

Convergent PR: The Best of Both Worlds

Since the dawn of business-to-business marketing, marketers have relied on traditional public relations strategies and tactics to enhance their overall marketing communications programs.

Those tactics have included everything from press releases, press kits and trade show support to proactive media relations, bylined feature articles, case histories and application stories. With traditional PR, the goal has always been to reach your target audiences through third-party *gatekeepers*—editors, reporters and writers.

Recently, however, the explosive growth of online media has changed the PR game, creating a deeper, richer two-way communication between a marketer and its target audiences. Now, marketers can use social media strategies and tactics to engage their audiences directly. Those tactics include press release optimization, online media monitoring and reporting, social media press releases, RSS feeds, blogs, podcasts, webcasts and a host of other emerging technologies.

Public Relations at a Crossroads

Never before has PR practice been so complex... and so challenging. In fact, the world of traditional PR is rapidly converging with the world of social media PR, creating a whole new public relations discipline—*Convergent PR*.

For marketers, Convergent PR presents a wealth of new opportunities. It allows you to increase organic search results for your company's name, brand names, products and services by using keywords in PR documents. Convergent PR helps drive more customers and prospects to your web site for product and service information. It boosts brand awareness among industry *influencers* as well as the trade press. It helps you develop more robust one-to-one relationships with your customers. And it helps position your company as an industry leader.

Macro Trends Impact Convergent PR

The sea change in business-to-business PR has been building for several years, thanks in large part to a few macro trends. For example, in the past five years, the number of people involved in a B-to-B decision has tripled. Today's B-to-B consumer—your customer—now works virtually, leveraging the Web to gather information, make important business decisions and save time. And, according to BtoB Magazine, there has been tremendous growth in online advertising, blogs, user feedback, beta programs and other online tools and tactics.

“Web 2.0 is not about technology; it's about an audience shift,” says the blogger-in-chief of a major U.S. corporation, speaking to a group of marketing communications professionals. “The expectations of our audiences are changing. They expect dialogue, to be able to talk back. It's about community and collaboration.”

Consider that 175,000 new blogs are created every day. The best blogs feature well-written content and a large number of subscribers. And journalists' blogs—even corporate blogs—are gaining credibility in the social media space. Also, online PR placements, once viewed as second cousins to traditional print placements, are now highly valued by marketers, their customers and prospects.

Leap before You Look

While the social media landscape may seem daunting, marketers shouldn't be afraid to dip their toes into the water. Some integrated marketing communications agencies, such as Godfrey, are analyzing the latest trends, building a considerable knowledge and skill base, and developing tools to implement new strategies, including those that address Convergent PR.

And, thanks to online technologies, you can easily track the effectiveness of Convergent PR tactics. Measurements include web trends/analytics, blog activity, online surveys, traditional clip and online coverage tracking and reporting, and feedback from target audiences (customers, prospects, journalists, etc). Using one or more of those metrics will help you realize a return on investment in Convergent PR—something all marketers should value.

Convergent PR effectively combines the tried and true with the exciting and new. To stay in the PR game, savvy marketers should continue to practice sound, fundamental media relations and publicity programs geared to their audiences. (That's traditional PR.) In addition, they should embrace the new social media, geared to online conversations among customers, prospects and influencers, as well as traditional trade journalists. (That's social media PR.)

Clearly, Convergent PR is the best of both worlds.

CONVERGENT PR: IDEAS THAT CONNECT

1. Convergent PR blends the tried and true (traditional PR) with the exciting and new (social media PR and web-based communications).
2. Social media PR creates a deeper, richer two-way communication between a marketer's company and its target audiences.
3. Social media PR engages audiences directly through tactics such as press release optimization, social media press releases, RSS feeds, blogs, podcasts and webcasts.
4. Convergent PR allows you to increase online search results for your company's name, brand names, products and services using keywords in PR documents.
5. Convergent PR tactics can be effectively measured via web trends/analytics, web site click-throughs, blog activity, online surveys, traditional and online coverage tracking and reporting, and feedback from target audiences.

For more information, contact LANCE BAIRD at 717-393-3831.

E-mail: info@godfrey.com or visit www.godfrey.com

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