

THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IS THE WILD WEST OF PR



The ongoing evolution of the media, particularly earned media (stories you don't pay for), has always been a given. Even so, we used to work with reliable assumptions we knew to be true, "used to" being the operative phrase. But after the last two and a half years, those reliable assumptions, like so many other things, have gone out the window. Best practices on how to engage media on behalf of our clients have been completely upended by a changing, displaced workforce and a crowded, crisis-fueled, and frankly, somewhat depressing news cycle. Because of this, our industry is re-learning the best way forward. Conjecture is still largely at play, but given our own experiences these last several months, this is where we think media relations is headed in 2023.

DECENTRALIZED NEWSROOMS ARE THE NEW NORMAL

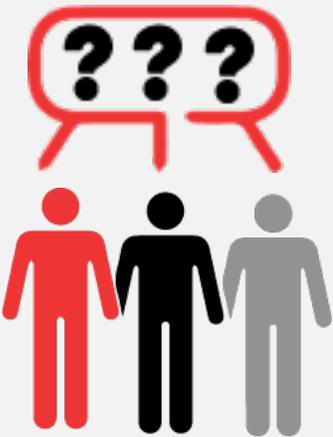
When Covid took the world by storm, working remotely became the new normal—at least temporarily. Fast forward two and a half years and while we're seeing many media companies make their way back to a physical office, very few are doing so five days a week. The hybrid model of in-office and at-home seems to be the most popular among both employers and employees, and we don't see that changing any time soon.



WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR MEDIA RELATIONS AND PR PROFESSIONALS?

A few things:

1. First, forget about picking up the phone. The nomadic nature of the average worker these days is too hard to keep up with. Unless you have the writer's cell number (and are comfortable using it! And they are comfortable giving it out), email is the primary form of correspondence.
2. Second, the lack of IRL "togetherness" journalists and editors share under this hybrid work model can make the lead time on assignments trickier to manage. Either stories don't come together as quickly as we'd like, or on the flip side, it's a mad dash to meet a sudden deadline. Some of these kinks within decentralized teams may smooth over in time, but for the foreseeable future, they remain a challenge to successfully navigating media relations.
3. Third, sending samples is now much trickier. Given that many mail rooms have been closed and so many reporters and freelancers need to receive things at home, we now must track a new KPI - willingness to receive a sample. So much for surprise and delight!



GONE ARE THE DAYS OF “BEAT” REPORTING, MAKING GENUINE MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Together with decentralized newsrooms, we are no longer seeing journalists exclusively covering a certain “beat” like we did a few years ago. With smaller staffs and less resources, we’re seeing a more “all hands on deck” approach among journalistic teams.

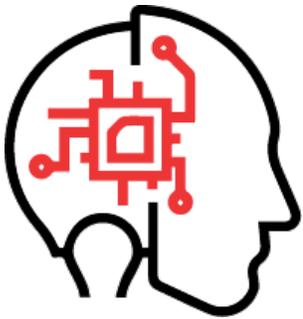
Whoever has the bandwidth is given the assignment. This too makes our jobs as PR experts more challenging than ever because writers we normally work with on specific topics are not necessarily the “right” person at a certain time any longer. Building relationships with writers is imperative to being kept in the loop on what they’re working on and how the workload is shifting amongst their team. Doing this well is less of a science and more of an art form. One that takes ongoing patience, time and care—but it can make all the difference when it comes to securing media results.

At the same time we can’t rely on our relationships alone to make a story happen. We need to keep at it to unearth who’s assigned what story and what freelancers are on the bench for each target publication. Add to this understanding the ebb and flow of what’s needed to make it “onto the page” or into the broadcast - media relations counts on relationships, investigative skills, and moving quickly to match what the writer needs with the information you have to provide.



PR MUST EVOLVE TO TREAT JOURNALISTS AS THE INDEPENDENT CONTENT CREATORS THEY'VE BECOME

Also a trend dramatically sped up because of the pandemic, many well-known journalists have opted out – or been forced out – of traditional reporting and/or editorial roles. Some have chosen to go freelance, still contributing to major publications, but as independent writers with the freedom and/or need to take on multiple assignments. Our experience has proven these writers to be reliable leads for stories and therefore an important group to identify and nurture.



At the same time, while we would have talked with the onstaff reporter or editor before, today we might need to cast a very wide net of known freelancers for a particular publication to yield the same result. The impact? Stories that don't have to be written right now, (not market-making or significant political breaking news) take much longer to secure. Plan on two-to-three times as long to make things happen as pre-2020. (Or as we said above a mad dash to make a deadline someone was just assigned.)

Other journalists have left full time editorial in favor of independent content creation.

The Information (theinformation.com) is the most high profile of this group. Started in 2013 with an annual subscription fee of \$399 it has become a critical news source for the Silicon Valley and technology set – and it's all delivered by email and behind a paywall.

PR MUST EVOLVE TO TREAT JOURNALISTS AS THE INDEPENDENT CONTENT CREATORS THEY'VE BECOME (cont.)



Another trend we've been tracking is the growing popularity of Substack, an open publishing platform that allows journalists to translate their loyal followings into paid subscriptions to individual newsletters. It ditches the red tape of legacy media brands and allows a writer to share his or her content and opinions freely. Some examples include: The Fintech Blueprint, Big Technology, and Wine Wanderings.

What does this mean for PR? So far, we've found that subscribing to the newsletters of writers relevant to our clients can be very insightful. Many of the writers on the platform freely share guidelines and requirements for pitching a story, essentially spelling out the checklist needed to succeed. What remains to be seen is how Substack and similar platforms will grow and measure up against traditional media titles with the cache that so many clients are after.



“CONSTRUCTIVE” NEWS COVERAGE IS ON THE RISE, OFFERING PR THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE MEANINGFULLY MORE THAN EVER

After the last two and a half years, we see a collective desire among both the journalists reporting the news and the public consuming it, for a break from the doom and gloom news cycle. In fact, the [Reuters Institute](#) found that audiences report feeling “overwhelmed by the amount of news, with many saying they regularly avoid the news because it is too depressing.” The same study found that “people feel better informed and more empowered after watching or reading constructive stories.” Because of this, we will likely see newsrooms reconsider how they cover top stories, opting for more solution-oriented coverage.

PR professionals should consider this new approach when forming client media strategies. Offering a client’s service or product as a solution to an issue or problem, particularly one that is newsworthy, will go a long way in drumming up media attention.



EVERYTHING IS LOCAL

While getting a story in a big national publication (online or print) or radio/tv show remains an important strategy for many companies and organizations, the local media – print, tv, radio, online, newsletter – is more important than ever in reaching specific demographics AND feeding the national newscycle. News comes from everywhere, and national shows and publications are constantly fishing from small markets for interesting stories. And any local story can gain traction online and explode onto the national media cycle based on how it travels on social media (particularly Twitter). Take the cheating scandal of the Lake Erie Walleye Trail fishing competition. On Friday, September 30th, two men were caught stuffing their caught walleye fish with lead weights and walleye fish filets to tip the scales in their favor to win the \$30,000 prize. [The Toledo Blade](#) reported the story, which one might assume would be confined to fresh water fishing hot spots or fishing publications. By Sunday, [The New York Times](#) ran the story along with dozens of other television and radio programs, and scores of news publications. And the cheaters have now made it onto the pages of [Rolling Stone](#), [People](#), and [The Guardian](#)....in London. (These stories are worth reading just for the fishing puns by the way.) Having a hard time cracking the national media nut? Go local.

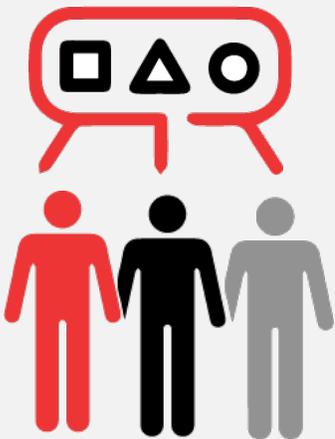
TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS WILL LOOK TO DIVERSIFY THE WAY THEY SHARE NEWS, VIA SHORT FORM VIDEO ON TIKTOK.

We've known for some time that print media is on its way out, with more and more iconic and long-standing print editions shuttering each year. We also know that short form video is the current gold-standard in capturing the attention of consumers, especially younger generations. (Remember, today [more](#) Millennials than Boomers exist in the workplace.)

While we can expect that video will continue to reign supreme, we see a newer movement of traditional publishers gravitating towards popular social platforms including TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to capture the attention of Gen Z and diversify the way they distribute news stories—a departure from their typical focus on Facebook and Twitter. In fact, a whole list of both individual journalists and news media titles with active TikTok accounts can be found [here](#).

This development continues to blur the line between traditional media and social media, an area that's become increasingly more "grayer" over the last several years. It will be interesting to see how the integrity of news stories withstands the viral nature of TikTok, in particular, but it also presents an early opportunity for PR pros to be a resource to journalists utilizing the medium.

What remains of 2022 will surely uncover more media predictions and given the especially unique way the media landscape has changed over the last couple of years, we may even see some of our current expectations altered before the year is out. We're not calling it the new wild west of PR for nothing! So, hold on to your hats ladies and gentlemen, more change could be just around the corner.



In the meantime, here are some recommendations for operating in this frontier:

- Follow all relevant media outlets on Twitter, Tiktok, Instagram, LinkedIn and read related Substacks.
- Identify all of the freelancers contributing to your target media outlets and start connecting with them.
- Plan further ahead than usual so you are ready for the mad dash.
- Present your news and updates as solutions to problems. Be of service.

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