

# The Evolving Skillset of the Modern PR Professional:

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Establishing Trust in a Chaotic World

## The core skills of the modern PR professional are based on gaining the most important currency for companies today: **Trust**.

Many fundamentals of PR remain unchanged. But the rise of digital technologies and social media has transformed how PR professionals must operate to succeed. Real-time channels have accelerated the speed of communication—and with it, expectations for rapid-fire response times.

Consumers are more connected than ever, and they have a huge amount of choice in which brands they choose to buy from and work with. Brands need to take smart steps to reach these individuals on the platforms they use every day and serve them messages they'll value and trust.

The following are four of the most critical abilities for modern PR professionals to possess:

- **Verifying information** to spare customers from the deluge of fake news sowing confusion.
- **Engaging appropriate influencers** to give brands a human face.
- **Performing analytics** to make objectively smart moves instead of using guesswork.
- **Working with multimedia** because information consumption habits have evolved.

Read on to see why and how you can adapt to the evolving PR landscape to achieve the PR results your company or your clients expect.

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# Verifying Information

The chaotic media climate today, in which blatantly false and malicious stories can lead to very real consequences, presents a serious challenge for PR professionals. These individuals have to realise the magnitude of the problem and counter with clarifications.



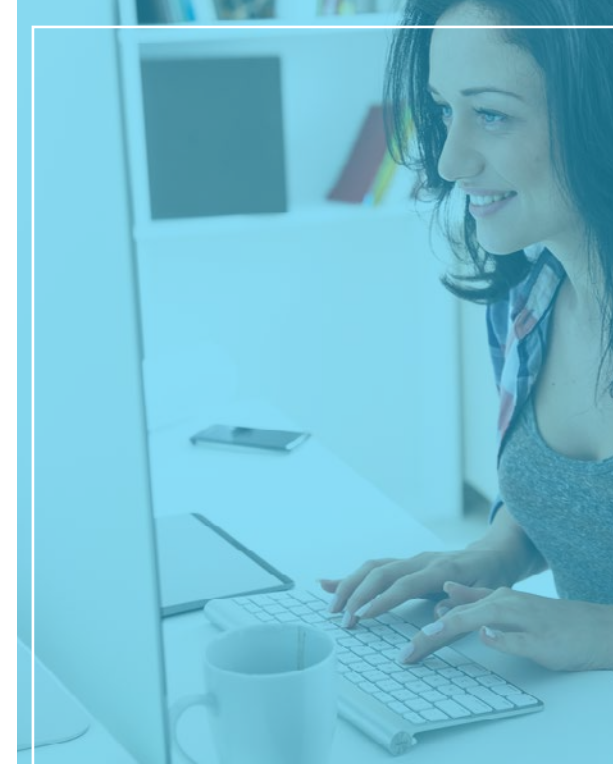
## Confusion is everywhere:

**64 percent** of respondents say fake news stories are causing “a great deal of confusion.” 24 percent say these falsehoods have led to “some confusion.”



## Fake content is spreading:

**16 percent** of respondents said they’d shared a fake news story not knowing it was untrue—and 14 percent admitted to willingly sharing fabricated facts<sup>1</sup>



## PR pros’ best practices

- 1** Establish an internal fact-checking process and team
- 2** Prepare sources and methodology for statistical information before presenting to journalists
- 3** Restrict pitches to outlets with strong reputations<sup>2</sup>



# Verifying Information

Last year felt a little *Alice in Wonderland*, where one could be expected to "... believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Fake news and alternative facts were so widespread, in fact, that Oxford Dictionaries announced that the Word of the Year 2016 was, "Post-truth—an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the constant debate over fact versus fiction led to significant distrust in the media. According to the 2017 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER, **trust in media languishes at 43 percent overall and at all-time lows in 17 countries.**<sup>4</sup> For PR professionals, who in the past relied on the media to get their messages out, public skepticism is now a hurdle to be overcome. In order to build trust with audiences, PR professionals must present clear, correct information—in a timely manner—especially when it comes to crisis communications.

Why? Just look at how the recent PR crisis for an airline spiraled out of control as the Twittersphere dissected every statement seconds after it was released. PR is not propaganda; but if your communications lack authoritative sources and authenticity, the risk of being labeled as such increases. As *PR Week* noted, "This is exactly the time when media and communicators need to double down on the standards of truth, authenticity, transparency, best practice, and facts that have traditionally defined their crafts."<sup>5</sup>

TRUST IN  
MEDIA

DOWN  
43%

“

Public relations  
fail when there is  
no integrity.”<sup>6</sup>

– Viv Segal  
Sefin Marketing



# Engaging Appropriate Influencers

With so much access to information, consumers are looking beyond brand's own communications to get information. PR pros today are learning to work with influential figures to reach large audiences with messages that come from people rather than companies.



## It's already working:

93 percent of professionals reaching out to customers through influencers found the method effective.<sup>7</sup>



## Relationships will deepen:

Rather than quick-and-dirty paid product pitches, influencers and companies should develop deeper connections over time.<sup>8</sup>



## Too much automation hurts results:

The value of influencers is in the human connections they create with followers. Too much automation negates this.<sup>9</sup>



## PR pros' best practices

- 1 Choose influencers who complement your brand
- 2 Remember even contracted relationships need to be nurtured
- 3 Don't let paid marketing dominate





# Engaging Appropriate Influencers

Before the dawn of social media, PR professionals relied heavily on traditional news outlets to distribute their messages. Journalists still represent an important source of earned media. Given widespread distrust, however, PR professionals also need to cultivate relationships with other influencers. The Edelman TRUST BAROMETER found that consumers cite other consumers as equally credible compared to technical or academic experts—and nearly twice as credible as a CEO or government official—when considering sources of information about an organisation or brand.<sup>10</sup>

Today, bloggers, vloggers and social media darlings are important influencers. NM Incite notes, **“Blogs are sometimes overlooked as a significant source of online buzz in comparison to social networking sites, yet consumer interest in blogs keeps growing.”**<sup>11</sup> In just five years, for example, the number of blogs rose by 36 million to 181 million globally.

When identifying influencers, however, reach takes a back seat to relevance. An enormous following won't matter if the intended audience feels like the relationship between a brand and an influencer is contrived or disingenuous. As we saw with a recent—and short-lived—ad campaign by a beverage brand, a lack of authenticity can spawn a PR crisis itself. In fact, many organisations have been seeking out micro influencers—those with 1,000 to 10,000 followers. A social analytics tool makes it easier to spot the right ones—before competitors snap them up. Choosing appropriate influencers also demands due diligence. Pre-screening and on-going monitoring helps PR professionals mitigate the reputational risks of cultivating a likable influencer who would quickly become a liability if an unsavory past came to light.



500%  
MORE BLOGS

IN THE  
PAST  
5  
YEARS

“

The term ‘influencer’ doesn’t just refer to bloggers. It could be a journalist who is a wine expert, a YouTuber who specialises in gaming or a fashion stylist with a huge Instagram following.”

– Megan Mephram  
Digital PR Architect, ThoughtShift

# Performing Analytics

While their counterparts in marketing have fully embraced data analytics to measure campaign effectiveness and optimise marketing plans, PR professionals have lagged behind.

Zach Cutler, founder and CEO of NYC tech PR agency Cutler PR, suggests, “Bringing quantitative measurement and prediction of outcomes to traditional PR will grow transparency and trust between agencies and clients, and inform better decision-making and, ultimately, results.”<sup>12</sup>



## Unlock fast responses:

Using real-time streams of information, PR pros can gain quick insights on trends that are still fresh.<sup>13</sup>



## Find small data in big data:

Global data is expected to total 44 zettabytes—equivalent to 1,936 trillion terabytes—by 2020.<sup>14</sup> Rather than being overwhelmed by this flood, PR pros need to find the value within it.



## Increase faith in PR:

Plenty of information flows between audiences and brands today, and intelligent PR pros will become adept at harnessing it. Analytics use is proving PR's ROI.<sup>15</sup>



## PR pros' best practices

- 1 Work with a trustworthy, comprehensive, media intelligence platform
- 2 Use help from outside analysts when you need it
- 3 Approach the insights with an open mind, you could uncover something unexpected



# Performing Analytics

Not that long ago, measuring PR performance required nothing more than a ruler, a stack of newspapers and some patience to add up the Advertising Value Equivalents (AVEs) of coverage for a press release. In the digital age, AVEs fall short. Just as other areas of business need real-time, accurate data to drive decision making, PR professionals need insights to inform their decisions. Take influencer effectiveness, for example. A click-through-rate does not offer sufficient insight into broader engagement; for that you need the ability to track virality of a campaign across multiple media channels. More importantly, you need to be adept at telling the ROI story to demonstrate your value and justify your budget in a prove-it-or-lose-it atmosphere.

The best approach is to **identify the business goals that matter most—to your C-suite or your clients—and then select metrics that speak to those goals.** Considering the volume of data that needs to be processed, thanks to an increasing number of communication platforms and channels, PR professionals need more than a ruler these days.

Media intelligence requires innovative tools for monitoring and analysing a wide array of media types—print, online, broadcast and social; the right solutions helps you achieve a comprehensive view of critical metrics—including share of voice, sentiment, and more—to evaluate and share the success of communications plans. What's more, you gain valuable media intelligence to help you spot trends, anticipate challenges and respond proactively.



“

Bringing quantitative measurement and prediction of outcomes to traditional PR will grow transparency and trust between agencies and clients, and inform better decision-making and, ultimately, results.”

— Zach Cutler  
Founder and CEO, Cutler PR





# Working with Multimedia

Traditional press releases alone just don't have the reach they once did. There are plenty of ways to ensure PR messages break through to customers, and just about all of them involve breaking out of conventional media use patterns and getting creative:



## Press releases are going unnoticed:

With **83 percent** of journalists using a mere 10 percent of all press releases they're sent, it's clear PR departments need other outreach channels.<sup>17</sup>



## Video is rising:

When deciding what medium to use to communicate key info, consider video, which is becoming the new standard: It will account **80 percent** of consumer internet traffic by 2019.<sup>18</sup>



## PR pros' best practices

- 1 Go beyond the standard press release to get journalists' attention
- 2 Give multimedia access wherever possible
- 3 Work with marketing, uniting your approaches<sup>19</sup>



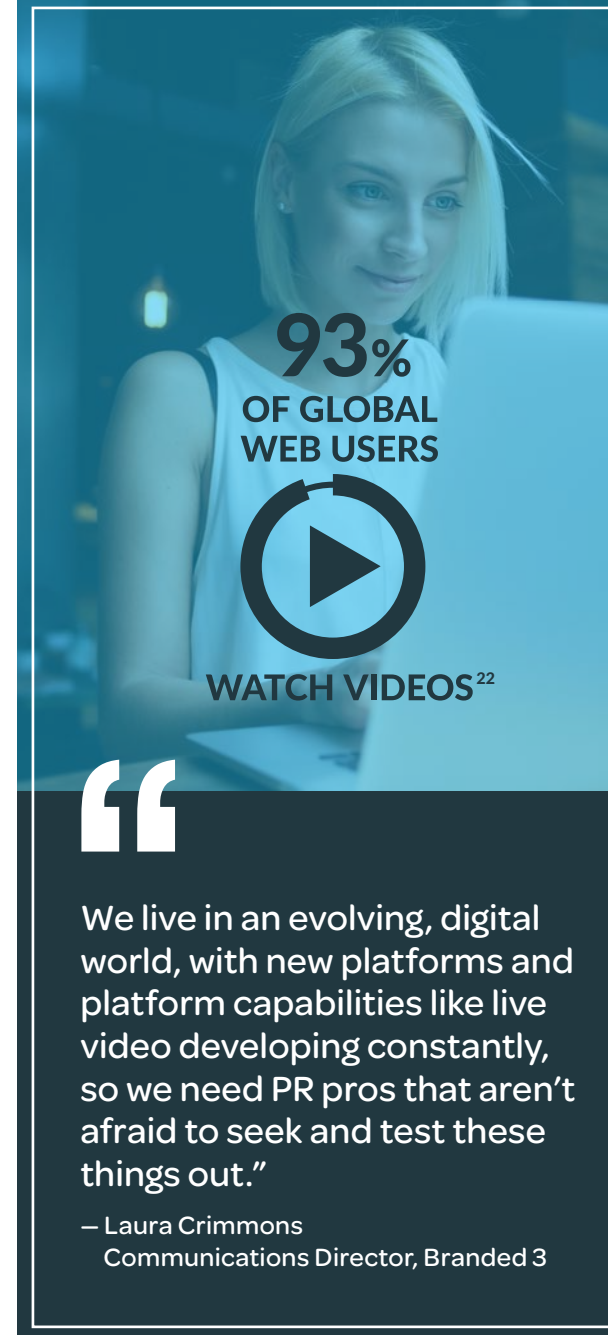
# Working with Multimedia

You need only look at Scott Brinker's map of the marketing technology landscape to understand that PR professionals need to stay agile when it comes to choosing communication styles and channels.<sup>20</sup> Twitter®, Instagram™, Pinterest, Snapchat, Facebook® Live and YouTube™—the list of possible ways to reach audiences is constantly growing and evolving. Now virtual reality platforms are entering the fray.


On top of the every-widening scope for delivering communications, PR professionals must also come to grips with the demand for engaging content. **Dry, factual press releases cannot compete in a fast-paced, always-on digital world that caters to short attention spans.**

Research by the Global Web Index indicates that "Having a strong video offering, and hosting live-streaming, is quickly becoming a requisite development for all social networks."<sup>21</sup> The force behind this—and the reason that PR professionals need to join the video brigade—is the rise in video sharing. Already, 20 percent of Facebook users upload videos, and the figure climbs to 33 percent for Snapchat and 50 percent for WhatsApp. Delivering shareable video content or live-streaming represent sure-fire ways to distribute PR communications.

Successful engagement in this atmosphere demands an integrated approach. No longer can organisations maintain separate silos for PR, traditional and digital marketing, SEO and social media. As the lines blur, PR professionals need to develop more collaborative relationships with marketing teams so that the stories being told are consistent, relevant and authentic—regardless of whether they take the form of a short video, a promoted blog or a tweet-version of a press release.



93%  
OF GLOBAL  
WEB USERS



WATCH VIDEOS<sup>22</sup>

“

We live in an evolving, digital world, with new platforms and platform capabilities like live video developing constantly, so we need PR pros that aren't afraid to seek and test these things out.”

– Laura Crimmons  
Communications Director, Branded 3



# New Paths to the Same Goal

How PR professionals execute their efforts may have changed dramatically, but the shift in PR skills only affects how PR departments achieve their goals, not what they are. At its core, however, PR remains focused on building trust with audiences, boosting the visibility and reputations of their brands—and doing that means going along with new technological changes that emerge.

In a world that is moving faster than ever—and becoming less receptive to PR touchstones such as the classic press release—it would be irresponsible to ignore the many changes going on and stay with legacy methods. The skills you use must continue to evolve as you cultivate traditional and non-traditional relationships, leverage analytics for discovery and measurement, and find balance when disruptive innovations enter the scene.

An effective PR department today is equipped with the latest technology, and staffed by individuals who know how to make those systems work toward their long-held goals. Be authentic. Be flexible. And ensure you have the right tools to support you, whether for brand building or crisis control.

“Trust is all that matters. It is the coin of the realm. Without a spokesperson who is trusted by the media, your story won’t get communicated.”<sup>23</sup>

— Jeff Slater, [TheMarketingSage.com](http://TheMarketingSage.com)



# Have your tools evolved to match your needs? See LexisNexis Newsdesk® in action with a demo.

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## About LexisNexis®

After nearly 40 years providing solutions that help organisations harness the power of information, LexisNexis remains dedicated to developing innovative tools to support data-driven decision-making.

LexisNexis media intelligence solutions help you:

- Monitor what's being said—in near real-time—across licensed and online print and broadcast news, as well as blogs and other social media channels
- Reduce the complexity of intelligence discovery and analysis with built-in data visualisation and social analytics tools
- Deliver news and actionable insights to stakeholders, colleagues and clients more efficiently
- Improve the quality and completeness of strategic business insight

From industry-leading signal identification and noise cancellation for accurate curation, to skilled and experienced media analysis consultants for measuring return on investment, we can help you gain maximum insights—and value—from LexisNexis solutions.

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