

EARNED MEDIA: ACHIEVING SHARE OF VOICE THROUGH THIRD PARTIES



INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The way in which companies traditionally referred to PR as “media relations” has become outdated. In today’s multichannel marketing environment, it is no longer sufficient to rely solely on long-term relationships with editors and freelancers, nor to focus exclusively on the generation, distribution and targeted placement of news stories and contributed editorial. Since the proliferation of digital and social media, the marketing arena has evolved into a more complex and sophisticated place, one where content is sought, consumed, shared and measured with relative ease.

For this reason, agencies and specialists now talk in terms of integrating communications activity across four distinct categories of media: Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned (PESO).

This multi-channel integrated PESO approach to communications has always been the essence of our strategic approach for clients. To optimise their Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI), we work closely with clients to develop powerful and engaging content and, just as importantly, map the use of that content across all relevant communications channels.

Here, in the fourth and final of a series of guides, we focus on the opportunities and advantages offered by earned media.

EARN YOUR STRIPES

A brand’s biggest strength is its reputation and earned media plays a fundamental role in building and maintaining this asset.

In many ways, earned media refers to the more ‘traditional’ practices of PR focused on establishing and leveraging long-term, two-way relationships between clients and the media, sector analysts and key influencers. Word-of-mouth, mentions, feedback and especially print and online coverage (press releases, customer stories, feature articles, thought leadership opinion pieces) all fall under the ‘earned media’ category, as well as a variety of promotional efforts that do not involve paid media advertising or owned media branding.

Earned media may well be the most valued channel when it comes to integrated communications, but it may involve relinquishing a significant amount of control over the final content. Unlike paid and owned media (ads, website copy, sales & marketing collateral, etc.), a brand may have little to no say over either editors’ interpretations of the copy shared with them or the tone and timing of the copy published by them.

EARN YOUR STRIPES (CONTINUED)

The same argument is relevant to social media platforms – another key channel for earned media – where the narrative and message can be impacted and even potentially altered by responses from the extensive social community (for more information on this, consult our separate guide, Shared: Being B2B Social).

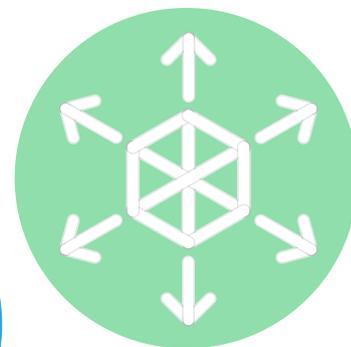
However, we should not allow these points to overshadow the considerable merits of earned media. Customers tend to be more trusting of earned coverage compared to brand-owned content because, with the separate ownership of content and platform, it feels more genuine, more credible. Jeffrey Dachis, former CEO of Razorfish, predicts that in years to come earned media will drive paid and owned media, as future brands will be built on authentic, advocacy-based marketing, which will in turn be amplified through owned and paid marketing channels. In sum, the most trusted information about your brand comes from frequent and compellingly written third-party content, not from your marketing slogans.

Earned media also provides brands an invaluable opportunity to broaden their sphere of influence and reach new, untapped audiences. But it's just as much about longevity as it is about scope – a piece of media coverage gets a second life whenever it is re-published in another title or shared on social media, therefore increasing its chances of reaching new audiences and consequently new business prospects.

THE DELICATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAID AND EARNED IN TRADE MEDIA

Leading trade media publications are an important route to market for companies wanting to communicate with decision makers in their sector. These publications command significant respect among their readership and, as a consequence, they represent a very attractive platform for companies looking for a highly effective promotional vehicle for their brand.

However, with the steady rise of digital technology and the growing availability of portals where content can be consumed for free, publishers are relying increasingly on sponsorship and ad placements to keep their titles running. This means that, in some cases, earned media coverage is contingent on a brand's commercial support towards a trade media title.



Yet brands should not let this trend discourage them from pursuing earned media opportunities with trade publications. Through intelligent use of commercial spend and the strategic creation of compelling content that is relevant and of interest to the title's readership, brands and publishers can work together to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship is maintained. This can result in valuable editorial coverage for the brand, while the publisher also secures commercial support through the use of cleverly timed ad placements online and/or in print.

This strategic partnership with publishers is key in managing brand reputation in the media.

SPOTTING EARNED MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

In order for a brand to build a strong profile and maximise earned coverage opportunities, it is important to deploy a variety of media activities.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Proactive outreach to key editors and the investment in long-term relationships is a tactic that can establish a brand as a go-to information source for editors and journalists. These relationships can be fostered through regular face-to-face/phone contact with editors, by hosting press events to support major announcements, or by meeting at industry trade events.

PRESS RELEASE DISTRIBUTION

The generation of a sustained news stream – comprised of product launches, show previews and corporate announcements – plays a key supporting role in raising visibility with key audiences, ensuring the brand is featured in news columns and sections.



FORWARD FEATURE MONITORING

Monitoring longer-range editorial opportunities in trade publications allows for the proactive planning and syndication of contributed copy such as customer stories, opinion-pieces and spokesperson interviews.

CUSTOMER STORIES

Customer case studies provide an effective platform to raise a brand's profile and are also the type of content contribution most valued by media editors. Case studies can also be used as website content or be sent to customers and prospects as marketing collateral.

OPINION PIECES

Opinion pieces by-lined to an appointed spokesperson allow a brand to develop a thought leadership position by providing authoritative, credible comment on industry topics, while also seizing an opportunity to steer the media agenda.

WHITE PAPERS

Similar to opinion pieces, white papers allow brands to further develop their thought leadership position in greater depth and provide valuable insights on industry trends and topics of interest to trade media publications.

REACTIVE PRESS OFFICE

If the relationship with media outlets is strong, brands may be approached directly by editors requesting for ad hoc editorial contributions, providing an invaluable opportunity to reinforce core messages.

HOW CAN AD COMMUNICATIONS HELP?

We pride ourselves on the long-standing relationships we've built with multiple publishers and editors over three decades, resulting in copious amounts of earned coverage in a wide variety of trade publications for our client portfolio.

Our relationships with the most influential media are conducted at both an editorial and a publishing level, giving us intelligence and insight that goes beyond the news and feature pages of the magazine or website. By partnering with respected publishers in our sectors, we have been able to harness a broad spectrum of earned media opportunities, using the full scope of the publisher's products, contacts and intellectual property.

Based on your objectives and available budget, we will be happy to work with you and the relevant publishers to research a range of initiatives to suit your communication needs. We can then develop and fulfil a tailored integrated programme that takes advantage of today's rich media mix to help you achieve your goals.

For more information about how to work creatively and achieve tangible results, please contact Helen Tolino:

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