

Why PR should heed the red flag and move beyond earned content

 By [Dominique Pienaar](#)

31 Jul 2018

Businesses around the world face a similar challenge, succumb to digital transformation or face competition from companies in the same or adjacent industry, or even worse, become obsolete.



© Dontree Malaimarn via [123RF.com](#)

As businesses change, so professions have to adapt to remain current. PR is not immune to change and the profession is currently going through a transformation to find its new iteration in the digital world of communications. Our clients' stories are taking on many forms. From earned content achieved through traditional media engagement to owned and shared content such as blog articles and social media posts.

As PR professionals we need to realise that there is a limit to the impact PR can have on organisations, especially if it remains rooted in earned media only. That is because earned media is shrinking and being replaced by native content behind paywalls. Good content is reserved for those willing to pay to access it.



Why a business always needs PR

Dominique Pienaar 7 Jun 2018



Added to this challenge is the steady decline in journalists worldwide. In South Africa and in many other countries we are seeing the juniorisation of the newsroom, which means journalists become generalists and are no longer specialists. They have to cover several beats and can no longer avoid becoming digital journalists.

The result is that our opportunity to influence media is diminishing and we need to find new ways to tell our clients' stories to the right audience. Whether we like it or not, PR now competes with social media specialists and marketers to convey stories in a compelling way through shared and paid content.

Heed the red flag

Change is not all bad and can bring about weird and wonderful solutions. Take for example the safety ritual that was introduced by the UK's Locomotive Act of 1865 as more and more self-propelled vehicles took to public roads. A man on foot waving a red flag and blowing a horn was required to walk ahead of the vehicle to warn other motorists, horse-drawn carriages and pedestrians of the imminent 'danger'.

Fortunately, the PR profession does not require all this fanfare to usher it into a new age, but it should take note of the red flag. PR professionals need to become experts at paid and shared content. This means that we need to understand how to craft, tweak, measure and report on content that moves across the media ecosystem, as we did with earned content.

We should become better at data analytics, especially in a digital world where we can't ignore the numbers and insights so that we can report on the impact and better guide the strategy.

Change is constant

But what happens if companies do not pay attention to the red flag? Much has been written about the longevity of Fortune 500 companies; [only 12%](#) of companies that made the Fortune 500 list in 1955 can be found on it today and many current businesses will probably be replaced by ones operating in new industries sixty years from now.

Research from ChristianSteven Software found that [65% of C-suite executives](#) believe that 40% of Fortune 500 companies will no longer exist in ten years. In addition, 53% said they were concerned about competitions from disruptive businesses, however, nine out of ten said that they're hopeful about the future of technology in their businesses.

What about the impact technology has on jobs? Since the 1950s, [232 occupations still exist](#) today, demand fell for 32, five became obsolete due to technology and one job was eliminated, as a result of automation, that of an elevator operator. Examples of jobs that became obsolete due to outdated technologies and a lack of demand are that of a telegraph operator and boarding-house keeper.

The lesson for us as PR professionals is that our jobs will probably not be at risk, but our services and skills will need to change for us to remain relevant in today's digital communications and marketing mix. Now will be a good time to heed the red flag, move beyond earned content and become better at analytics. We must, therefore, modernise our skillset, continuously learn and embrace change so that our profession earns its rightful place on the occupation list of 2080.

ABOUT DOMINIQUE PIENAAR

Dominique Pienaar is the CEO at DUO Marketing + Communications, a specialist PR, digital and marketing agency servicing B2B technology companies in sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya).

- Data and platforms bring new opportunities to expand PR - 5 Dec 2018
- Why PR should heed the red flag and move beyond earned content - 31 Jul 2018
- Why a business always needs PR - 7 Jun 2018

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>