

Round Table Mania:
Mapping Media Coverage In The 21st Century
10 tips to the new world of media
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Preface:

In the past five years, and especially in the past three, media has changed immensely, shattering into hundreds of channels and outlets. To deal with this, Marketing Communications people must now concentrate much more on the purposes of their communication efforts, on the specific target segments they want to reach, and on the appropriate channels they use to reach those targets. This involves extreme customization, patience, and some nerve – many CEO's, rooted in an old world, won't necessarily agree with you.

1. Channels have multiplied by the hundreds:

It was once said that the magazine of the future would be so targeted as to simply have your name on it, i.e. Bob's Magazine, and all articles in it would be of relevance to you, (or Bob). We're almost there with the new multiplicity of channels.

Traditional Print and television news outlets have been joined by specific magazines; e-zines; blogs; content sites, both general and specific; citizen journalism sites; social networking (Web 2.0); webinars, podcasts; newsletters; e-books, online forums, placement in video games, etc – the list grows daily. We're in a world where people can customize their information reception to their own needs and desires. This brings up the point of how people find information: Most now use search engines, specifically Google if they're in business. So part of the task is choosing media channels and outlets that are picked up by Google. Newspapers and many magazines are not. They consider their information proprietary (i.e. for sale) and Google can't find them. So you may get great ink in some newspaper, and it will never be seen on google, meaning it's a one-shot. Marketing communications has to live on, so it's important to always keep the Google profile in mind.

2. Channel preferences have segmented;

The older watch television and read newspapers and magazines, the younger tend more toward online and word-of-mouth (buzz) information sources. Most people now juggle several segments, usually surfing general sources and then moving sequentially to more specific and useful (to them) information channels.

3. Content has converted to useful and educational information.

The world is awash in information, and most people have adjusted by subscribing or returning to trusted, ever-more specific information sources. An example is a successful online e-book company that concentrates just on scholarly Judaic discussion, or Sitepoint, a content site for web developers, or ContentBiz, a service just for content providers. No longer to people simple absorb copy, they now want it to be useful and helpful to their own needs.

4. Channels must be graded for value to the campaign.

Some content sites, newspapers and magazines generate their own content with an in house staff; another large group doesn't generate enough revenue to support a staff of editors and writers, so exclusively uses free-lance "experts"; even more accept unsolicited material IF it is highly relevant. Instead of looking for outlets with the most general influence, pick channels where you can speak directly to potential customers: the media today is almost as targeted as direct mail. Also pick the channels most appropriate to (and most used by) your target audience. This means sifting through and examining multiple options, and then zeroing in on the ones that will best achieve your objectives.

5. Match material to outlet.

With increasing movement to content niches comes the demand to make material extremely relevant to the niche. One size does not fit all. Some outlets take simple press releases, some demand complete articles, some will accept only technical treatises, etc. Everyone wants extremely relevant subject matter, which just about spells the death knell for the generic press release (except for isolated instances, such as use to support other campaigns). Example: In an e-newsletter, Management Consulting News, a seller of business planning software does a Q&A article on how business planning can benefit consultants, who are notorious for avoiding them. This is relevant, educational, and useful: A press release wouldn't have gotten through the door. (Regarding the previously mentioned Google profile, I refuted the article and made a case for something else, which they ran in the next edition. That's now in my own company's Google profile and supports my general positioning.)

6. Know your business.

What space are you in? More than 70 per cent of BC tech companies supply services, usually to other businesses. They're in B2B, yet many still use product-marketing techniques, which are different because the two types of marketing operate at different stages of the buying cycle. Often communicators are trying to speak to the wrong listeners, and correspondingly choose the wrong channels to deliver their messages. If you're in B2B, you have to use B2B marketing techniques such as thought leadership and expertise marketing, case studies, and other problem solving material relevant to the unique nature of the audience. And it has to be delivered to media accessed by the target prospects that have different buying behaviours than product buyers.

7. What's the story?

Despite the emphasis on "messaging", the basis of all communications is still story telling, complete with triumph-or-tragedy drama or problem-solution case studies. But most mar/com people insist on talking about their own companies instead of showing in a compelling way how the product or service relates to the customer's situation. No one cares about what you do, they care about what you will do for them. The WIFM (what's in it for me) factor rules. Sell benefits, not features, in a (very

short) story format. Example: “Company A was falling into a money-losing death spiral until it installed Acme billing software” is a story. A list of Acme software’s features is not.

8. Tell your story the right way.

The format must be appropriate to the channel. Each channel outlet has its own style and it’s almost instant death to send the wrong style to a channel. If you’ve targeted a few specific channels – and you should have because shot gunning won’t work -- ensure that the material sent to them is similar to what they normally use. This means much prep work.

9. Tell your story in the right language.

You have to use language that’s appropriate to the end user. If material is to speak to engineers, who are always seeking facts, there’s no point in presenting a flash video that’s all design wizardry. Make it very scientific and simple. CFO’s are concerned about a business case first, integration second, and technology third, so don’t deliver a list of tech specs. Today, committees often choose products or services (i.e. software), so you may have to speak to several users and find a hybrid style that answers all their individual concerns.

10. It’s a lot more work.

Because everything must be so targeted, customized, and specific today, it’s no longer a case of media blasting, following up (maybe) and hoping something will stick somewhere. You have to zone in completely on the best influencers. However, there is the CEO ego factor to contend with. Many CEO’s are too used to the old system, and think it’s great if they see their name and picture in the local paper, even though it might be totally useless in terms of results (except to validate, or create bragging rights). Sometimes you just have to give in to this and rework the campaign (and story) to satisfy this factor.