

New tools, new challenges for PR pros



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Everyone is talking about social media – businesses, nonprofits, teens and their 40-something parents – but the recent conversion of social media from personal use into a marketing tool creates a whole new world of opportunities and pitfalls for the uninitiated.

Public relations has been undergoing a sea change as online activities encompass and expand its fundamental responsibilities. The similar skills required for traditional and virtual environments have increased client expectations and requests for their PR consultants to use current capabilities to satisfy new demands in the online arena.

CLIENT WEBSITES

Websites require a unique tone of writing, blending vendor-neutral prose with more promotional verbiage. Public relations professionals now must coordinate closely with search engine optimization – SEO – specialists to insert keywords in an unobtrusive manner while maintaining a powerful writing style for the site's visitors.

After the SEO company, and graphic designer, complete their assignments, the PR firm must help maintain the site by updating text and creating new web pages. Programs such as Dreamweaver offer a partial solution for technophobes, but successful PR consultants are using FTP (file transfer protocol) programs and html as well.

WS-FTP Home (Ipswich), one of the most popular FTP programs, provides two windows with active website

files in the right one and files from any selected folder in your hard drive in the left. In between, two arrows point in opposite directions. By highlighting a file and clicking one of the arrows, you can transfer it between the two windows, either downloading or uploading it depending on the direction. Any client's website may be accessed by inputting its FTP address, user name and password, available from the client or hosting company.

Once you master this process, editing is a snap. You simply find and change the text, leaving the technical language alone. To create a new web page, you use the "save as" function to rename the file. The file name, once uploaded, corresponds to the new URL.

An elementary knowledge of html can increase your capabilities tenfold. Many commands simply consist of an open and closed bracket (closed ones are indicated by a forward slash). For example, "b" stands for bold, and "Enjoy this article" translates in html as "Enjoy this article." You can learn more by Googling "html commands."

INBOUND LINK CAMPAIGNS

PR firms have also been required to maintain and increase Google rankings. The Google algorithm evaluates

websites according to the number and quality of inbound links, but these links must constantly be refreshed through new written material.

Inbound links are best defined as clickable text on external sites pointing to your own. They can be created by distributing online press releases, usually through PR Newswire, Businesswire or PRWeb; submitting articles to content provision sites; and posting blog entries. Whenever any written material is published in a new location, it must include the author's URL for attribution purposes. Thus, a new inbound link is created.

Content provision sites are an online structure where visitors can go to get written material for their own websites. However, they must agree to publish the author's URL, thus generating another inbound link. Major content provision sites include (www) amazines.com, articlealley.com, articlecity.com, articledashboard.com, ezinearticles.com, goarticles.com and ideamarketers.com.

BLOGS, SOCIAL MEDIA

Blogs probably represent the most valuable source of links because each entry is published on the equivalent of a new web page. Internal blogs residing on a company's domain (www.domain.com/

blog) are especially powerful because they help to create "deep links," another essential component of the Google algorithm. Deep links point to an interior page of your website instead of the home page, and Google considers them an indication of a particularly strong site.

Social media, widely touted, have also buffeted the PR professional. They have become essential for reputation and brand management as well as crisis communications, resulting in active PR participation in LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

PR firms can also register their clients at a number of other social media sites to create inbound links and increase visibility, another major goal of traditional PR. The latest phenomena, social bookmarking programs, pioneered by www.delicious.com, are also a fertile source for publicity and links.

Websites, inbound links and social media must all be addressed by today's PR consultants. For best results, they will proactively inculcate their clients instead of falling back into a reactive mode.

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