


THE IRREFUTABLE  
POWER OF  
**DATA**  
IN  
MEDIA RELATIONS



DOUBLE  
*Forte*

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# THE IRREFUTABLE POWER OF DATA IN MEDIA RELATIONS

Today's media landscape has become increasingly complex—its purview stretched to include social media and trusted influencers, its transparency clouded by sponsored media, and its authenticity called into question by biased reporting. The sheer volume of information available daily is overwhelming and confusing to navigate, making it more and more difficult to reach the audiences that matter.

This is why data is a superpower for brands and PR teams.

For one, data is crucial to understanding what makes people tick, what propels them to not just stop and pay attention, but to take action. Data is the evidence that ideas, campaigns or programs are resonating and converting potential customers into actual customers. Without data, goals cannot be measured. And second, every news article you read, every social post you engage with, and every viral video you watch—everything is a data point. News and content that resonates with an audience is a goldmine of insights waiting to be unearthed, and data is the reason why.

The last few years have shown what the media deals with regularly: political upheaval, racial injustice, health crises and climate disasters. What do they have in common? For one, the coverage is a mixed bag of biased opinion and factual reporting, which public perception echoes; [American Views 2022: Trust Media and Democracy](#), a survey from Gallup and the Knight Foundation, found that 50 percent of Americans believe there is so much bias in the news media that it's often difficult to sort out the facts.

With this sentiment, it's not surprising that we've also seen social media gain traction as a reliable news source among certain demographics. A [2022 survey from Media Insight Project](#), a collaboration of the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, found that 74 percent of Gen Z (16-24) and 71 percent of "Younger Millennials" (25-31) consume news from social media *daily*. And a [Pew Research Center survey](#) conducted the same year revealed that half of 18- to 29-year-olds in the U.S. say they have some or a lot of trust in the information they get from social media, which is disconcerting given how quickly misinformation spreads on social platforms. Finally, to convolute public perception of "news" even more, paid media (i.e. sponsored posts on social media) sit right next to earned media, often so well-camouflaged that consumers can't tell the difference.



68%

of journalists said they wanted data – in the form of original research, such as trends and market data.

66%

of journalists said they wanted data and expert sources.



boatsetter

In a world full of skepticism and misplaced trust, coupled with influencers who communicate directly with their audiences, reliable data has greater, renewed value in generating authentic connections with consumers. Here's why:

### **LEADING WITH MEANINGFUL DATA CUTS THROUGH THE UBER-COMPETITIVE MEDIA LANDSCAPE.**

It's no secret that the media industry has undergone significant change over the past few years. Even pre-Covid, newsrooms and traditional media outlets had become increasingly understaffed, leading to the demise of beat reporters and insufficient time for those who remained on staff to properly research stories. During and post-Covid, the challenges persisted with journalists working from home or new geographical locations, causing further decentralized teams.

[Cision's 2023 State of the Media report](#) underlines these issues, noting that 38 percent of journalists felt that keeping up amid downsizing and reduced resources was their biggest challenge over the past 12 months. The same report reveals that **68 percent of journalists want to see original research, trend and market data from PR professionals, and 66 percent believe that when communications professionals provide data and expert sources, it makes their jobs easier.**

Of course, the changing state of the media industry has caused a ripple effect, forcing PR teams to adapt their approach in order to succeed. In short, the information journalists need to write their stories hasn't changed, but how PR people are expected to present it has. It used to be that sharing a client's desired news angle with a data point or two to support it was enough; now, data is the story with client news the proof points.

Here's an example: our client Boatsetter, the leading boat rental company, believes that life is better on the water so it encourages people to rent boats for everyday occasions, no boating experience required. On its own, Boatsetter's offering could generate some product and lifestyle coverage—and those are not to be discounted. But when data leads the narrative, broader stories emerge. For instance, [BusinessInsider](#) featured a story about how Boatsetter is creating a whole new entrepreneurial opportunity on the water. The reporter interviewed a young entrepreneur who brings in \$500,000 a year renting his two boats, with minimal effort using the platform. This story uses the data available to show how boat-owners can turn their assets into a profitable business.



Here's another example: [Forbes](#) interviewed Boatsetter's founder about how the platform is making a once-exclusive activity more publicly accessible. Boatsetter put its internal data to good use by sharing that over 75 percent of Boatsetter users are under 45 years old and that the fastest growing segment is Gen Z—of which over 51 percent of users are women. The data illustrates the premise of the story.

The bottom line is that every media pitch should be data-driven. Journalists are in the business of reporting stories based on facts—contextualized facts; our job is to help bring those facts forward AND highlight the reason those facts are important. Doing that can be the difference between securing press coverage and hearing crickets.

### **DATA-CHARGED, CURATED PITCHES STRENGTHEN AND LENGTHEN MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS**

The ability to build and nurture quality relationships with journalists is one of the most coveted and valuable skills a PR professional can offer to a company or client (more on this can be found in a [recent DF blog post](#)). And as is the nature of most relationships, it's a long game; a strong rapport doesn't result from a single interaction, but rather a string of them. It requires ongoing effort and maintenance, served up with a "what can I do for you" attitude. And even on paper, it sounds easier to master than it is in real life. Still, the key to successful media relationships for PR people can be boiled down to one guiding principle: consistently being of service.

We demonstrate being of service in a number of ways: responding quickly to inquiries, respecting deadlines, offering solutions to challenges, providing access to credible spokespeople or experts, and of course, delivering relevant, news-worthy information that can strengthen a story. Sharing useful data falls into the last category, and helps to build a relationship of trust and mutual respect with journalists.

One way to provide relevant data to the media is to produce quarterly data reports. We've helped several clients build the infrastructure for gathering data points that matter, as well as counseled them on how to create compelling and easy-to-digest reports and how to effectively distribute them. These reports often gather key, proprietary data to reveal interesting and important insights about the client's offering, while also putting it in the context of other third party, industry or trend data and stories. By packaging the information this way for the media, we help them build their stories with color and examples they may not otherwise have easy access to.

Frankly, if PR professionals don't do this, there aren't any media relationships to speak of. Even a good friend can't and won't publish a story for a reputable news outlet without facts, context and examples. Delivering these things is ultimately what fosters strong media relationships, transforming a PR person into a true partner and resource who the media can call on again and again—a collective perk for both parties.

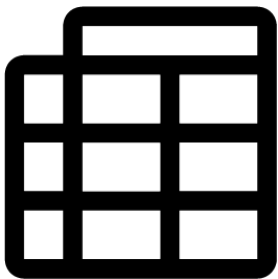
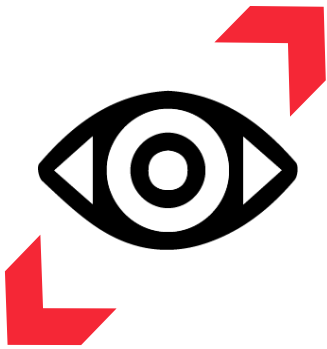
### **DATA LENDS INDISPUTABLE CREDIBILITY AND GRAVITAS TO A POINT OF VIEW**

While it's clear how important relationships are to PR success, insiders can attest that another key competence is the art of influence. It's broadly applicable to so many facets of the job, whether persuading the media that a brand announcement is newsworthy enough to write about, convincing consumers to try a new product or service, or guiding industry peers to see a new perspective. In whichever scenario, the ability to successfully influence is dependent on credible claims and assets, which includes reliable data.

Whether offering proprietary data or repurposing third party data in a new and interesting way, using facts and figures always underscores a point of view in a way that no other asset can. Without data, an argument or perspective can be more easily derailed by naysayers, even with other meaningful points of support like informed spokespeople or expert opinions. This entire article is a case in point. Being experts in the PR space lends some gravitas to the opinions provided throughout; however, the individual data findings referenced to support the statements made, add an indisputable layer of authority. The key to using data effectively is performing the due diligence to ensure it's reliable.

### **CROSS-TABBING DATA GENERATES GREAT STORIES**

Now that we covered the WHY, let's go over HOW to use data effectively. The beauty of data mining is that it's not only for measuring objective or quantitative topics; it can also evaluate subjective or qualitative matters, which are often harder to gauge. In the case of PR, data that reveals sentiment, perception or preferences, for example, is hugely influential in dictating media and content strategy—and as a collective whole, that data can uncover relevant themes and trends that might otherwise be overlooked. Regardless of the topic researched and analyzed, it's important to consider both third party, external data sources, as well as proprietary data (often referred to as internal data).





The media prefer external data produced by a third party, reputable and unbiased organization (think Pew Research Center). If you're lucky, relevant and timely external data might already exist to support your brand POV—for example, perhaps popular online dating app Tinder wants to make a case that it's the most widely used dating app not only among Gen Z and Millennials, but also with the sub-50 crowd. A 2023 Pew Research Center survey titled [Key findings about online dating in the U.S.](#) offers the data needed to support that claim. Most of the time though, the specific data points a brand wants and needs don't exist, so another route to collecting external data is to commission a valid third party research company to conduct a survey on a brand's behalf. Either way, using reputable external data in media and content can bring a brand more credibility and also provide a much broader data pool than internal research can.

External data is also excellent for trend tracking, which is often key to media and content success; for instance, data can be used to understand where a particular customer demographic is evolving in terms of values, preferences and behaviors, which gives brands the head start they need to craft key messaging, target the right media for coverage and amplify on social media effectively.

When a brand can't find appropriate external data or afford to commission a survey, using proprietary data (internal data) is an option; it's relatively easy to collect and can yield a treasure trove of consumer, marketing and product insights specific to your brand, but it must always be contextualized to something verifiable. As an example, perhaps the Ford Motor Company crosstabs their internal data to understand how customers buy differently in various regions of the country. And the resulting data shows that Gen Z drivers are the primary purchasers of Ford Broncos in the Northeast. This data reveals facts only about the Ford Motor Company; however, additional examples from other sources that show increased SUV sales amongst 18-29-year-old drivers give context and validity to Ford's findings.

One of the best ways to use data is to place internal data against industry data. This does one of two things—it shows that a brand is either on trend or that it bucks trend. Let's look at an example of each:

According to [Intel's 2024 Global Food & Drinks Trend Report](#), technology that streamlines meal planning, shopping and cooking will become "integral daily tools" for consumers.





Bucking trend is another way to juxtapose internal and external data. For example, Tesla, *the* name in luxury EVs, bucked an industry-wide trend when an [S&P Global Mobility study](#) reported that luxury car brand loyalty dropped by an average of 4.7 percent from January 2020 through April 2022, while Tesla's rose by 4 percent. In this case, bucking trend is positive; Tesla's brand loyalty growth during a time when competitor loyalty fell indicates category leadership.

Regardless of whether data is internal or external, when presented to the media in the right way (preferably in tandem) and with context, it can result in a much more powerful story than ever imagined.

### IN SUMMARY

"Data-driven" is an adjective we don't see disappearing from business discussions anytime soon. It has surpassed buzzword status and taken center stage in most industries. And while PR might be considered a highly relational discipline built on connections and reactions, it's relevant data that enables those connections to be natural and authentic to the audience. Data also demonstrates the value of media and content strategies, indicating where brands are hitting the mark, and also when and where they may need to pivot. In today's climate, brands simply cannot compete if they don't embrace all that data-driven media relations and content has to offer.

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