

Don't be a one-trick pony; there's more to PR than media relations

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Public relations has historically been considered a press release machine, driving awareness through editorial, and relying on AVEs (advertising value equivalents) to demonstrate value through the estimated cost of the press release coverage achieved.



Even at surface level, it's clear to see that the PR landscape has shifted quite dramatically over the years. Magazine and newspaper readership is declining, with big print media titles, including amongst others, *Marie Claire*, *Destiny*, *ELLE* and *Entrepreneur*, being discontinued in recent times.

The decline in print advertising spend, rising cover prices, rapidly diminishing reach, shrinking newsrooms, and in some instances, poor quality journalism, means that pitching editorial content has become even more difficult for PR practitioners. And for some time now, the traditional press release has become redundant to most journalists; there's only a handful of trade press that still appreciate and use this content type.

With that said, media relations still holds a very important place in PR, but it's not the only tool to achieve communication objectives. As the discipline has evolved, there should be less reliance from both PR practitioners and clients, on press release exposure to validate PR or communication value.

It is astonishing that so many clients and PR agencies still rate AVEs so highly. The problem is, without an industry benchmark to calculate the return on editorial exposure, the 'value' is grossly exaggerated, as it does not measure the

quality and effectiveness of the coverage achieved. This quality is evaluated against several factors including tone, credibility and relevance of the medium to the stakeholder or audience, message delivery, inclusion of a third party or company spokesperson, and/or prominence as relevant to the medium.

In 2010, the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) introduced the Barcelona Principles, which set a new overarching framework and basis for measuring and evaluating PR efforts. One of the seven principles is that AVEs are not the value of communication.

Further cementing this thinking is a call by the UK's [Chartered Institute of Public Relations](#) (CIPR), to declare "the use of AVEs in public relations as unprofessional". In fact, the CIPR is threatening its members with disciplinary action should they not change over from AVEs to the Barcelona Principles within a determined 12-month period.

The Barcelona Principles were reviewed and adjusted in 2015 to ensure relevance, and one significant shift acknowledged that the world has become more integrated, and communication measurement should reflect that.

Consequently, PR value should be measured against smart objectives that track that the content disseminated actually reached the target audience, that there was resulting action by that audience, and that it influenced their perception, trust etc, and that it had some impact on organisational change, i.e., sales, retention and so on.

It's worth mentioning to those brands who are questioning the value of PR in their own business, that real impact is not achieved by media relations in isolation. It is a tactic that serves mostly to raise awareness. Only when it is tightly focused and integrated with other marketing and communication disciplines, can it deliver a cohesive, measurable effort.

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