

COMPLETE COVERAGE

Crafting newsworthy stories. Bolstering pitches. Employing technology to its utmost impact. Using social media to strengthen relationships. Tips on all of these key media relations tactics — and more — were shared during Agility PR Solutions' recent three-day virtual summit.

EARNED MEDIA MASTERY »

AUGUST 26-28, 2021

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HEADING TO THE SUMMIT

The discipline of communications changes daily. Both what PR pros are entrusted to do for brands, as well as how they do it.

Some things, however, don't change. Among them, the importance of getting positive coverage for your clients and/or brands. That will always be a huge part of any comms pro's remit.

The Earned Media Mastery virtual summit, held from August 26-28, 2021, was created to inspire and educate PR and comms practitioners through myriad sessions focused on improving key earned media tactics.

On these pages, we recap 15 of the event's sessions. Data, analytics, influence, social media, messaging and so much more are covered in depth.

And while the free portion of the summit may be over, you can still get access to the tips, tricks, and secrets of all 35-plus PR industry experts, award-winning journalists, and thought leaders who joined the event this year.

To that end, we have an exclusive offer for readers of this eBook: Use the promo code "PITCHING" to lock in an All-Access Pass at the discounted rate of \$97.

With this pass, you'll be able to view all 31 sessions at your leisure — and forever. To get started, head over to [earnedmedia-mastery.com](https://www.earnedmedia-mastery.com).

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All session recaps written by Barbara White-Sax



SESSION Superior media pitching strategies for the new normal

SPEAKER Michael Smart, CEO, Michael Smart PR

POWERFUL PITCH

Journalists are getting more requests for coverage from more directions than ever. This session highlights myriad tips to help your pitch stand out.



When comms pros find ways to reach target journalists outside the inbox, they are more likely to make it onto those reporters' radar, counsels Michael Smart, CEO of his eponymous firm. Whether it's following a journalist on Twitter or directly asking what is most helpful to them, "taking the time to engage with journalists where they live leads to relationships that yield results," he says.

The DIF (Do It For Them) approach, providing not just angles, but sources for journalists, gets results.

"When you lack hard news, you can identify a trend," advises Smart. "Find three examples and show how your organization fits into that trend."

One PR pro used this tactic to pitch a story on how health systems are trying to close the gap on delayed vaccinations due to COVID-19 by giving three examples that tied to her client's healthcare software company. The result was a placement in STAT+, a premium provider of healthcare and medical news.

Smart urges PR pros to always take charge of the story. He cites the example of a PR pro at St. Luke's Hospital in Missouri who didn't just respond to a media inquiry about the recovery of a patient with serious complications from COVID-19, but provided background on the patient, quotes, some additional bullets and links to photos and video.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Personalized pitching also pays off. Resist the temptation to send the same pitch to everyone on a particular beat.

"Use your database to identify the target journalists, write them a targeted pitch," says Smart.

And your work doesn't end with a placement. "It should be table stakes to not just promote the placements you make, but make sure that journalists know it," he adds. "They care about those page views, too."

Tiny tweaks to a pitch can bring awesome results. For a pitch on underrepresented businesses, one pro pasted a thumbnail photo of a graphic designer and her work right into the pitch.

"I recommend you do this with every pitch," suggests Smart, "It's a pattern interrupt. Journalists are used to getting email after email of text, text, text. When yours has a photo that just pops out to them, it makes them more likely to read it."

It's also useful to look beyond the usual suspects when pitching. For a story on a fundraiser coloring book by venerable designer Iris Apfel, placement on the home design and interior decorating platform Veranda drove the most traffic.

Non-traditional outlets, such as LinkedIn, which is "super buzzy in the entrepreneur space," can be a great placement. A PR pro with the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, who had already made inroads with the Florida media, cast her net wider to build relationships with the American Birding and Salt Strong podcasts. Both have more than 20,000 monthly listeners; a particularly passionate niche more likely to make a donation."

"These are the types of narrow niche verticals that will help you," says Smart. "Don't try to be all things to all people. [Focus on those] most likely to bring the business results for your client or organization." •



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MICHAEL SMART
CEO, Michael Smart PR

SESSION Meta Media Relations: Telling the Media's Story

SPEAKER Isabel Lara, CCO, NPR

TELLING THE MEDIA'S STORY

Pitching a story on behalf of a media company is a unique challenge. This session offers guidance on that, as well as so much more that will benefit all PR pros seeking to improve their relationship with the press.

Managing reputation and building relationships is foundational to the broader PR function. It is also key to media relations, especially when pitching other media companies on behalf of a media company.

Isabel Lara, CCO at NPR, sees her team's mission as extending the reach of NPR journalism.

"NPR is more than radio," she emphasizes. "Our content is on so many platforms we want to make sure our podcasts, digital stories and video get further."

Pitching NPR's 50th anniversary in 2021 was a home run for Lara's team, with placements including *CBS Sunday Morning*, *People*, *Washingtonian* and *The Washington Post*.

The Tiny Desk Concert, which started on the desk of *All Things Considered* host Bob Boilen, gets millions of views on YouTube and has been a wonderful platform for NPR, increasing its reach to millions of people.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Occasionally, her team does have to do some damage control, such as the time NPR took

its tradition of reading the Declaration of Independence on the air on July 4 to Twitter and caused an uproar. Some of the document's language was taken out of context and misunderstood.

"We were happy it generated conversation around this important document," explains Lara. "We did a critical analysis of some of the language that is racist or disparages Native Americans and that was included in our coverage. We got plenty of blowback from people who thought that was not patriotic, but it's kind of the opposite. I feel proud of NPR when we do that kind of coverage."

Sometimes her team is pitching its own newsroom staff. "When NPR is launching a new show or there's a big staffing change, our own newsroom gets first dibs," she notes. And often Lara's team is looking to the newsroom staff for stories that could be of interest to a wider public.

More frequently, Lara's team plays a supportive role in making content available for other media when NPR does a newsmaker interview, breaks a story or has a scoop.



“It’s really important to be accurate in the information you’re providing journalists. It shows respect for their craft.”

ISABEL LARA
CCO, NPR

"We provide sound clips and transcripts for the other media to use," she says. "We are a trusted public service journalism organization, so other media feel comfortable quoting and referring to NPR."

A MATTER OF TRUST

In any media relationship, Lara believes establishing trust is critical, both with outside media and with NPR's own team of journalists.

"It's really important to be accurate in the information you're providing journalists," she counsels. "It shows respect for their craft. If you provide inaccurate information, they'll never come back to you. Sometimes in the fast-paced environment, people are tempted to provide information they haven't completely fact-checked. Take a pause, wait until you have confirmed the facts. Then get back to that reporter."

Lara believes Twitter can be a powerful tool for researching reporters.

"It's almost Cliff Notes," she opines. "Even when we're working with databases, finding press lists, I always use Twitter to see if that person is still on that beat, what they tweet about, what they're publishing. It's a good way to cross-reference. Of course, you must read the reporter's work. You can't pitch somebody without reading what they write about." •



SESSION Reimagining PR Measurement in 2021:
How to Measure What Matters

SPEAKER Katie Paine, CEO, Paine Publishing

DEEPER THAN THE NUMBERS

Regular measurement of comms efforts is now table stakes for every brand and PR pro. This session will help you recognize the specific metrics that can uniquely impact your brand.

“Start with a goal,” advises Katie Paine, CEO of Paine Publishing and a broadly recognized pioneer of comms measurement. Each brand must decide what it wants to compare before beginning to collect data.

For a nonprofit membership organization, the objective might be increasing membership in an effort to drive revenue. For an NGO, it could be to become a trusted information source.

“If you’re trying to be a source of information, people downloading your stuff is an indicator of credibility,” adds Paine. “Another indicator is if people show up at your event because they’re curious about what you have to say. If they’re sharing your content, your data, that’s another indicator.”

Creating a dashboard of highly measurable indicators helps a company measure results. Paine recommends simplifying everything down to one number, with five or six components, that reflects your organizational goals.

“You can see which components make that number go up or down,” she explains. “And you know which ones to fix, so it’s actionable.”

Paine offers an example of a European client that hired different

PR agencies in every country in which it operated. It decided to adopt one standard measurement and put all firms on notice as to how they would be evaluated.

“Message dissemination went up by 40% in one quarter because everybody was on the same page,” she reports. “You could correlate directly — where the messages appeared most often, sales went up the most.”

INDIVIDUAL PREFERENCES

Companies need to define what good and bad coverage looks like for their own organization.

“Negative headlines are obviously bad,” Paine says. “A story that recommends the competition is worse. Something that contains an undesirable visual is also bad.”

When Southwest Airlines wanted to increase employee engagement, it created a weighted score and did quarterly pulse surveys combining all the data into a single index to define staff engagement on a monthly basis.

Data can also help give a comms team perspective. The National Wildlife Federation’s PR team was bereft after a booking on *Conan* turned into a disaster due to an uncooperative water buffalo. Conan O’Brien complained on air.

“This was the worst day of their lives,” recalls Paine. But when a data-analytics person checked website traffic after the episode aired, membership increased by 10%, subscriptions rose 20% and donations increased 25%.

“Make sure you’re not afraid of digging into this stuff,” she emphasizes. “The end result could be wonderful.”

LISTEN TO LEARN

Social listening can be a way to measure awareness, perception, relationships and preference.

“You can establish a correlation between increased positive coverage and greater traffic to your website,” says Paine. “You must measure things such as share a voice, share of positioning, conversions, brand lift and return on investment, not necessarily how many page views or clicks will be likes.”

She also cautions against a proliferation of “dirty data generated by bots.”

“CEOs view them with a very skeptical eye these days, so keep your numbers small, clean and tidy,” advises Paine.

“Look for connections and correlations between your web analytics and the rest of the data because that’s where you’re going to get the most insight,” she concludes. “Then put everything in context of what it means for the organization.” ●

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KATIE PAINE
CEO, Paine Publishing



SESSION Stars of PR: How These Pros Cut Through the Noise

SPEAKERS Beth Casteel, senior counselor, The Reis Group; Eric Hazard, MD, Vested; Curtis Sparrer, cofounder and principal, Bospar

TRIUMPH OVER TUMULT

A trio of renowned media relations experts share their secrets of how they have maintained media relations success during an historically trying pandemic year-plus.

C OVID-19 made it more difficult to connect with reporters, but the need for media relations didn't wane.

"You had to be more aggressive on social media feeds," advises Curtis Sparrer, cofounder and principal of Bospar. "You really had to focus on making your pitch stand out."

Vested MD Eric Hazard found many media contacts more open to a good phone conversation during the pandemic, so long as the focus was on how PR pros could assist journalists.

"We leaned into developing three or four most influential media in the space and built our profile using one-on-one conversations to further establish expertise and drive our perspective," he explains.

Of course, all this was happening during a period in which the media was laser-focused, understandably, on the pandemic.

"Journalists told us if it's not about COVID, don't even bother," says Beth Casteel, senior counselor, The Reis Group.

A NEW APPROACH

"We let the media set the agenda for our spokespeople to create a dialogue that was more engaging than just a presentation," explains Sparrer.

Vested focused on research to generate positive media coverage.

"We provided research reports showing that volatile markets won't be volatile forever," shares Hazard. "The overall effect is ongoing, positive media coverage for the clients that speaks about their insights, their perspectives."

For a client with residential treatment centers for teenagers, The Reis Group worked with the CEO to address how the pandemic was becoming a mental health crisis for kids, arranged speaking engagements for a spokesperson therapist and placed a therapist bylined article in a parenting magazine.

Panelists agreed that PR pros must do more to help clients understand the threshold for coverage and the importance of raising the quality of stories.

"I always ask my clients what they need the coverage to do," notes Casteel. "There are a lot of unknowns, a lot of uncertainty," adds Hazard. "I counsel clients on how they can better control the narrative to external audiences and maintain reputations."

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

When discussing trends that will shape PR this coming year, the conversation took a nostalgic turn.

"I recommended investing in old-school approaches because there's a real desire for

them," counsels Sparrer. "If we're not being politely pushy, we won't get through."

Hazard urges colleagues to take a decentralized mindset to media relations.

"We're seeing decentralization across financial services with less concentration in one global media center," he notes. "Let's be mindful of that and create an in-person experience for the media that are somewhere else."

Casteel believes the industry has gotten used to virtual efficiency.

"TV is much more amenable to doing a Zoom interview," she observes. "There are smaller newsroom budgets. Media groups are now forming to collaborate on issues to do investigative reporting." And savvy PR pros will keep in mind the bigger beats, shorter turnaround times and extra online outlet responsibilities journalists are juggling and adapt their approaches.

And you must not forget about broadcast, as younger news consumers demand a visual component to get their attention.

"Broadcast is no longer a nice-to-have. It's a must-have," says Hazard. "Our spokespeople need to be broadcast savvy and we need to have the latest in broadcast technology so we provide a one-stop shop and enhance the overall experience." •



“ There are a lot of unknowns, a lot of uncertainty. Counsel clients on how they can better control the narrative to external audiences and maintain reputations. ”

ERIC HAZARD
MD, Vested

SESSION Getting Inside the Minds of Journalists: Journalists Tell-All

SPEAKERS Megan DeLaire, Journalist with Torstar; Christopher Elliott, award-winning journalist, author and consumer advocate; Tom Hallman, Jr., Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author

MEDIA RELATIONS: A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

A panel of journalists discusses their thought process in various scenarios, offering PR pros valuable tips on pitching and cultivating relationships as they do so.

“We’re in the business of ideas,” asserts Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Tom Hallman, Jr. “Give me a good idea, you got me. Give me a bad one, it’s not going anywhere.”

The best pitches, he adds, come from PR people who understand the power of a great story and can link a reporter to a compelling source.

The PR resources journalists value most are professionals they can depend on.

“I’m cultivating stronger relationships with PR professionals in the past year in a way I wasn’t before the pandemic,” says Megan DeLaire, a journalist with Torstar. “It feels more like a partnership.”

And that relationship is symbiotic. “The script has been flipped. We’re sending PR people ideas for what we want, then we’re getting pitched back,” reports Christopher Elliott, award-winning journalist, author and consumer advocate.

He actually sends out queries for stories he’s working on to see if PR contacts can connect him to sources or give him additional ideas. They may not have what he’s looking for, but they often offer other compelling leads.

SOLID SOURCES

The ability to provide trusted sources is an invaluable resource.

“This is a relationship,” explains Elliott. “As a PR person, you are the one facilitating that relationship. You’re building those bridges between journalists and their sources. And when you do the job correctly, the stories will be absolutely amazing.”

Journalists also appreciate when PR pros do their homework.

“I’m receiving more emails from comms

people hyperlinking to stories I’ve written that say, ‘I’ve read this story by you and I have something I think can work for you.’ They clearly know my audience and the types of stories I’m interested in,” notes DeLaire.

Pitches with a personal angle always have great appeal, says Hallman.

“Some of the stories I’ve done this year have been among the highest read in the paper,” he shares, “and they are all people-based stories.”

To help reporters identify trends they may want to tap into, Hallman advises PR people to read many publications and follow reporters on Twitter to see what they are talking about.

POWER OF AGGRESSION

Panelists also encouraged PR teams to be aggressive in reaching them.

“A call to a reporter’s cell phone cuts through really well,” counsels DeLaire. “It’s not quite the same as getting me in a room over coffee, but it’s a step up from an email for a potentially great story getting lost in my inbox.”

When it comes to providing experts and background information, she says there’s room for both wide-angle and closeup-lens approaches.

“I like to get into the weeds about a subject with the experts that I’m speaking to, even if most of that doesn’t make it into the story,” explains DeLaire. “It’s just important context. On the flip side, I’m looking for people who are on the ground really experiencing things.”

Elliott adds that the best backgrounders provide something he can’t find anywhere else.

“If it’s online already, just point me to the link. We write for the web first now,” he says. “If you’re sending us information you say is exclusive and our plagiarism finder — or worse yet, Google — flags it, you just sunk the story.” •



“I’m cultivating stronger relationships with PR professionals in the past year in a way I wasn’t before the pandemic. It feels more like a partnership.”

MEGAN DELAIRE
Journalist with Torstar

SESSION Your Future Self: What the Future of PR Looks Like

SPEAKERS Gini Dietrich, founder and CEO, Spin Sucks; Joseph Thornley, CEO, Thornley Fallis Communications; Martin Waxman, author, professor and CEO, Martin Waxman Communications

TALKING TECHNOLOGY

The relationship between AI and PR is a source of constant discussion. There are obvious positives and remaining limitations. Our panelists focused a bit on each.

“We have very transactional interactions with AI,” says Martin Waxman, CEO of his eponymous firm. “They make our jobs easier and take away some drudge work.” AI, however, is still not a magic bullet.

What makes PR pros unique is “our perspective mapped against our ability to tell a story using all kinds of different media,” explains Joseph Thornley, CEO of Thornley Fallis Communications.

AI will also never provide the judgment and empathy required for many PR tasks.

Gini Dietrich, founder and CEO of Spin Sucks, says she considered using AI to provide synopses of fiction and business books, but found “that the robot is not emotionally intelligent yet.”

Of course, while lauding what PR pros bring to the table, our panel was clear to emphasize the need for PR pros to become more adept at data analysis.

“[Many] people go into communications because they don’t want to deal with math,” notes Waxman. “You need not know how to code, but you need to know how to think logically. How to read a spreadsheet and the principles of statistics. Every PR class should have a module to teach people how to use Excel or Google sheets better so they can analyze and see patterns. That shapes how we communicate.”

Thornley cautions about the pitfalls of getting sucked into the idea of big data.

“Most of our communicating is to small groups of people with specialized knowledge,” he explains. “We need to become adept at recognizing that AI won’t do it for us if we want to be really precise. You don’t take a butcher knife to heart surgery. You look for a scalpel. We must be the holders of the scalpel. We need to be actively involved in the next stage of understanding what’s in the databases we’re using and refining those databases, getting more detailed data. That’s the big challenge for the future.” ●

SESSION Earned Influence: The Key is to Serve

SPEAKER Karen Swim, president and CEO, Words for Hire

HOW INFLUENCE BECOMES LEADERSHIP

Karen Swim, president and CEO of Words for Hire, loves how the dictionary defines influencer: a person who guides or inspires others.

“It’s all about guiding and inspiring,” she explains. “Those words speak to leadership. And as PR professionals, we really should be leaders.”

Comms pros serve multiple audiences: their companies, clients, consumer audiences and more.

“We’re protectors of the messaging, making sure integrity is maintained at all touch points,” notes Swim. “We’re sharing information that’s valuable, relevant and ethical to our public.”

The key to becoming a true influencer is truly serving your audience. Those professionals who have attained the status of trusted advisor focus on their audience to prioritize their needs.

“Your focus is not on volume or on quantity,” Swim advises. “It’s on the content.”

She outlines the “three L’s” PR practitioners can use to become influencers: learn, listen and lead.

“True experts are lifelong learners. They’re always looking to develop their skill set,” adds Swim. “They read a lot. They listen to others. They take in information.”

“Be hungry to learn and always stay curious,” she continues. “Don’t rely on what you knew yesterday. Listen to your audience. Listen to other people, to the conversations people are having on social media. In our work, we don’t just get to serve the people we have an affinity with, we have to deal with diverse audience bases.”

Practitioners should also have a process to check for inherent biases, so messaging and campaigns don’t isolate people they need to serve.

Above all, the key to leading is sharing what you know.

“Your colleagues will respect you more and you may get the ear of the C-suite more often,” counsels Swim. “You won’t have to fight for that seat at the table.” ●

SESSION PR Headlines That Get a YES and a LIKE

SPEAKER Nikki Woods, CEO, Nikki Woods Media

SOCIAL MEDIA GETS THE STORY

Social media platforms can be a huge part of targeting pitches more efficiently and organically, but each platform is unique.

“In the last four to five years, journalists have gotten a lot more relaxed about being approached on social media,” explains Nikki Woods, CEO of her eponymous firm.

And PR pros will get further when they personalize a pitch. “You can get a ton of information on journalists just from social media,” she says. “Follow them. Share some of their stuff. Give them a little promotion. Start building relationships.”

The importance of subject lines cannot be overstated, she adds.

“I love numbers in subject lines,” she suggests. For a pitch on a fitness professional who could discuss the struggles women faced with gyms being closed during the pandemic, Woods suggested a subject line that addressed the journalist by name and offered “Five effortless ways any busy mom can maintain an ideal weight.”

“As somebody who’s looking for media opportunities for clients, Twitter is my BFF,” she adds. “Twitter is fast enough, short enough and effortless enough that you can really maintain regular interaction with the journalist. You can build relationships for current or future clients before you need them.”

LinkedIn is all about business. On that platform, Woods recommends keeping the pitch to one sentence that offers a journalist a value proposition.

“There are a lot of journalist-focused LinkedIn groups that allow publicists as well,” she reports. “Be intentional about the conversation and very clear about your intention.”

Instagram is visual and is best used when video or a series of photos are the draw. “Instagram is a laid-back platform that is more story related,” notes Woods. “Make sure you’re using relevant photos that make sense. Hashtags are absolutely a must on Instagram.”

As for Facebook, Woods values it highly for reconnaissance.

“Look at what journalists share on their Facebook page,” she recommends. “A lot of PR groups on Facebook allow you to pitch clients, but they also share media opportunities that might be right for your client. Facebook Live is a quick way for a journalist to see what’s happening.” •

SESSION It’s a Hit. Now What? Amplify Media Coverage to Boost Conversions

SPEAKER Chris Dickerson, director of digital integration, Verde Brand Communications

BOOSTING YOUR CONVERSION RATE

Everyone is looking to maximize media placements to increase conversion, improve SEO, drive customer loyalty and build greater awareness for the products and brands you represent.

“Big media placements can drive a lot of awareness in a hurry,” shares Chris Dickerson, director of digital integration, Verde Brand Communications. “Smart brands can use coverage to build long-term value across channels, turning a one-time awareness boost into new customers and increased conversion rate.”

Consumers are increasingly unsure of whom to trust when it comes to product reviews. At the same time, media outlets are becoming very niche-specific and building more trust within their market segments. Dickerson suggests amplifying coverage by enhancing the client’s landing page.

“Look for places to add an award mention or positive media coverage,” he advises. “These are great ways to help the shopper figure out what they want to buy. It makes it a little less overwhelming.”

Most home pages see a lot of traffic, so Dickerson suggests utilizing media placements to highlight an item, create awareness and help legitimize your client’s brands and products.

Email should be your client’s highest-converting lowest-cost channel, he believes.

“It’s a great way to retarget customers who might have been on the fence about buying that product,” Dickerson says. “It’s a great touchpoint that gets validity behind it.”

It’s also very trackable using open or high click rates. And it’s directly related to that earned media coverage.

Social media is a great channel to amplify recent coverage.

“Third-party validation lets others do the talking for you and increases trustworthiness,” he notes. When Alaska Airlines won the *Condé Nast Traveler* Readers’ Choice Award in 2019, it incorporated the Condé Nast Traveler badge into its Instagram post and thanked the publication’s readers for choosing them.

“They won this award, thanked their customers, mentioned *Condé Nast Traveler*,” says Dickerson. “It’s mutually beneficial. You’re helping support these publications. Hopefully when *Condé Nast Traveler* does an expo on a cool new place to travel to, they might reach out to somebody from Alaska.”

He also advises putting money behind search. “Paid search and search engine marketing, media coverage and awards can help drive click-through by spicing up paid search ads copy,” concludes Dickerson. •

SESSION Tools of the Trade: The State of PR Technology in 2021

SPEAKER Martin Lyster, CEO, Agility PR Solutions

MAKING YOUR TECH INVESTMENT COUNT

Increasing your investment in PR tools and software does not make you unique among comms departments and agencies. Figuring out how to make the most of those investments is rarer.

Whenever Agility PR Solutions works on new applications, outcome is the driver.

“It has to be useful to the client to achieve their business objectives,” says CEO Martin Lyster. But it also must have time to achieve its maximum value.

“We’re trying to help the client get the results they’re looking for in the fewest steps,” he adds. “The most outcome with the least amount of energy.”

Agility’s new advanced targeting module reduces the amount of energy and number of clicks by up to 50%, depending on the workflow.

“It’s helping our clients fine-tune media targeting and it gets them to the finish line a lot faster,” notes Lyster, who says his firm has developed tools to help clients with targeting, gaming, media monitoring and media intelligence.

“It’s about bringing those workflows together,” he suggests. “Whether you’re trying to gain insight into your audience or trying to gain earned media, it’s the quality of the data and the integration that makes it all work.”

Using those tools has enabled Agility’s clients to target journalists who are specifically writing about emerging topics so PR people can put their energy into building relationships with those members of the media in a more accurate and efficient way.

Agility is investing heavily in its product management team to understand what clients want to achieve.

“We want to know their organizational objectives and we work to develop creative solutions to help them with those goals,” says Lyster. “We work to support the programs that actually drive business outcomes. Over the next year, we’re going to see a lot more workflow and a lot more modules within the media side of the business that will help our clients connect with the media in ways that we haven’t done previously.” ●

SESSION Media Outreach: The 3-Pronged Approach to Amplify Your Story

SPEAKER Kyle Villeneuve, senior client success specialist, Agility PR Solutions

NEXT-LEVEL CONTENT TARGETING

“There is a systematic approach to news pitching and getting content out to the right people based upon different ways to target,” suggests Kyle Villeneuve, senior client success specialist at Agility PR Solutions.

His firm has a three-pronged strategy to getting a story, press release, announcement or study in the public eye using one system that relies on Agility’s media database.

Prong one is email distribution. Villeneuve says PR pros need to target the right journalists, writers and influencers.

“A database component, such as Agility, makes it simple using a few key components to intuitively construct the best formatting and content based on suggestions generated when users fill out a subject line,” he explains. “It gives you tips and tricks from research we’ve done on what works best.”

The most crucial step is to ensure you have the right contacts. Building a strong distribution list is the best path to that.

Agility’s tools allow users to choose the optimal time for an email to drop, provide clickthrough rates to indicate how people are interacting with the information and measure engagement over the first 24 hours of release, as well as over a seven-day period to indicate a trend.

Prong two is the newsroom. Agility’s newsroom website allows a variety of clients to post their stories or announcements on one hub to help boost their SEO potential.

“Clients can pitch media individually with the email distribution and give them an exclusive,” shares Villeneuve, “then set the time they want to go live online.”

Prong three is the newswire. Agility has an application for making that part of the workflow seamless.

“Within 24 hours of sending this out, we get unique metrics similar to the email distribution reporting that allows us to see any pickups or activity,” says Villeneuve. ●

SESSION Broadcast TV – How to Get Inside the Mind of a Producer

SPEAKER Rebecca Rogers, broadcast media lead, LEWIS

READY FOR THE BIG TV MOMENT

Cracking broadcast media is a unique proposition. And it requires some out-of-the-box thinking, suggests Rebecca Rogers, broadcast media lead at Lewis.

“It’s not so much about having a good idea,” she notes. “It’s about having a unique idea.”

A pitch should “get straight to the point,” continues Rogers. “Producers don’t care about stats, figures. Make it clear what you’re offering and why it matters. Two to three sentences max.”

She also suggests writing the pitch down and reading it out loud. “When you read it out loud,” she suggests, “you really understand how to make that hook stand out.”

Once you do pitch, “have all your ducks in a row and be ready with the details at a moment’s notice,” adds Rogers. Preparing your spokesperson is a very important part of that.

“Take the time to develop a separate media alert,” she advises. “Bullet out the most compelling details — the most human element of the story, the main hook. Outlining this and offering a few talking points to the producer, no more than five, sets your client up for much more TV success.”

Rogers took that human approach when she pitched the chief medical officer (CMO) of a digital health company. She played up the CMO’s work on the Affordable Care Act as part of the Obama administration and the angle got the CMO on a CBS Sunday morning talk show that focused on politics.

“Producers are always looking for a human angle,” says Rogers. “Once you get your spokesperson on the show, you have the opportunity to get to the main message they want to showcase.”

To ensure that key client messages make the cut, Rogers counsels spokespersons to “approach the interview like a natural conversation,” but keep key messages top of mind.

She recommends keeping answers within 30 seconds to one minute and cautions that if you can’t get the message across in that amount of time, it needs to be reworked.

“I time responses with a stopwatch when I do TV and media training for clients,” concludes Rogers. ●

SESSION The 20-Minute Twitter Rule to Media Relations Success

SPEAKER Devin Knighton, assistant professor of public relations and director of the PR Intelligence Lab, Brigham Young University

TWITTER: THE START TO GREAT RELATIONSHIPS

Twitter can be a powerful tool to bolster PR pros’ relationships with the media, says Devin Knighton, assistant professor of public relations and director of the PR Intelligence Lab, Brigham Young University.

“In 2015, journalists made up the largest category of Twitter verified users,” he reports. “A 2019 survey found that 83% of journalists said Twitter was their most valuable social media platform, while only 40% said it was Facebook.”

“The main reason for you to be on Twitter is to efficiently build relationships with influential people that you don’t know,” continues Knighton. “If email is not working anymore, Twitter can be a great vehicle for you.”

So how do you go about this? Knighton suggests that success only requires 20 minutes, three days a week.

The first step is creating effective Twitter lists. Knighton recommends creating specialized private lists of tech reporters, for example.

He also recommends using a tool, such as TweetDeck, to see what people on the specific list you created are posting. “Check those lists three times a week,” advises Knighton, “and engage by making smart, authentic comments.”

This is definitely a worthwhile step, as reporters absolutely take time to read Twitter comments.

“If I comment on Twitter in a smart, authentic way, it’s a way to start a relationship,” says Knighton. He gives an example of how he has used this strategy to cement a relationship with *The New York Times* reporter David Pogue.

Pogue had long ignored emailed comments from Knighton about his stories, but Knighton then responded to one of Pogue’s tweets.

“Pogue responded by following me. And once he followed me, I could direct-message him and set things up,” he adds. The strategy resulted in a brief on-the-fly meeting with Pogue that sparked the beginning of a professional relationship.

“It happened because I used just 20 minutes, a few times a week, to build that relationship with him,” notes Knighton. “The bottom line is this is not just about placing a story. This is about good relationships.” ●

SESSION How the Right Key Messages Can Level Up Your Media Mastery

SPEAKER Kimberly Capwell, founder and CEO, Capwell Communications

A STRONG BOILERPLATE IS THE FOUNDATION OF A GOOD MESSAGE

Developing the right message for your client or brand is a process, one that can start by speaking with a few key execs, suggests Kimberly Capwell, founder and CEO at Capwell Communications. This will provide insights into finding the right words to use when talking about the client, the company, the product, or service.

“You want to get a crystal clear view on the benefit this company or product is offering,” she explains.

Write boilerplates so reporters will use them, Capwell adds. “The right words can create impact and inspire action. Distill the messages with clarity and simplicity.”

And always look for a point of differentiation and use language that sets a client apart from other companies. “Look for ways to position yourself as the first, the only, the best,” she says.

“We don’t start writing a whole boilerplate. We write one sentence at a time,” continues Capwell. “Then we string them together to make a boilerplate so one sentence can live on its own. The goal is to get reporters to use those keywords.”

She offers examples of well-crafted boilerplates. For Starbucks, “ethically sourced” is a key term.

“That’s obviously a value proposition for Starbucks,” notes Capwell. Wording that identifies the company as the “premier roaster, marketer and retailer of specialty coffees” is also an important distinction.

Nike, she says, has lots of nouns and adjectives in its boilerplate. The company bills itself as the “world’s leading designer, marketer and distributor of authentic athletic footwear, apparel, equipment and accessories for a wide variety of sports and fitness activities” — indicating that Nike is a leader in all these areas.

Apple’s boilerplate mentions its “more than 100,000 employees... dedicated to making the best products on earth and to leaving the world better than we found it.”

“That tells me they value their employees,” observes Capwell.

For Prolacta, a line of 100% human milk-based nutritional products, Capwell’s team helped position the company as leading the industry with the highest quality and safety standards.

“We helped this company go public in January 2021,” she recalls. “This messaging was key to cast them as the world’s largest pure play in-vitro diagnostics company.” ●

SESSION Pitching Broadcast: Navigating the Newsroom

SPEAKER Celena Fine, VP, Tier One Partners

THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE NEWSROOM

Recognizing the key players is essential to successful broadcast pitching, explains Celena Fine, VP at Tier One Partners.

“There should be a wide array of players who are included in that email list — producers, assignment desk editors, the assignment manager,” she advises. “Getting awareness out to all of the key players in the newsroom is the goal.”

Producers are the people in the newsroom who are stacking the shows, says Fine. “They’re helping to select which stories will be covered. They have a lot of input in reporter stories and in what the anchors are packaging for the newscast. They have a good amount of say in how resources are distributed.”

Fine’s top recommendation, however, is to reach out to the assignment desk.

“Assignment editors are the nucleus of the newsroom,” she asserts. “Everything goes through their desk. They’re assigning reporters, cameras, the helicopter. They are the primary people you want to hit when you are pitching a story.”

Digital producers are writing the copy for the website, as well as posting anything that’s relevant from the newscasts to the website.

“Even if you don’t secure that on-air coverage, your backup can be to get something on their websites,” counsels Fine.

Special project producers and planning editors work on longer-lead stories and could be a good target, depending on the story and the lead time.

“Planning editors work on coverage for future stories and have a direct hand in creating day books and night books,” reveals Fine. Assignment managers direct the assignment desk and are a good resource for email contact.

It’s just as important to know which professionals should not be targeted.

“General assignment reporters are assigned to their stories, so they have less ownership in proposing stories,” says Fine, “Unless a story plays to a particular passion point, such as a charity or a cause that’s near and dear to their hearts, you’re better off not reaching out to anchors.

“Production assistants have no decision-making authority, while writers and investigative reporters are not the proper targets for your story, either,” concludes Fine. “Editors are editing film and directors are directing talent. These are also not the appropriate people to whom to be reaching out.” ●

MEDIA METRICS

The savvy PR pro adjusts strategies based on the trends revealed by data. Below we share some such research provided by Agility PR Solutions that will either validate or make you recalibrate your current media plans specific to four prominent channels.



ONLINE AND DIGITAL MEDIA

43% of Americans use Facebook as a news source on a daily basis, even though

57% say they expect the news they see on social media to be largely inaccurate.



6 hours and 45 minutes

That is the average amount of time Americans now spend online per day.



TELEVISION



3.5 hours The amount of time, on average, Americans spend watching TV per day. Among those 50 and older, that number rises to **6 hours** daily.

Number of viewers for flagship broadcasts:

7 million to 10 million nightly

National networks

just under 3 million daily

Top cable news networks

just under 2 million daily

Univision



RADIO

235 million The number of Americans reached by radio.

106 minutes The average amount of time per day those Americans spend listening to radio.

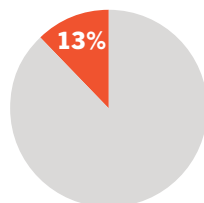
850 Number of live broadcast stations iHeart Media operates across the U.S.

234 Number of news, sports and music stations Entercom operates across the U.S.

424 Number of stations across the U.S. to which Cumulus provides local programming.



PRINT



13% of Americans 50 and older do not use the internet and rely on print mediums for news.

63% of people trust newspapers

33% of people trust online news

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