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Ideas That Grow: making marketing work in a networked world

Through agility and sheer reach, PR can help marketers take control of the chaos to construct and maintain robust, reputation-focused strategy.

It is generally held that advertising has many advantages over PR. One genuine advantage is that it's far easier to understand – a truism established by the fact that in simplistic terms advertising is easier to practice. Anyone with enough money can buy media space and fill it.

Annotated art

Clearly, success in advertising is predicated by ensuring that this media space is in front of the intended audience's eyes and that what it is filled with is something visually engaging, interesting and of relevance to the intended audience. Most typically advertising fills the space with arresting creative content, or 'annotated art.' It then puts this 'annotated art' in as many places as it can, for as long as it can afford to.

Repeat after me...

Which brings us to the single greatest advantage advertising has over PR: repetition. The fact that the same creative is repeated time after time after time, in multiple locations across varied form factors ensures that recall – the tried and tested measure of advertising effectiveness – is always high.

Marketing by numbers

So, as a CMO making cost/benefit decisions, I know I can generate x amount of recall among my target audience with a spend of y. As y increases, so – to a degree – x increases. Typically, the size of the budget determines the length of the campaign and therefore the amount of recall. If the annotated art is particularly strong creatively, the amount of budget required to generate the desired level of recall can be decreased – particularly

in this digital age where the online media space is infinite and, in many instances, free. Which explains the advertising industry's obsession with creative content.

Advocacy starts here

If we consider the advantages of PR, the greatest by far is advocacy: the delivery of positive messages by independent third parties that promote a perception about a thing (product, service, organisation, person...). PR is able to deliver advocacy through its ability to deal with the tough questions: something advertising can gloss over. A good PR has detailed knowledge of his client's business and industry, the current and upcoming issues and trends that are shaping the news agenda. A very good PR will also know which advocates the intended audience is most influenced by.



An exceptional PR will know how to present his client's proposition to each advocate in a way that is tailored to the advocate's needs and addresses their previously-held perceptions of the 'thing' being promoted.

Blink and you'll miss it 'Old school' PR – at its worst – obsessed about media coverage. Campaign success would be measured in terms of column inches, generated by a media event. So the length of the campaign was often incredibly short: amounting to just one day's reports in as many papers as possible following an event and that was that. And, as PR's critics are always quick to note, today's news is tomorrow's chip paper. But the advent of digital, fuelled by a buoyant search economy, has given the humble news report new life. As content fights for precedence, it is the traditional and trusted mainstream media entities that carry most weight.

The King is dead. Long live the King!

That doesn't mean to say the only reason PR is more valuable today is because the internet search giants ensure its output is fresh and relevant. It's just a coincidence that happily validates the long-held knowledge within the PR profession that influence is a constant. The main – and oft-cited – reason PR now demands such respect is the evolution of media habits online. As social media rivals traditional media for consumers' attention, so

the opportunity to deploy PR's skills within new channels extends the opportunities to drive advocacy way beyond traditional means.

Stop the world, I want to get off

So what? Digital has created an opportunity for brands to move beyond 'annotated art' as a vehicle to secure attention. PR's ability to react to events, to create and sustain ongoing relevant conversations about the stories its clients want to tell and to use advocates to amplify those stories means that it is instinctively positioned to help organisations 'cut through' in this new, networked media environment.

Ideas That Grow

PR creates Ideas That Grow. Creative concepts that are not simply annotated art, but rather are deep and engaging brand experiences. PR is skilled at managing the timeline of a story, sustaining interest and relevance, and syndicating the advocacy in real time. Using a combination of direct social (digital) engagement and traditional influencer relations, PR can deliberately create programmes that have organic growth and evolution at their heart, that identify the roles of both the brand and its audience in the campaign, and that set out to more richly alter and/or shape perceptions and opinions. Through agility, empathy and an understanding of what truly constructs/maintains reputation, PR can help organisations come to terms with the chaos of modern-day marketing.

Weber Shandwick is a leading global public relations agency with offices in 74 countries around the world. The firm's success is built on its deep commitment to client service, creativity, collaboration and harnessing the power of Advocates – engaging stakeholders in new and creative ways to build brands and reputation.

Weber Shandwick has been named Global Agency of the Year for two years in a row by *The Holmes Report* and was recognised as Public Relations Agency of the Year in Europe at the 2010 International Business Awards. The London office won PR Lions at the 2009 and 2010 Cannes Lions International Advertising Festivals.