

Let's face it, PR is a dying practice and there is no going back!

By Khangelani Dziba

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PR as we know it has evolved immensely from the 1900s and the early 2000s where it merely focused on utilising press release services with the hopes that your message will eventually land in the hands of the media; and Bob's your uncle, you're in the papers.



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No! The spray and pray method may have worked back then but today we have a completely different milieu. It works differently in the 21st century and this is a reality that we have to accept. Doing this will allow us to chart a new way forward on how we practice PR in an era that is ever-evolving and keen on finding new, exciting and interesting ways of communicating brand messages.

I say this honestly because for the years I have been practicing PR, and most recently with a new wave of innovations, I have often grown frustrated and tired of the fact that it feels like we are fighting against the tide with clients who often think that PR is merely about compiling boring press releases and sending them out to journalists.

This could not be further from the truth and there are some key insights in the evolution of PR that we need understand and take full cognisance of.

In doing so, it will enable us to share these with our clients, brand managers and those who claim to have a stake in the food chain so that they are able to appreciate the changes that have taken place. And ultimately get the best out of their agencies through tapping into key areas.

My observations of the changes in PR and where the space is going are pretty simple but poignant. It can be characterised in five categories: strategic intent, content curation, bought media/media partnerships, influencer marketing and digital as the new age of PR.

Let me explain. These areas have had major influence, are gaining momentum and should be taken note of.

Strategic intent

This is the starting point to any brand solution that a brand practitioner can offer to their client because this is where the tone is set on what the brand narrative is and how PR needs to be aligning and communicating accordingly.

It is also a key driver in what the brand is striving to achieve and ultimately how it needs to be landing in the ears and hearts of its consumers.

Ultimately it is about brand awareness and driving brand equity.

Content curation

This is such an important part of what a PR practitioner needs to be focusing on in their day-to-day servicing of their client's needs in terms of driving their communication.

Merely churning out announcements about brand activity does not land nor does it say much. But rather, communication that is aligned to the type of content publications are looking for is the true measure of success.

When we are able to feed into this insight and drive it in the boardrooms we find ourselves pitching ideas in, we will then be unveiling to clients a new way of doing PR that will ultimately become best practice.

Media partnerships

There is no doubt that newspapers across the globe have felt that wrath of the digital age where we have seen major innovations in the technology space that have forced the migration onto digital platforms.

This has obviously meant that how they run their newspaper entities is no longer just about making content available to consumers but also driving the bottom-line; which is that they also need to make revenue. How they do this is through an awake(ness) to branded content and advertising which is probably a PR practitioner's worst nightmare!

However, pleading ignorance and hoping to get coverage for brands at no cost is no longer as simple. An introduction and appreciation of bought media opportunities and what they unlock to our clients is where we need to be going.

In fact, I do not think that this is where we need to be going, **it is where we are!**

Influencer marketing

It is no secret that when trying to pitch stories to our journalists/media we cannot lead with a product or brand speech. We have to find a ruse that will inevitably allow media to bite.

The bait in this case has been the utilisation of influencers and brand advocates who are tasked with speaking authentically to the brand narrative. This is a trend we see globally and can afford to amplify more in the South African context.

Digital as the new age of PR

Like it or not, the depth and breadth of digital is fast gaining momentum and cannot be ignored. Natives are finding their niche and perhaps it is time that we take heed of this and start making it a part of what clients are expecting to see on what we are reporting on and where they should be placing their value criteria on.

It is happening around the world where print is not the only measure of success but also the bargaining on the strength of digital which is where we are headed and cannot run away from.

So, is their value in even still utilising titles such as Publicists and PR Practitioners in this day and age where we are seeing such rapid change? Change that is requiring that we adapt and showcase a mind of convergence and an ability to perform more than what these titles say we are. I do not think so. We are more than that and should take pride in it.

Finally, but certainly not least, as we go forward, we need to stop investing in old tactics that no longer add value to the work we do and ultimately to what brands are trying to achieve.

Out with the old, I'd say, and in with the new!

ABOUT KHANGELANI DZIBA

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