Plaxo Pulse.

- Micromedia such as Twitter, jaiku, Tumblr, Utterz, Pownce.

5. Be Creative

- The traditional press release has no business in blogger relations. You're going to have to put things together as building blocks in order to help someone tell a story.

- Video, create short video demos, intros, events, greetings, or skits, that are specific to markets you're trying to reach.

- Podcasts, invite them to co-host a podcast or to be a guest on something like BlogTalkradio. Or create pre-recorded interviews or discussions that matter to bloggers. Think about creating custom content for different people. One shoe doesn't fit all just like one message or one tool doesn't matter to everyone.

- Social bookmarks, Bookmark content that matters to bloggers through services such as StumbleUpon, ma.gnolia, and delicious. Also, create purpose built pages dedicated to providing unbiased market background and perspective to help bloggers gain expertise and context through one link.

- Tagging, Tag items within social networks for specific people.

6. Find the People Who Can Help You

- Google Alerts allow you to be notified if anyone is talking about your company, competition, you, or other important topics.

- Blogpulse reveals blogs and bloggers that have strong authority around relevant memes.

- Technorati allows you to discover blogs that cover certain key words.



7. The Art of Listening

- Read.
- Explore their blogroll.
- Use an RSS aggregator or feed reader to simplify the process of reading the important blogs and their coverage.
- Read the comments (and participate). Sometimes the greatest insight is unveiled outside of the post.

8. The “C”s of Blogger Relations

- Concept: what's the compelling plan.
- Context: why is it relevant to them.
- Consumption: create a package that makes it easy for bloggers to write their story.
- Credibility: what makes you credible? Become the expert.
- Community: join it, participate without expectations.
- Conversation: you are not invited to the conversation as a marketer. This is about people, so be articulate, responsive, honest, smart, and resourceful.

9. Expand the scope

- Don't get caught up in the A-list.
- Blogger relations can be based on news and also stories.
- Focus on the magic middle, bloggers with 20-1000 blogs that link back to them.

10. Read the **Social Media Manifesto**

The New Rules for Breaking News



Now that blogging is crossing over into the mainstream, certain bloggers have earned a right of influence and clout that rival many of the top journalists.

Good friend Robert [Scoble](#) recently [discussed](#) the subject of blogger relations, embargoes and the process of news and launches in tech PR. Scoble, for those who may or may not know, is probably the one of the world's most recognized bloggers. While his forte lies in tech, his influence is far greater. For Scoble to take the time to observe trends in PR and openly discuss them in the blogosphere is representative of an important shift in news distribution and the art of influence.

It got me thinking.



The business of news distribution, from a "smart" PR perspective is evolving out of necessity with new processes dictated by the more savvy practitioners. But in some cases, it's important to expose the mechanics of the new media machine for the betterment of the entire industry.

I don't know about you, but I'm a little burnt on just being a "PR guy." There's so much more to what we do, so why not work on the PR for the PR and actually improve things.

Introducing news used to be pretty cut and dry. We'd start by running a press tour a couple of months in advance to the brief monthly print publications and analysts. Then as the official launch day would approach, we'd hit weekly print two weeks out and then online a few days prior - holding everyone to the same embargo date. The press release would then cross a news wire and some would support it with media outreach while others would cross their fingers and hope for the best.

This entire cycle seems like a luxury nowadays as the cycle of innovation is completely dependent on frequency in order to compete, and that frequency has radically shortened the span between communicating news. In turn, the business of news targeting and distribution is favoring short lead outlets such as newspapers, weeklies, as well as online venues.

Enter blogs.



Bloggers have changed everything and it's sending PR people into a frenzy for how to launch products and broadcast news.

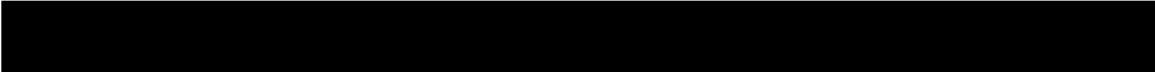
Yes, we're talking about tech and maybe that's not the industry you're in. However, in tech, things work on a bit of a more hectic, hurried, and constant schedule, but the processes that we develop and evolve, wind up inspiring other industries. Basically this is edgework. We're defining and refining new processes and strategies and bringing them back to the center.

So when tech bloggers emerged as part of the mix, we found ourselves rethinking (maybe scrambling in some cases) to figure out how to balance bloggers without upsetting relationships across the board.

Scoble states, "I've noticed that PR types are getting very astute with dealing with bloggers lately...First they'll call Mike Arrington of [TechCrunch](#). Make sure he's briefed first (Mike doesn't like to talk about news that someone else broke first, so they'll make sure he is always in the first group to get to share something with you all). Then they'll brief "second-tier" bloggers like me, Om Malik [of [GigaOM](#)], Dan Farber [of [ZDNet](#)], [Read/Write Web](#), and a variety of others. Embargo us all so we can't publish before Mike does."

He's partially right. There is a process, but trust me, it's a process rooted in respect, admiration, and cultivating relationships (at least for the more effective communicators anyway.)

I've dubbed bloggers the new "wire" service. Providing them with early access to information allows news to bubble up, gaining credibility and momentum to the point where it attracts attention from traditional journalists. Bloggers have direct relations with people, your peers, and they thrive off of their participation.



Attention wire representatives, I'm not saying that bloggers have replaced you. Wire services are still valuable in not only sharing financial information and meeting disclosure requirements, they also have integrated with search engines allowing press releases to reach people directly.

Bloggers add a new step at the beginning of the process.

For example, one of the primary reasons that we launch most tech companies and products in "Beta" these days is because we want feedback directly from the people who would jump in early and give honest feedback as well as sharing the information with their friends and associates. And, if a product is in Beta, most traditional media wouldn't yet pay attention. However, those journalists who do feel a greater sense of competition with bloggers in order to be one of the first to share new, new information, will make it known through their coverage.

This is why it's so important to listen and read before you create any marketing strategy.

Working in Beta not only adds a new step to the communications process, it also affects product marketing as it also requires the team to factor in time and energy for a private or public focus group in order to build awareness and garner feedback.

Most traditional journalists these days want to hear about things that are either ground breaking or changing things in a way that is demonstrable by the massive support of the people who use it. After the beta gains momentum, and enough people use it favorably, then traditional media comes into play.

The next step after that is hitting the "[magic middle](#)," bloggers who are defined as having a range of between 20 - 1,000 inbound links to their blog. These are the influencers who truly move the needle for customers and is among the best peer to peer marketing avenues you can pursue. In many cases, these bloggers are you prospective customers.

How do you share news with bloggers? Well, a lot of it has to do with relationships and

for that, I suggest you read the series on blogger relations (Part I and II.) I can tell you that it's different for different industries and there isn't an exact science yet.

Certain bloggers maintain a higher authority than others, and while it fluctuates, most levels of influence remain constant over time.

The business of news has advanced quite a bit in the tech world, and by advanced, I mean that it has introduced a new layer to the equation.

Let me first clarify, there is still a thriving news business within traditional media. In the tech world however, the art of Beta news is the new game. But, this is not unlike other industries. Early information, prototypes, leaks, R&D, are all things that give bloggers their edge these days and, if executed properly, they only escalate the brand and the anticipation for new things among traditional press and ultimately customers.



But going to bloggers is tricky. Favoring one and not the other can cost you credibility and relationships. So borrowing a page from the traditional PR playbook, bloggers have embraced embargoes to maintain the privilege of receiving early information - in most cases.

I can tell you most certainly that I've had several instances where bloggers broke embargoes, which could have been costly if we didn't have backup plans in place. I have witnessed the wrath that can result if one blogger goes before everyone else. It all comes down to relationships, having valuable news to share, and working with a select

group of people that can really help build the community, while adapting to the way they work.

But this is the Wild West. Live and learn.

Exclusives come into play these days still, however, they're growing more rare. Offering one story to one writer may most of the time, limit the total visibility for any story, as most bloggers extend the reach to a more complete global community of people.

Scoble points to organic initiatives such as those executed by [Kyte.tv](#) and [Seesmic](#). Both companies are embracing bloggers, and influential players directly, without PR, to introduce them to the product and let them experience it without influence. He openly wonders if these techniques may be more beneficial in the long run instead of playing the news game.

Well, to tell you the truth, you can still run both and be successful - as long as you're smart and genuine about everything.



Working one on one with important people, whether they're bloggers or enthusiasts, will only benefit you in the short and long term. However, this isn't always a guaranteed success - even though anything rarely is these days.

Remember this...campaigns aren't viral. People make them viral.

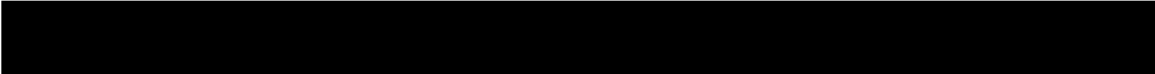
If it's anything that Social Media has taught us is that we can empower people to help carry the word out to others. However, most executives are far too impatient to sit and wait for an organic campaign to get traction.

Now, an even earlier step can be introduced into the process as a way of gaining traction sooner. Before Beta, there's Alpha and this is usually an experiment in organic marketing, driven by a sense of scarcity and exclusivity. Note, many companies also dub this "Private Beta."

Most of the time, new companies and services are previewed in private, through either invitations, opt-in reviews, or password-protected links. Bloggers, media, and enthusiasts are all included in this round and empowered to share information with other peers to build up excitement. For example, microblogging service [Pownce](#) was almost an overnight sensation as it was introduced in private to a select group of influential geeks and bloggers. Their touting of access to the site combined with the fact that each were also empowered with a set of invitation codes, created a hyper-active market for invitation exchanges, with some actually going on ebay (and selling!).



As mentioned earlier, [Loic LeMeur's Seismic](#) is pursuing the invitation strategy and is currently in Public Alpha. This is unique in the sense that it still creates a sense of exclusivity, however, people are so excited to be part of it, that they show off their creations in public, thus fueling demand and increasing visibility for the up-and-coming company. Here's an [example](#) of Robert Scoble using Seismic to discuss [Upcoming.org](#),



which he promoted across all of his social networks.

Imagine for a moment breaking news organically without worrying about embargoes, but instead by using social tools and people through all channels of Social Media to share information before an official launch. Yes, it's possible and is being practiced and streamlined now. But, we can talk more about that later as part of an upcoming series, "How to do PR without a Press Release."

Social media is forcing an evolution in how companies share information with customers as well as those who also act as information intermediaries to the people that depend on them for guidance. The art of news is truly an art and it requires practice and experience. It also requires talent and creativity. The most successful ways of sharing news will be dependent on your ability to listen and by building and cultivating relationships with those who can help break news under the "new" rules of the launch.

There isn't one way to work with bloggers, enthusiasts, and traditional journalists, but there are more than enough opportunities to do it the wrong way. Pay attention. Think. Be Creative. Have a plan. Build trust and ensure that your intent is genuine.

Conversations with the bloggers and media (and customers) will help dictate the launch and news strategies that are going to have the biggest impact and meaningful benefits for your company.

The New Rules of Breaking News, Beware of Embargoes



[The New Rules of Breaking News](#) was written to open your mind and unlock creativity when introducing new products and services. It subscribes to the notion that there isn't one "audience" to any given story or campaign. There are opportunities outside of the usual routine of drafting press releases and blasting news to reporters and bloggers.

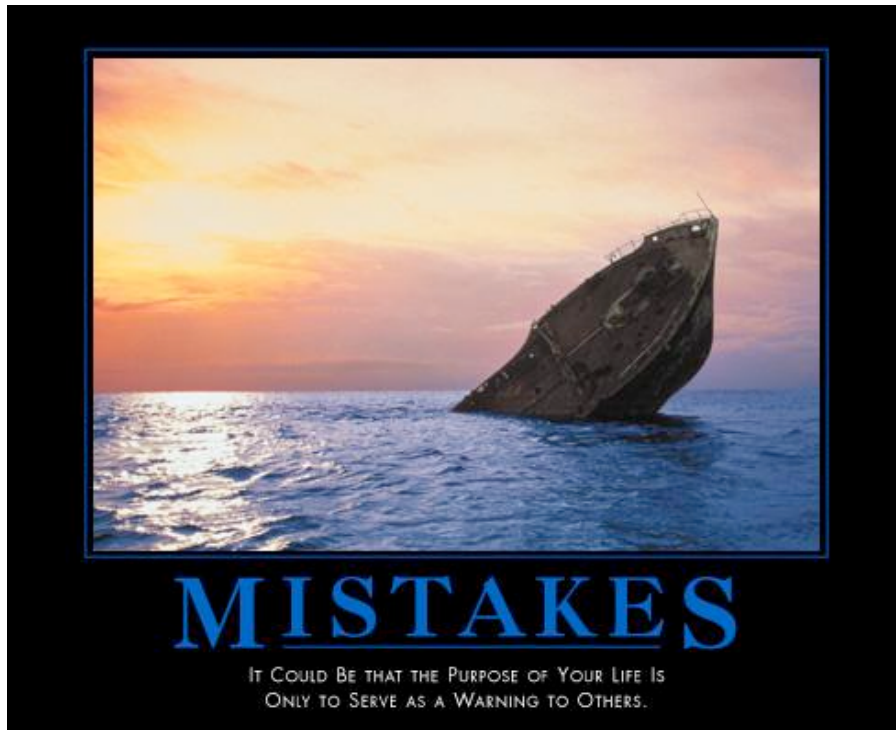
Shortly after the last chapter ran, I had not one, but two news announcements where stories either broke ahead of their intended time and voices. In one case, it wasn't even part of the embargo process which was just unbelievable.

To the lead bloggers whom I had brokered these launches, it appeared as if I had misled them, instead sending the news to others, even though I had assured them that they were given first rights.

In both cases, I took credibility hits and had to do an exhaustive amount of repair work to ensure that these and other relationships weren't damaged because of the mistake, spite, or questionable activity of other ambitious bloggers.

I did take the steps to rectify things, and ultimately the "mistakes" were corrected...but the damage was already done. Any attempts to convey that to those affected may or may not regain trust.

So, rather than just share with you the ways to be successful or constantly focus on the future of PR, it's also important to share the experiences where things don't work out quite like we planned as a way of learning together.



In the realm of technology, this practice is all about who can be positioned as the "lead" story and tools such as [Techmeme's Leaderboard](#), [Technorati's Top Blogs](#), [Bloglines Top List](#), [Google Reader stats](#), and other highly referenced lists, only encourage bloggers to do what they can to increase rankings. After all, these lists influence and determine not only PR campaigns, but also where ad dollars are spent.

But it's not just technology. There are lists that cover every market segment therefore the lessons from this post are helpful to anyone in PR.

What happened here sends an alarming signal, not just to me, but to the entire blogosphere and PR industry.

Outside of my two recent experiences. There are grumbings about foul play across the board that we should all understand.

The business of news can be ugly. There will always be an underground rivalry between top and up-and-coming writers for authority, links, views, and ultimately ad dollars.





The rumors and stories are thick with rife, including the manipulation of "time stamps," copying and pasting from other blogs and sites without attribution, not disclosing any personal or professional interests associated with the stories they run, and running controversial or early stories with checking facts first.

However, this isn't unlike the business of traditional news media, who have always been notorious for scooping each other.

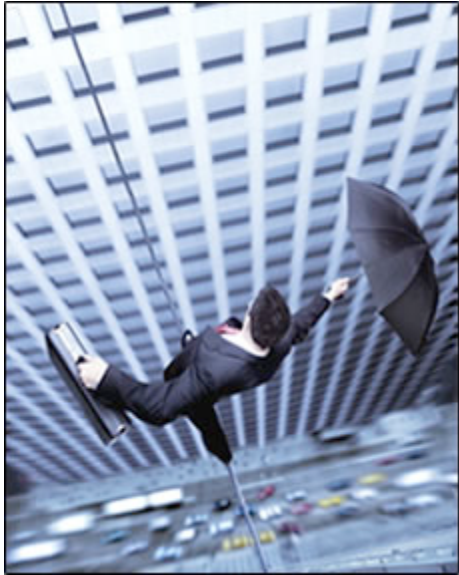
This is business and business is never clean.

These enlightenments, however, force us to rethink the process of PR launches and news distribution, because at the end of the day, it's our relationships that will carry us forward.

The message to us is, "be careful and do your homework."

We walk a tightrope between client/company expectations and the relationships we maintain with writers and bloggers.





On one hand, those we report to want to see coverage and they want to see it everywhere. Most have no clue what it takes to make that happen, but they don't care either.

On the other hand, relationships are the foundation for all good PR, and risking or compromising them should never factor into the news equation.

In the [last post](#) I wrote that bloggers were willing to honor embargoes as a way of participating in the business of news distribution. Many bloggers are trying to run [legitimate businesses](#) and having the privilege, and yes it's a privilege, to receive news early is an earned right that offers mutual benefits between the blogger/writer and the company.

As I said, top bloggers are the new "wire" service. Providing them with early access to information allows news to bubble up, gaining credibility and momentum to the point where it attracts attention from traditional journalists. Bloggers have direct relations with people, your peers, and they thrive off of their participation.

There's a difference though between top bloggers and those who aspire to take the lead, and those differences will ultimately determine who you can trust and who you can't.

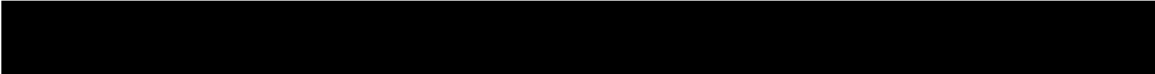
Maximizing coverage is a risky business. And unfortunately, there are many ways things can quickly go south:

- Not communicating the embargo time clearly, complete with time zones
- Not receiving a documented acknowledgment of the embargo
- Not fully knowing the reputation of the blogger beforehand
- Being careless and trying to go for too much right out of the gate without ensuring everything was set

Unfortunately however, the reality is that some of us will learn these lessons the hard way. And many times, these lessons come at a steep price, with reputation, trust, and relationships as the currency.

The best thing we can do is keep an open dialog with our best contacts. Talk with peers. Share experiences. There's plenty to learn from others to minimize the mistakes and the steep costs associated with them.





In the attempt to earn the respect and trust of bloggers, many PR professionals are subscribing to a "Blogger Relations" [code of ethics](#) - although this draft is in dire need of revision (which will be a later post), but it's a start in the right direction. [WOMMA](#) also offers 10 principles for ethical contact by marketers.

Perhaps many bloggers need to think about subscribing to a Blogger Code of Ethics. Breaking embargoes, changing time stamps, editing/barring comments, pilfering content, etc., is just not going to fly for the long term. And it's unfortunate effects are that these practices will continue take down people and relationships in the process until we all do something about it. That's the beauty of civil enforcement. Collectively we can dictate the winners and losers.

Tim O'Reilly has an excellent series on drafting a [Blogger's Code of Conduct](#). Forrester's Charlene Li also got the conversation going almost three years ago with a call for [Blogging Policies](#).

We as PR and communications professionals don't need to support those bloggers or writers who don't keep their word.

I know my word is everything to me and I will make decisions that only strengthen relationships and build trust, on both sides of the tightrope.

Most importantly, sometimes less is more. And, expectation setting is everything.

Breaking news with a few trustworthy bloggers and reporters may be more than enough to effectively align PR with business and communications objectives. After the first stories break, follow up with outreach to other primary influencers, but also find something unique for them in a way that helps them find a unique angle for coverage. Some will push back for not being included in the earlier rounds, and it will be up to you to consider opting them in for the future, but do so based on the discussions and trust.

Contrary to popular belief, the business of news isn't formulaic. It's less of a science and more of an art.



Make decisions that benefit your stories without compromising relationships.

Dear Chris Anderson, an Open Letter to Make Things Right

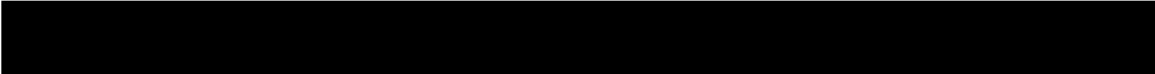


Chris Anderson, Editor in Chief of [Wired](#) and also author of *The Long Tail*, is someone whom I deeply admire and respect. We've linked to each other in the past and for the most part, I agree with his views and observations.

Every now and then Anderson discusses the state of PR and when he does, it causes nothing less than a full blown blogstorm that reverberates across the entire industry. But, what matters is that we all learn from it.

In his latest post, he makes a pretty powerful [statement](#), "Sorry PR people, you're blocked."

If you don't read anything else in my post, please just learn from what Chris says here, "So fair warning: I only want two kinds of email: those from people I know, and those from people who have taken the time to find out what I'm interested in and composed a note meant to appeal to that."



Is that so hard?

Really?

What's it going to take for PR to reflect that sentiment and honest plea for relevance?

It should be common sense. But it's not. Common sense is all too uncommon in almost everything we do these days. I really wasn't going to blog about this as there have been plenty of very astute, as well as unbelievably lame, commentary on the subject.

Taking a step back to observe the landscape, the cumulative response represents both sides of the spectrum and everything in between. The net result should be that we as PR people need to do things better.

First, let me say this, more for Chris, but to the benefit of everyone else as well, I agree and empathize with the inspiration behind your post.

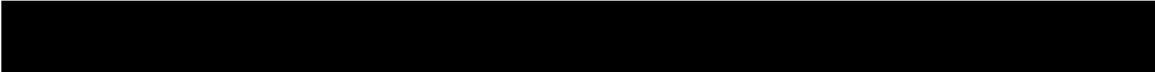
No, really, I do.

Hell, I only get a small fraction of the press releases and pitches you receive, but it's still enough to give me a taste of your frustration. I'm committed to helping rectify this problem for you and all other respectable and influential journalists and bloggers.

I promise to fix this problem among those with whom I work with and can reach. I will also work with others whose voices are trusted among PR practitioners and their peers within the communities in which they seek guidance. We will do everything we can to help teach those PR people who truly desire to learn and truly understand the ramifications of their actions, good and bad, and how to be successful while respecting the rules.

Everyone else, aka the lazy PR flacks, well, they're on their own.

Your post sent a message to the lazy flacks and hopefully they learned their lesson –



they have all been alerted to the fact that they are the epitome of what's wrong with PR; well, that, and the fact that your post scared the sh!t out of everyone else.

Yes, they represent the larger epidemic of what we the few, but proud PR folks who try to do things better, have to contend with day in and day out - the worldwide poor reputation of PR. Public Relations, when you think about it, really is the furthest thing from PR these days. I mean honestly, very few of us are out there building relationships with the public or people for that matter. Most of us don't bother to spend the time to really learn about what we represent, why it matters, and how it's different than everything else out there. And, without that understanding how could we possibly figure out the channels and context necessary for it to reach the people that would need to hear the story?

This is the reason why many PR people aren't or will never be, ready to make the transition to Social Media. After all, if reporters and bloggers don't want to talk to us, why would we bring the same foolish BS and spam tactics to our customers?

I dedicate this [blog](#) and almost everything that I do to try to change things for the better. But I am only one person. I join a growing group of people who really do want to change, build relationships, and be of service to you, our customers, as well as to the people who employ us.

But it's not just PR. It's the whole game of media. And, the game itself is broken.

The only reason anyone is paying attention now is because Social Media provides the ability for people to reach other people on a global and immediate scale, and in this case it just may start to work itself from the right to the left on any market graph. People have voices now and they can now publicize and expose the very things we took for granted for far too long.

Let's look at the game however, because PR is only one of many functions in the greater scheme of content distribution.

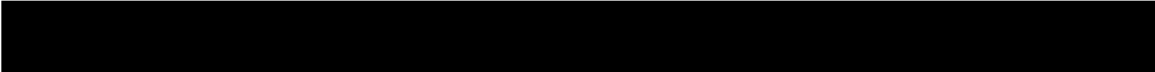
It is a job that many people perform everyday in order to earn a living. Like any business, there are shining stars and lazy flacks that ruin it for everyone else. But, it is still a job. and people are still just people. We all have a\$\$hole bosses or clients that push and push us in order to prove our value and earn our paychecks regardless of how much we push back. In many cases, like in everything else, most just grin and bear it. We also have coworkers that are just in this to collect a paycheck. Even though the timer is ticking until they leave the business, their contribution only damages the damaged PR reputation in the meantime.

Many of us are measured in volume, inbound links, traffic, sales, or by the stack of coverage, that all collectively determines our ability to keep our jobs. Don't get me wrong. There are plenty of snake oil salesman in this business, and in every business for that matter, but those who truly want to do things differently choose to separate themselves from the crowd.



There are those that are overly ambitious and just don't know better. Then there are those who are trained by decades of outdated communications philosophies, formulas and bullsh!t metrics that send them out into the real world only to get baptized by fire for every mistake they make - while taking down the brand they represent in the process. And in the realm of Social Media, these lessons are the equivalent of public flogging in the town square, except this time, the world is watching.

There have been many responses to this subject, however, what every single one of them is missing is that sense of internalization that demonstrates that "we" get it. Maybe



most don't believe that some of us could get it, but boy, do we get it. Then again, how does everyone else know we really get it?

I can guarantee you that I will still get my scheduled call from Bacons aka MediaMap offering to renew my unbelievably expensive subscription to the "industry-leading" media database, that, as they SWEAR, provides me with every opt-in contact who wants to receive information associated with key topics, products and industries.

But, it's the difference between building lists and building relationships.

Could we do our job better?

Hell yes.

Could we take the time to make sure that what we want to share is actually important to you?

Yes. Absolutely.

Should we spend more time reaching out to people individually than blasting matrices comprised of those who are simply grouped by "key words?"

Yeah. I mean, it should be obvious. But most PR people, veterans included, are just groomed to make the numbers. But, yes, yes we really need to adopt and live the "less is more" and "quality versus quantity" mantras we hear all the time. More importantly, we need to also push back and ensure that our clients and bosses understand what the collective group of fed-up journalists and bloggers are saying that they will no longer tolerate the status quo.

It's all about humanizing not just the process of receiving information, but also the process of sending it.

Is PR representative of spam?



For the most part, yes.

This is business and every cog in the machine has its associated benefits and downsides. For every reporter and blogger that's inundated with lame pitches and unsolicited press releases, I can show you two flacks that are equally spammed with requests for updates and the status of coverage from execs in order to prove their worth. The problem is so much deeper than PR spam. It goes back to the very reason why companies invest in PR in the first place, and in the process, they mostly miss the point of publicity all together. They all believe their news matters to everyone else and that you have nothing better to do than take our release and run with it.

Get me the Wall Street Journal!

Why aren't we in the New York Times?

You do have these relationships right?

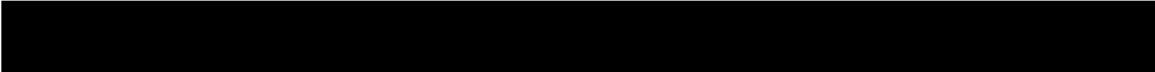
But, let's put things in perspective. There's more to the story.

Media is also a business and they are comprised of both editorial and advertising departments. Do you know how many phone calls and emails I get from sales or biz dev people from publications and blogs soliciting advertising "deals" and sponsorship opportunities for conferences? You'd be surprised and I'm not the only [one](#).

In some cases, I'll receive calls only moments after speaking with a reporter saying, "I hear so and so is considering running your company in the story on such and such. I think it would be smart to also take out an ad to strengthen your story and your brand."

I've even had some reporters tell us off the record that they were advised not to cover us until certain contracts were signed.

Ahh yes, this is all a business. Most editors and reporters however, have the luxury of



not seeing this side of things. It's not hypocrisy. In most cases it really is just church and state, but just not equally on both sides of the playing field.

Do any of these sales people take the time to figure out that I'm merely in PR and not in sales?

For the most part, I'd wager that these ad sales people are more aggressive and relentless than PR could ever be.

While reporters complain of those PR people who follow up and ask, "Did you get my email?" There are also sales people who call daily to CONVINCEN me that I'm making a terrible mistake by not running ads when my competitors are all participating.

Yes, it's the difference between commission and fixed salary - it's all related to the ability to sell a story vs. tell a story.

Like anything there are lines and they're crossed all the time, across the board.

But for every crappy PR person and ad rep, there are also equally lazy writers.

Trust me when I say though, that there are plenty of reporters and bloggers who can't get the story right, even if they're briefed, which has legitimate business ramifications. There are lazy reporters who simply cut and paste and can't be bothered to do more. There are writers who won't cover a story because someone else did, even though their ad departments can "prove" that their demographics have little crossover with any of their competition. There are those who break embargoes for the sake of getting the extra eyeballs for that particular story. And then there are those who are better than everyone else. These actions too come at a price.

Would publicly outing these people make things better?

I don't think so. Is PR constantly sending offers for penis enlargement miracles or the ability to meet lonely women in your area tonight?



No.

So, just opt out. It's part of the business.

It's the difference between spam and someone just doing their job - again, even though it's a poor way of doing so.

It's just as easy to reply to someone with either unsubscribe or "f#ck off" as it is to place them on a blog post where they, and their company can be ridiculed.

Block them and publish the companies like [Gina Trapani did](#) (whom I also greatly admire.)

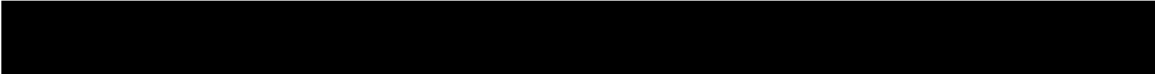
We all choose who we ultimately work with and we earn the relationships we deserve. But at the end of the day, the onus is on PR leaders to do something about it - at least from our side any way.

Chris Anderson didn't tell us anything we didn't already know. He only brought a bigger magnifying glass to class in order for us to more effectively see the ills of our business. We still have things we need to change and until we do, these public lists are only going to increase in frequency and volume.



Attention PR people, here are your lifehacks or PR hacks in order for you to do your job better and stop pissing people off (and ruining it for the rest of us in the process).

1. Remember this is about people
2. What do you stand for? Answer that first before you try to convince people that are busier than you why they should take time to stop what they're doing to pay you any attention.
3. It's more than doing your homework. To some doing homework is building lists. Figure out what your are representing and why it matters. How does it compare to other things. What do people need? What are their pains?
4. Practice saying it aloud in one-to-two minutes or less to a friend or in front of a mirror. Seriously. It works. If you don't get it no one else will.

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5. Less is more. Find the right people, not just because you read their profile in a database, but because you read their work and understand their perspective.
 6. Engage in conversations outside of when you need something.
 7. Build relationships not lists.
 8. Humanize the process and remember that this is about people
 9. Stop whining and making excuses. You are responsible for your actions so arm yourself with what you need to be successful.
 10. Isn't weird that it's always 10? Stop sending press releases without summarizing what the news is and why it is IMPORTANT to the individual person you're sending it to.
 11. Ah, thank you Spinal Tap. This one goes to 11. Remember the future of PR is on you. If you're not in this to do your job better, then ask yourself why you're here. If you're not actively contributing to things improving then you're part of the problem.



Brian Solis is Principal of [FutureWorks](#) , an award-winning PR agency in Silicon Valley. Solis blogs at [PR2.0](#) , [bub.blicio.us](#) , [WebProNews](#) , and regularly contributes PR and tech insight to industry publications. Solis is co-founder of the Social Media [Club](#) , is an original member of the [Media 2.0](#) Workgroup, and also is a contributor to the Social Media [Collective](#) and [ConversationalMedia.org](#).

In concert with Geoff [Livingston](#) , Solis released “ [Now is Gone](#) ” a new book that helps businesses learn how to engage in Social Media.

Solis has been actively writing about new PR since the mid 90s to discuss how the Web was redefining the communications industry – he also coined PR 2.0. Solis is considered an expert in traditional PR, media relations, and Social Media. He has dedicated his free time to helping PR professionals adapt to the new fusion of PR, Web marketing, and community relations. PR 2.0 is a top 10,000 Technorati blog and is ranked in the Ad Age Power 150 index of leading marketing bloggers.