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new chapters!

eBOOK

Unlocking Social Media for PR

by Sarah Skerik

ENGAGE OPPORTUNITY EVERYWHERE



PR Newswire

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eBOOK

Unlocking Social Media for PR

Introduction

by Jason Keller, Senior Vice President, Products, PR Newswire

So social media is changing the art and science of public relations so fast your head is spinning. It all may be second nature to kids with freshly minted degrees and new agency or corporate jobs. But if you're a PR professional just a few years older than that, you may be dizzy.

Luckily, this is the eBook for you – with two new chapters for Q1 2012.

In an inviting and accessible style, author Sarah Skerik illuminates social media's plentiful impact on PR. She provides insights you can use right away concerning what social media has changed, what's not changed and how you can use the new social layer to make your PR better – all leveraged from Sarah's unique vantage point. Sarah is Vice President of Social Media for PR Newswire, and she gets first-hand insight into the social media best practices of PR Newswire's voluminous global customer base even as she manages our own social media presence.

And that customer base is telling us that you simply cannot escape the influence of social media in modern public relations – and, in fact, it's leading to entirely new kinds of workflows for the PR industry.

Originally conceived as a coordinated series of “Social Media 101” blog posts on PR Newswire's [Beyond PR](#) blog, Sarah sets the stage with “A Simple Guide to Getting It by Doing It.” She dives progressively deeper into strategies, tactics and tailored advice for specific social networks, but always in easily digestible briefs that give you enough to get started without wasting a moment more of your valuable time. Social media is new enough that nobody has a perfect formula – we're all making it up as we go. *Unlocking Social Media for PR* lays down a strong drum-and-bass line around which PR professionals can begin to weave their own social media melodies.

Last, because the integration of PR and social media is such a new and rapidly evolving phenomenon, we're opening up a [new discussion forum for this eBook](#) on our ProfNet Connect expert community. At the end of each chapter, you'll find a linked button that will enable you to join the conversation and agree, disagree or expand upon the thoughts you find herein.

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Chapter 1

PR and Social Media: A Simple Guide to Getting It by Doing It



Unsure about taking the plunge? A more gradual approach is fine.

If you're one of those folks who had set up a Twitter account, tweeted a couple of things, followed a couple of people and then abandoned the account after two weeks, this eBook is for you. Trust me; I was there.

Social networks have upended many aspects of our lives – from how we stay in touch with friends and family to how we consume information, stay on top of news and buy stuff. So social media has also changed how companies sell, how they serve their customers and how they communicate with their publics. However, many public relations professionals are still struggling when it comes to integrating social media into their daily work lives. This eBook is devoted to making the integration of social media and PR practical – and practicable.

First and foremost, it's important to note that social media is not a practice unto itself. The social layer will soon become as intrinsic to our everyday lives and workflows as e-mail, the telephone and search engines. It'll simply be seen as another mechanism to communicate and to find things.

Start by listening for your personal interests

Most social media experts advise that the first step in devising a social media plan is to listen to your brand's Social Echo – the powerful reverberation of conversations around a brand that occur in the numerous social networks where people gather today.¹ But I recommend a preliminary step so that before you swan dive into the deep end of the social media pool, you wade around in the shallow end first. So before you even start monitoring social media for your brand, make the foray onto social networks yourself, and, once there, listen to and observe those around you on topics that grab your personal interest.

Facebook

On Facebook, for example, become a fan of businesses and brands you like. Observe how they interact with their audiences. Notice which posts generate interaction with fans (e.g., "likes" and comments). Notice which are ignored. Of course, if you're aware of current events, you probably know it's important and worth your time to customize your [Facebook privacy settings](#). Here's a good Facebook settings privacy guide from the good folks at Mashable. And in case you need some suggestions to get you started, here are three really interesting examples of brands that are doing an excellent job managing their Facebook presence:

- [Intel](#): The Intel team has done a great job on its Facebook page – it has more than a million fans. They've done some cool Facebook customization, but I really want you to watch their Wall. They are good at loading interesting content that drives fantastic interaction, and at starting conversations.
- [Adobe Photoshop](#): Like Intel, Adobe has some nice customization. Again, however, the real interaction is happening on their Wall. This is another

1. [Amplifying Your Social Echo](#), PR Newswire white paper, 2010

great example of a brand interacting with its audience (which is more than 2 million strong). The Adobe team is particularly adept at blending online content with IRL (“in real life”) events. In addition to proving the brand is out there interacting in person with its audience, the incorporation of information from real events adds fresh and timely content to Adobe’s presence.

- **Saddlers Row:** At the opposite end of the business spectrum is Saddlers Row, a tack shop near my home. This is a small, local business that doesn’t have a huge marketing budget or social media experts on staff. However, they are creative and human, and their use of Facebook is inventive. They post about area events, poll their fans, and have sparked great interaction with a series of “field testers” – calling for people to test products and give feedback. This is the “if they can do it, so can you” example.

Blogs and Discussion Forums

Blogs and discussion forums are another great way to pursue personal interests online while also observing social discussion and brand interactions from an objective perspective. Tune in to blogs and discussion forums relating to a hobby. See how people act and interact. Watch how the community handles trolls. Notice whether or not any brands interact with the group, and whether or not the communications are well received. You’ll learn a lot about interactions in the social layer (and probably about your hobby, too!)

Case in point: One of my own hobbies is finding new homes for racehorses that are no longer competitive racers. Transitioning these animals from the racetrack to life as a riding horse involves training, changing their diet and addressing minor problems common to horses coming off the track. I belong to several internet forums devoted to this pursuit. Different feeds, drugs and therapies are often discussed. One day, someone started a discussion about a feed supplement from a popular supplier. The supplier’s packaging had changed, and the daily dose packages were a real hassle to open. A few others chimed in saying they had noticed the same thing. General unhappiness with the supplier was percolating. Within a few hours, a service rep from the supplier weighed in, noting that they had switched to compostable packaging, which was flimsier,

and the glue used to seal the packing was too strong and hard to open. The rep also mentioned that they would be switching to a new adhesive within a month or so, which would help remedy the problem. The discussion quickly changed tone – everyone liked the fact that the packaging could be composted and that the problem was being fixed. And they loved the fact that the brand was listening and responded directly.

Believe me, there is something for everyone. Just Google your interest and the word “forum” and you’ll find a group talking about that topic, whether it’s gluten-free baking, wild mushroom hunting, any manner of crafts, motorcycle-rebuilding or model train choo-chooing.

Twitter

Sign up for Twitter, and have someone help you find interesting people to follow who are talking about your industry or hobby. Or, if you’re afraid to ask, here’s a great [beginner’s guide to using Twitter](#), again from Mashable.

Case in point: My own husband was a vitriolic anti-Twitterer, until he got an iPad shortly before the NFL draft. When he wasn’t looking, I set up a Twitter account for him and found a bunch of NFL scouts, bloggers and draft prognosticators for him to follow. I then loaded Flipboard, which turns a Twitter stream into a sleek, interactive newsmagazine. I handed him his iPad with his customized, up-to-the-minute NFL draft digest and blew his little mind. Needless to say, he doesn’t fully get Twitter, but he’s now a fan who avidly manages his Twitter lists.

Another case in point: For someone whose title has “social media” in it, I was fairly late to Twitter. I followed “best practices,” which include a lot of listening, replying and re-tweeting. I also avidly read a variety of industry blogs and would tweet interesting things I saw, which the authors appreciated. It took a good six months, I’d say, but Twitter went from being something I was doing because, frankly, I had to do it to a totally indispensable network and resource.

A Blog of Your Own

Create a free blog on [WordPress](#) (my favorite), Blogger or [Tumblr](#) (the current darling du jour) and start writing about something that interests you, preferably a topic you're also following on Twitter. Blogging regularly delivers a couple of benefits:

- You will be amazed at how your writing improves. You will be faster, more nimble and more creative if you are also blogging frequently on the side. (I have two personal blogs and contribute frequently to PR Newswire's *Beyond PR*. I spend a lot of my free time writing, and my output is all the more readable for it.)
- By tweeting your posts and sharing them on your Facebook page, you'll learn specifically how to tweet messages in a way that encourages people to read and interact with the information you're putting forth in social venues – an important skill for any communicator these days.

So, if you haven't yet plunged into social media, now is the time to test the waters. If you don't learn to navigate this environment, chances are good that you'll be swimming against the current, professionally, from this day forward. Follow these steps, and learning about the social layer will be fun, intuitive and personally rewarding. Let me know how you fare!

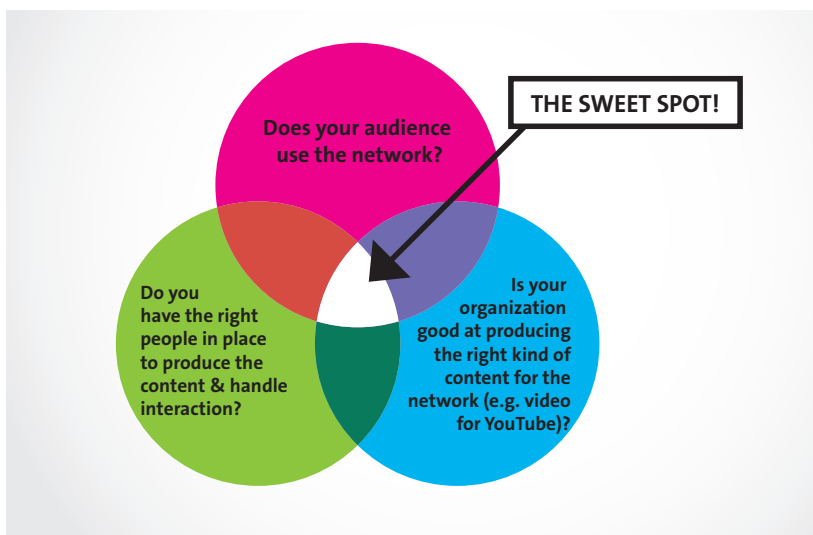
Need a social media pal?

If you need a friend as you start your journey, or just want to see how I spend my time in social networks, come find me – I've staked out space in most social networks, including:

- Twitter: [@sarahskerik](#) – I tweet about digital PR, social media and search.
- [LinkedIn](#): Back to shop talk. I use LinkedIn for professional networking.
- [Google+](#): I'll admit, I'm having a hard time working a new network into my personal workflow. I prefer Twitter, frankly.
- [Beyond PR](#): The PR Newswire blog where my "day job" output goes.

Other blogs:

- [Tumblr](#): This may wind up being a photo blog, or I might abandon it. I don't know yet. I'm still thinking about it. I'm much more active on the next two blogs, in addition to *Beyond PR*.
- [Collecting Thoroughbreds](#): My adventures with ex-racehorses.
- [The FUNgrrrl](#): I'm into foraging for wild mushrooms and document my frequent failures and occasional finds here.

Chapter 2**Selecting Social Networks
How Many Are Enough?**

The social sweet spot: the intersection of your audience, your content and your team's strengths.

When building (and maintaining) a social media strategy for your organization, it's easy to become overwhelmed as you consider all of the different networks and platforms on which you can establish a presence, connect with your audience and share content.

In addition to the "Big Three" – Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn – a plethora of other topic- or industry-specific sites and networks abound. How do you pick which to use? Or do you just give up and go with "*D. All of the above?*"

I wrestle with this question on an ongoing basis for PR Newswire. In fact, my July 26th blog post about [optimizing social content](#) made me sweat a little, especially as I looked at the vast content optimization map produced by Edelman

Digital that I included in the post. To ease my own angst and lower my pulse rate, I revisited the elements of our strategy that inform our selection of social networks for the PR Newswire brand. Here, I'll share some of the key points, and what I've learned along the way, in the hope that it'll help keep your pulse in its normal operating range.

Pick the audience, not the network

Considering all of the discussion groups, networks and platforms in social media, it's easy to panic when thinking about the resources required to maintain a presence on all of those sites. But it all becomes much more manageable when you think about where your audience is, instead – and act accordingly. So, if you're focusing on teens, you can cross LinkedIn and Twitter off your list and double down on Facebook and YouTube. Do you have a B2B focus? LinkedIn and Twitter will be key, but, unfortunately, you can't eliminate Facebook or YouTube (which you should think of as a very search-engine-friendly video repository.) Our June 2011 white paper, [*Content: Marketing "Currency" in Social Media that Accelerates Performance*](#), includes a detailed explanation of why.

Part of the explanation in that white paper is that generalizations like LinkedIn = B2B and Facebook = B2C are just no good in social media. So, key to picking the audience, not the network, are social media listening tools that help you zero in on where your brand's particular audience happens to be hanging out and what they're talking about. Another one of our white papers, [*Amplifying Your Social Echo*](#), goes into depth about why and how brands should listen to their Social Echo, including "The top 11 benefits of listening to your Social Echo," which we've excerpted at the end of this chapter.

What kind of content does your organization do well?

Some organizations have genius graphics people; others have crews of talented writers. Still others embrace and rely on video. Ideally, you want a mix – but, ultimately, you need to gravitate to your sweet spot. Here at PR Newswire, we write. We write blog posts, articles and white papers. (See above!) No surprise – we employ a lot of former journalists and English majors. Writing is our default setting, and we capitalize on it. We use the blog and [Knowledge Center](#) on our Web site to store our content, and we use a variety of networks to share it.

Building a strategy that's appropriate for the sort of content your organization is good at producing is probably the most important factor in determining your ultimate success, because content (whatever form it takes) fuels your social media presence. It's an authentic way to leverage your organization's skills.

What are your team's strengths?

Sustaining social media efforts – especially at the outset when you're still trying to build the sort of success that will enable you to sell programs internally – isn't easy. And giving people tasks and responsibilities for which they're well suited is crucial to your program's ongoing success. Don't expect a non-writer to be a great blogger. Instead, look for people who have the right DNA for the job. Chances are good that several people on your team already have their own blogs. If that's the case, they're good potential contributors for the company blog. That person in customer service that everyone loves might be really good at dishing advice and tips on Facebook. The serial networker in the group may be a great advocate for the brand on LinkedIn or a powerful voice on Twitter.

Be realistic about how much your organization can do

The time, energy and effort required to support social presences is considerable. In addition to producing content (blog posts, images, videos, etc.), your team will also spend time finding and sharing interesting things with their audiences on the social presences they manage. And they'll need to plan on spending some time listening to and interacting with the audiences, too. Rather than spreading your team too thin, and developing social presences that aren't alive and connected, limit the number of presences to a manageable quantity. This is truly a quality over quantity judgment call.

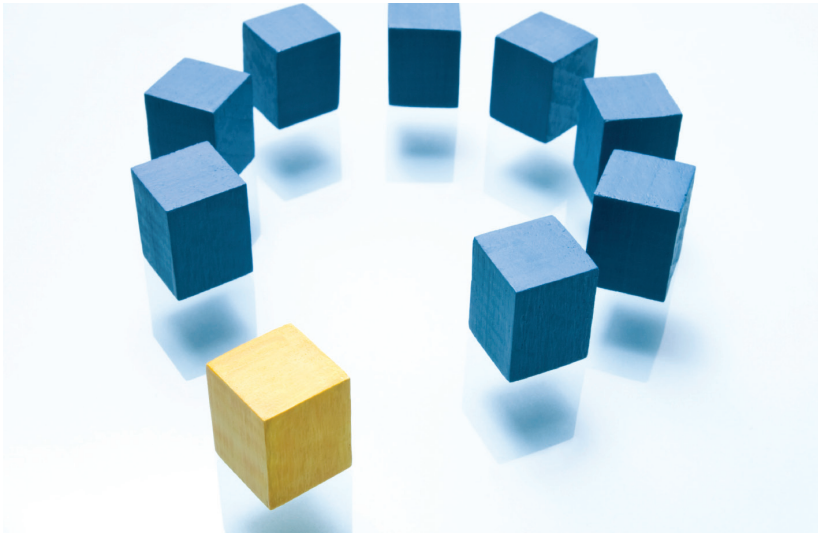
The top 11 benefits of listening to your Social Echo*

1. Identify the issues customers really care about, as well as their serious “pain points”
2. Identify the topics customers really care about, that are emerging as ripe for thought leadership
3. Identify what topics really matter to the media editors that you care about
4. Understand the true impact of a “controversy” so you can avoid wading into a tempest in a teapot
5. Accrue more gravitas to your thought leadership spokespeople by learning the ideal topics, and venues, on which to focus them
6. Ground your marketing activities in measurable data
7. Identify the level of influence (among your target customer audience) of different influencers, conversations, venues
8. Tap into a permanent, real-time, instantly accessible focus group
9. Learn when “now is not really the right time” for your brand to venture into social media – and thus avoid an unexpected buzz saw!
10. Gain deeper insight, far faster than traditional media clipping
11. The overarching result of all these factors: learn how to truly understand your customers and prospects, and think like your customer

*From [*Amplifying Your Social Echo*](#), a PR Newswire white paper.

Chapter 3

Integrating Social Media into the Daily Practice of PR



The integration of social media into PR brings new tactics, new expectations and new outcomes.

When you ask PR pros about social media, you're bound to get a broad range of responses. Some have embraced the social layer and have incorporated social media fully into their daily workflows. Others are curious, aware of the opportunities and developing their own plans. And there remain a healthy number of skeptics questioning the value of social word-of-mouth versus journalism, and the credentials of the new crop of social media consultants one meets at every turn.

For me, however, the key thought was summed up best by [Gloria Gasaatura](#), a corporate communications consultant at Bluefront Capital, who said, "Conversation is moving from word-of-mouth to online, and it's an IR or PR's duty to follow and go where the market is – online."

This chapter shares the experiences of PR people who are in the process of following their publics online. It explores how they're using social media in their daily practices, along with the challenges they're encountering and the results they're generating. Some common themes that emerge from their experiences are detailed at the end.

It's part of the workflow

[Tyler Williams](#), the author and Executive Editor behind the [Haute and the City](#) blog, is a luxury publicist who lives and works in Manhattan. For him, social media is “a daily occurrence.” Social media content is mapped each month as part of the overall media plan for his clients, and he monitors key networks around the clock. Tyler emphasized the importance of the opportunities springing up in real time as he explained his commitment to ongoing, real-time monitoring of the social layer.

“If you join in on a conversation early enough, you're considered a leader,” says Tyler. His is a 24-7 approach to social network monitoring, in which he keeps tabs on his clients and finds conversations to join. And he wasn't kidding – during our conversation, his Blackberry pinged several times, alerting him to @mentions of one of his clients on Twitter.

[Andrea Samacicia](#), founder and President of [Victory Public Relations](#), a New York PR firm focusing on consumer-based health and beauty businesses, has also built social media into her firm's daily workflows, and her clients' campaigns. The first tasks each morning are no surprise: the Victory PR team scans the media, checks their Google alerts and updates everyone's Facebook page. The team stays on top of their clients' Facebook accounts throughout the day, responding to all comments and interactions on the pages.

The team also spends quite a bit of time curating content, looking for news and information and bookmarking the content for future sharing on Facebook. They also encourage their clients to stay in touch. If anything funny or interesting happens, the clients know to let the Victory team know. They'll post pictures of flowers sent to the office by clients, recount funny happenings and wish staffers a happy birthday on Facebook. “The front office staff do not understand PR,” says Andrea. “But Facebook they get.”

Media relations(hips)

Social media now plays an undeniable role in media relations. Services like ProfNet fire out queries from reporters on deadline seeking quotable experts. Savvy journalists and bloggers use Twitter like their own personal newswire service and trawl Facebook for stories and trends. Any way you look at it, the social layer represents one more way to get a journalist's attention.

Social channels also play an important role in connecting people and developing relationships.

Andrea noted that in a former life, several years ago when another PR firm employed her, she communicated with editors all day long. But she didn't start building real relationships with journalists until she started using social media. "I'm much closer to the people I interact with now," she says. "I have much closer relationships with the editors, producers and journalists I'm linked to on Facebook and Twitter. It makes keeping in touch much simpler. You can 'like' something they've done on Facebook, and they get a little reminder about you."

Tyler also uses social media to build key media relationships. He recounts an instance last year when he needed a celebrity reporter's contact info but couldn't find anything. He located her on Twitter, where she was active, and tweeted to her about an event. "She responded in three minutes," he says. "And she came and covered the event, and now we're friends!"

New objectives and outcomes

The integration of social media into PR brings new tactics, new expectations and new outcomes. Victory PR, for example, handles group buying deals on sites like Living Social for its clients. Deals like that aim to generate new revenue for those clients.

The business value of those group buying deals is crystal clear to a periodontist office that employs Victory PR. "Typically – a patient comes in for a cleaning. They wait, get cleaned, pay and leave. But now that we're connecting with patients on Facebook, we'll see long-term customers say, 'I saw some things on Living Social, and I didn't realize that you did X, Y and Z. Can you let me know when the next deal is?' It helps break peoples' routines and allows us to encourage people to move out of their routine without imposing on their time," explains Andrea.

[Eric Bryant](#) of [Gnosis Arts](#), a New Jersey-based internet marketing and PR firm that caters to microbusinesses, notes the shift in customer expectations.

“PR outcomes have shifted. Marketing and PR are not as distinct as they once were – social media spillover has blurred the lines. The internet brought the worlds of marketing, PR and sales close together – uncomfortably so for some,” Eric notes. “The outcomes are different – lead-gen and prospecting. Social media has changed the outcomes people expect – and people expect more.”

“People are expecting ROI from PR as a result of the power of the internet for marketing,” Eric continues. “Now that people can measure things, they want specific measurement and ROI. But social media gives people the false idea that social media is free or has no upfront costs. It’s forcing PR people to demonstrate ROI in some way, shape or form.”

Common themes: content, monitoring and real-time PR

The new opportunities social channels afford, and the changing expectations of customers, put some distinct pressures on PR.

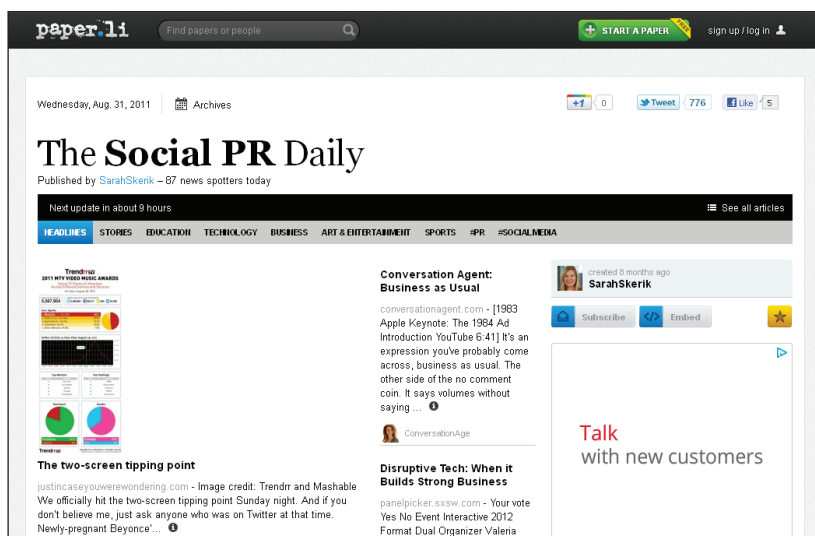
Social media monitoring: Across the board, everyone I spoke to mentioned social media monitoring repeatedly. Keeping their thumbs on their clients’ digital pulses was clearly the most important and pervasive tactic used by the connected communicators with whom I spoke.

Real-time PR: The ongoing activities in social networks can present opportunities at the drop of a hat. Making time for real-time PR requires a shift in priorities and resource allocation. It’s probably a good time to take stock of PR workflows and activities, and end those activities that are no longer productive.

Content: Most of my discussions with PR professionals invariably wound up focusing on the importance of content. Developing interesting content your audience will care enough about to engage in and share is absolutely job one in a social media strategy. PR pros are well acquainted with the role good content plays in any communications plan, but social networks up the ante by requiring a steady diet of compelling graphics, catchy videos and meaty text. (For those days you’re stuck, this post from Copyblogger contains some good ideas: [21 Ways to Develop Compelling Content When You Don’t Have A Clue.](#))

A whole new universe

There's no question social media increases the scope of the public relations role, touching customer service, prospecting, content marketing and lead generation. It's safe to say that PR and the other communications disciplines are morphing into something new. Social media isn't just a tactic. It's a new universe for communicating with our publics – which is at the heart of public relations.

Chapter 4**How Journalists and Bloggers Use Social Media – and the Opportunities for PR**

Paper.li aggregates tweets into a user-friendly electronic newspaper.
This is the [Social PR Daily](#) (curated by author Sarah Skerik.)

The social layer has changed how people find, share and consume news and information. And, as a natural result, the practice of journalism is changing, too. Understanding how journalists and bloggers are using various social media tools and platforms is critical when planning a social media PR strategy.

Social networks have become society's central nervous system, capable of telegraphing information from one point to another – and across a whole network of individuals – almost instantly. Just as nerves and synapses relay information from our fingertips, eyes or ears to our brains, the social layer enables us to find – and broadcast – information. We're also able to quickly find trusted sources of information, current reviews and like-minded people who

share our enthusiasms and concerns. The highly networked nature of our society and information marketplaces means more visibility opportunities for public relations pros than ever before.

How journalists and bloggers are using social media

Breaking News and Trends: Facebook and Twitter, in particular, have evolved into major sources of news for millions of people worldwide, and the search engines aren't far behind – they're now surfacing relevant social results within seconds and are displaying that information front and center within search results. Like the rest of us, savvy journalists and bloggers are keeping an eye on social networks for breaking news and information. For PR pros, therefore, it is absolutely necessary that your brand or clients' news be found in the appropriate areas on these social networks so that journalists and bloggers find it there. And for that to happen, this news must be relevant and interesting to your audience so that they'll want to share it. Such visibility is a key benefit of a brand's social media presence.

Two tools that journalists and bloggers are likely to use (and with which you should become familiar) are:

- **[Trendsmap](#):** Enables you to get a look at what is trending on Twitter from a particular city. For a reporter or blogger with a local beat, this kind of information is crucial.



Trending Twitter topics on August 31, 2011, amongst Twitterers based in London, via Trendsmap.

- **Booshaka**: The Booshaka search function reveals what's being said publicly on Facebook about specific topics. You can also see what's trending on Facebook.

Research: Social networks offer a plethora of data and information to a writer hot on the tail of a story. From a PR perspective, cultivating credible presences on key networks is a great way to position experts and attract audiences.

Twitter lists: Active Twitter users create lists of fellow Twitterers, often organized around subject matter or expertise, and users can follow each other's lists. Following Twitter lists is a great way to stay informed about a particular topic, identify influentials (and get to know their POV) and, for newbies, observe the ebb and flow of conversations. Obviously, developing a solid following on Twitter and providing value to your audience are great ways to get listed and start accruing visibility exponentially.

- **Paper.li**, the **Tweeted Times** & **Flipboard**: A fleet of social content aggregation services are turning Twitter lists, Facebook posts and RSS feeds into up-to-the-minute, glossy digital news magazines. At the beginning of this chapter, I provided a look at the **Social PR Daily**, powered by Paper.li (and curated by me), which aggregates information from leading public relations and social media thinkers. It's updated twice daily.

Quora, **LinkedIn**, **ProfNet Connect**: Follow a topic on Quora, and chances are good you'll soon stumble upon some seriously insightful and revealing commentary. Quora's community values and encourages sophisticated insight, and provides a treasure trove of information and potential story angles (there's more on Quora in Chapter 8.) Sites like Quora, LinkedIn and ProfNet Connect (a free community of tens of thousands of journalists and experts) attract subject-matter experts and facilitate interaction. For PR pros, they are great places to showcase your brand's or client's experts. Building a credible presence on these networks provides your brand's or client's experts with valuable visibility to the people seeking information in your brand's or client's sector – journalists, influentials and prospective customers alike.

Relationships: Any seasoned media relations pro will tell you that cultivating working relationships with journalists and bloggers is critically important. Establishing mutual trust and credibility is the foundation for a great working

relationship between a journalist and a publicist. Social networks offer a great way to learn about other people before introducing oneself. The blog posts a person publishes, their Facebook posts and their Twitter account tell a lot about their interests and expertise.

But beware: a reporter may be active on Twitter, but that's not an open invitation for you to "@mention" him or her with an unsolicited pitch. Building relationships in social networks requires the same grace and tact necessary in real life. To lay the groundwork for a relationship, first identify yourself as someone who's interested by commenting on the author's blog posts, tweeting their articles and offering perspective or expertise about the topics on which the journalist writes.

Content publishing and personal visibility: For several years, PR Newswire and *PRWeek* together produced a survey of journalists. We learned that the majority of journalists are either blogging for their own purposes (professional or otherwise) or are required to produce content for online properties and social channels – in some cases, it's a mix of both. Content fuels social presences. It's the currency of Twitter, and [news sharing on Facebook](#) is undoubtedly driving traffic to sites. Journalists and bloggers are using these channels to build an audience for their content and publications as well as drive readership for the content they produce and publish on their own.

So what's the opportunity for a PR pro? Something as simple as a tweet from an influential journalist or blogger can pay real dividends in terms of message visibility, both in social networks and search engines. Creating content that begs to be shared capitalizes on active social media users' need for content – and few have more of that need than professional journalists and bloggers. Writing headlines and subheads that can be easily tweeted, providing infographics and other sharable multimedia and always providing URLs that can be tweeted/liked/shared are important tactics that should be embedded into your PR department's habits.

Very, very public

The closing thought in this chapter is another word of warning. As we think about how journalists and bloggers are using social media, and the opportunity these interactions afford PR pros, it's also important to note that *everyone*

in social media is using the same tools and platforms. Communications in the social layer are very, very public – something which should work in a communicator's favor if you operate with tact and insight. As is always the case in social networks, spending some time listening and learning about your audience's interests and social style is always recommended.

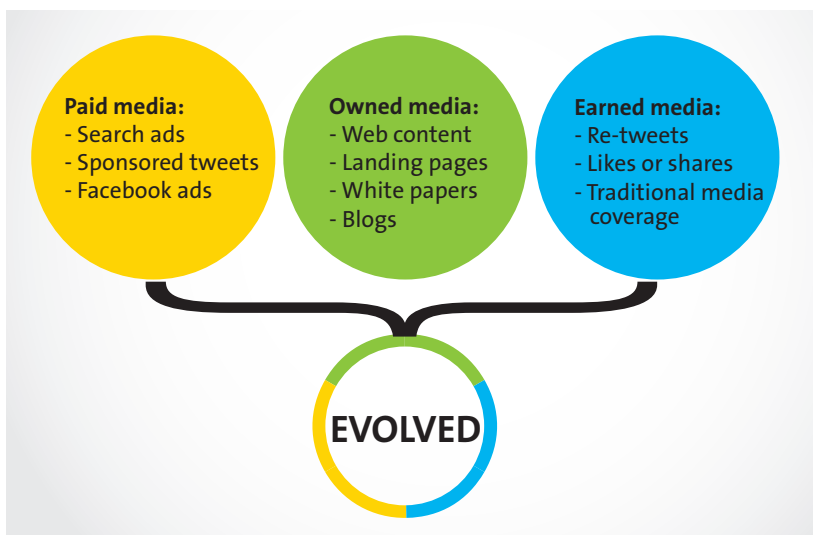
Related reading:

[Twitter, Traditional Media & SEO: The Power Triangle for PR](#)

[15 Free Ways Journalists Use Social Media Tools to Track Topics](#)

[Media Relations, Meet Twitter](#)

Chapter 5

**Earned Media:
When 2 + 2 = 7**

The evolved media phenomenon combines paid, owned and earned media.

Because the social layer is causing them to transform, a lot has been written lately about the three basic types of media: paid, earned and owned. Paid media is simply exposure for which an organization pays. Advertising, search engine ads and promoted tweets are all examples of paid media. Owned media is content your organization produces. The company Web site, white papers and articles you publish, infographics and presentations are all examples of owned media that can be published by your brand.

Earned media is something else entirely. Traditionally, earned media was the visibility generated when an editor picked up and published your story in a newspaper. However, more opportunities for earning exposure exist today, in the social layer. When a blogger includes mention of your product in a post, when a

Facebook fan “likes” a post you made to your company’s wall or when a follower on Twitter re-tweets one of your messages, you’re earning media. What’s common between traditional media pickup and social interaction is that both confer third-party credibility on your product, service or content.

All media can be earned; it just needs to be useful and interesting

Defining these different types of media is easy. However, stopping there ignores the most interesting aspect – namely, the intersection of all three. Today’s interactive, social Web means that bought and owned media can readily be found and consumed by your online audiences. If you do it well enough, those audiences will want to share your content. And their act of sharing creates the type of credibility associated with earned media, while at the same time triggering additional visibility across social networks and search engines. In a nutshell, messages and content that start out as an ad on Facebook or an article on your Web site can quickly morph into valuable, visible and credible earned media.

Julie Hamp, Senior Vice President of Communications for PepsiCo, discussed this recently at the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference. She outlined why we all need to be thinking about being total media companies and consider all of the opportunities for each piece of content we issue. “It’s paid media, it’s earned and owned,” she noted. “It’s evolved content – a higher order level of co-curated content, and it’s the biggest content area for us to all look at next.”

The new potential for all brand messages

The evolved media phenomenon, and a blog post I read titled [“The Five Dumbest Things PR Pros Do With Social Media,”](#) got me thinking about the messages we produce and distribute on behalf of our organizations. The blog post advises against pumping your status fields full of “boring press releases.” Of course, the reference to “boring press releases” leapt out at me.

In this day and age, when everything a communications department produces has the chance of gaining earned media status, reaching exponentially further into social networks and, ultimately, being seen by a whole lot more of the right people, why wouldn’t a writer really go for that golden ring – every time? Why would anyone let a boring press release (or any other boring content) out the door?

In reality, any content any organization publishes – press releases, blog posts, data sheets, backgrounders, white papers, etc. – turns into a de facto digital ambassador for your brand once released into the ether.

In today's environment, bad content won't generate results. It is ignored on Facebook, it garners no re-tweets, journalists delete it from their inboxes and search engines bury it from view. Creating boring content is a studied waste of time.

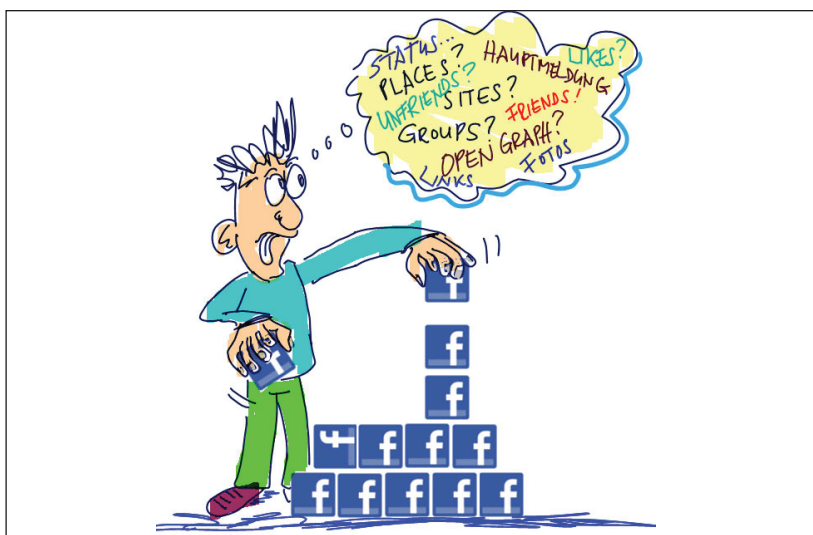
Information that audiences find interesting and useful, on the other hand, can trigger a flurry of audience activity. Good stuff gets shared over and over again. A challenge for all communicators, then, is thinking beyond crossing one more item off the to-do list. Instead, consider the full potential of every piece of content you ever produce, and treat it accordingly.

Related reading:

[Rules for Effective Writing – Drawn from SEO and Social Media](#)

[Improve Press Release Writing with Storytelling](#)

[Jargon Isn't Just Boring – Overusing It Reduces PR Results](#)

Chapter 6**Using Facebook
for Public Relations**

It can be a little overwhelming at first, but Facebook represents great opportunities for PR. Image *courtesy* of Flickr user [stoneysteiner](#)

Building Facebook into PR strategies can be an obvious win. Or, it can be a terrible idea – if you don’t do it right. With an audience of more than 750 million people who log an incredible 700 *billion* minutes on the social network monthly, Facebook’s potential for communicators is undeniable. However, Facebook is first and foremost a very personal space for many users. Communications – even between brands and individuals (and maybe especially?) – have an intimate, one-on-one aspect. Respecting individual preferences and boundaries is important.

Audience research

While Facebook definitely has a place in PR strategies, the charge to simply “get it out on Facebook” isn’t the approach to take. Before communicating via

Facebook, learn about your audience first. Chances are pretty good that a large chunk of them are on Facebook. But why are they there, and how do they use Facebook? Do they tend to be eager and rampant networkers? Or are they more focused on friends and family? Are they active in groups? Enthusiastic game players? A little research into how your audience interacts on Facebook will inform and improve your messages and strategies.

“For our clients, we first determine if Facebook is the appropriate outlet and customize our approach based on our client’s goals,” says [Mike Nierengarten](#), an internet marketing consultant at [Obility Consulting](#). “For example, our client Animation Mentor, an online animation school, is perfect for Facebook because it has tons of great content [video, events, pictures], a strong [current] student presence on the site, and our target customers [potential students] use the site regularly.”

But exactly how does one research an audience on Facebook? You can start by simply purchasing an ad on Facebook. As you go through the process, you’ll learn more about your audience in terms of size and demographics. That said, I prefer the gumshoe method – meaning you log in and start looking. Demographics won’t give you needed insight into where people gather, what sort of messages they share and the overall “vibe” of the Facebook community interested in topics related to your organization’s objectives. Any social media strategist worth his or her salt will tell you that the first step in planning a strategy on social networks is to listen, and you’ll find the same advice here. Find active groups focused on relevant topics and join them. Spend most of your time listening and observing.

Desired outcomes

Secondly, consider your desired outcomes. Do you want to use Facebook to develop relationships with media people and bloggers? Or are you more interested in finding and engaging the enthusiasts within your marketplace, and building awareness among them? Do you have calls to action that you’ll measure, such as lead generation, building Web site traffic or generating conversation and buzz? Deliberate planning with your outcomes in mind is always a good idea.

There are many ways you can weave Facebook into your communications tactics.

Media and blogger relations

Virtual environments lend themselves well to building real relationships with media and bloggers.

Remember [Andrea Samacia](#) from Chapter 3, the founder and President of New York-based [Victory Public Relations](#)? She told me that in her former life, while employed by another PR firm, she communicated with editors all day long but didn't start building real relationships with them until she started using social media. "I'm much closer to the people I interact with now," she says. "I have much closer relationships with the editors, producers and journalists I'm linked to on Facebook and Twitter. It makes keeping in touch much simpler. You can 'like' something they've done on Facebook, and they get a little reminder about you."

In addition to building relationships and communicating with key journalists and bloggers, by paying attention to what they share and post, you can learn more about what interests them and what they've written lately. You may even find a story opportunity among those interactions.

You can even pitch media via Facebook – with some conditions. Blind pitching isn't a good idea; and before pitching a reporter, you should determine whether or not they use Facebook for professional purposes. If you see a journalist discussing news issues and sharing news stories on his or her wall, then chances are better that they'll be receptive to a pitch than if they focus on personal interests and family. Context is always important in social communications.

"For the reporters in the Web 2.0 space, I have begun pitching them via Facebook. I have found they often respond quicker to my Facebook messages as opposed to the e-mails I send to their corporate accounts," says Andrew Miller, Vice President, External Communications at Integral Systems, in a discussion on LinkedIn. He also made a point of noting that he doesn't make "cold call" pitches via Facebook. "Please note that I have relationships with these reporters and have connected to them on Facebook. For PR people interested in using Facebook as a means to pitch reporters, I suggest doing the same."

Finding and connecting with enthusiasts and influencers

There's something for everyone on the Web, and on Facebook, or so it seems. For most organizations, Facebook represents a great opportunity to find and connect

with “your people” – the folks who are truly passionate about whatever it is that makes your brand uniquely your brand. Developing a presence that people will want to connect and interact with requires that you produce, curate and share interesting information about those topics. It also requires the willingness (and resources) to interact with each and every audience member, one on one.

Yes, you want to encourage people to “like” your page. But building interactions with your content – getting people to “like,” share and comment on the things your organization posts – is where the Facebook magic happens. Those liking and sharing interactions can trigger viral distribution of your message. People won’t “like” or share boring content, however, so it is imperative that you create good content – the kind of stuff that Steve Jobs coined the phrase “insanely great” to describe.

Good old-fashioned promotion

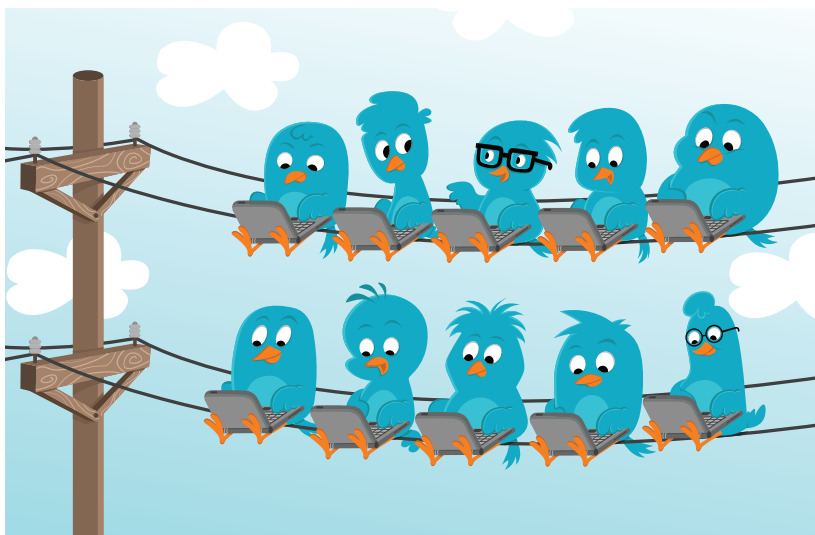
Facebook is a great place to generate publicity – that’s obvious. And once you’ve done your research, identified what your audience likes, developed the content plan to attract and keep your audience’s attention and have been rewarded with a growing following, then you can actually start to promote your company. Please note – promoting the company comes **after** you do all of the heavy lifting described above. Building context – and communicating within that context – is important on social channels. It would be jarring – and uninviting – if a friendly, funny brand presence suddenly switched to a hard sell.

That said, people understand that brands need to promote themselves and their products and services. And, let’s face it – if you’re in the market for a particular item, you’re probably going to be interested in information related to that item. So it’s perfectly OK to promote your business, brand and products on Facebook. However, if you want to do so effectively, most of your communications should be focused on building relationships and credibility with your audience. If 80% of your communications are consistently focused on educating and entertaining your audience, they’ll tolerate 20% of promotional content – as long as you maintain the context you’ve already built. So go ahead and promote your blog posts, white papers and other promotional content, invite your audience to special events and offer them special deals and discounts for being loyal fans.

Simply put, Facebook can be a terrific medium for public relations, as long as communicators respect the personal nature of interactions and take care to connect the right audience with the right, carefully crafted, message.

Related reading:

[Study: How People Are Engaging Journalists On Facebook & Best Practices](#)

Chapter 7**Using Twitter
for Public Relations**

Many journalists, bloggers and PR professionals use Twitter for rapid news consumption and distribution.

Twitter's role in spreading news and information is undeniable – more than any other social network, Twitter was built for the rapid relay of information. So, the audience Twitter has attracted revels in the consumption and sharing of news. As a result, Twitter is enmeshed in the workflows of many journalists, bloggers ... and PR professionals.

However, there's more to using Twitter to spread the word than simply writing a tweet. And there is potential risk for your brand in how you name your Twitter handles – which we'll discuss at the end of this chapter. Meanwhile, here are some tactics that can help expand the audience for your message.

- Tweet all of the angles of your content to maximize interest in your message. Press releases, white papers, blog posts and case studies often contain

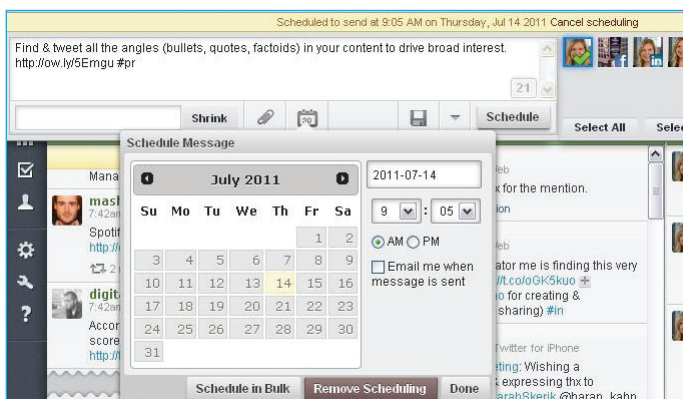
multiple angles. Find and tweet them all. Additionally, if the content includes infographics, photos or video, you can tweet those elements separately.

- Spread multiple tweets out over time in order to expose the content to the broadest possible audience. Remember that for many, Twitter is a real-time news service. Timing matters.
- Use correct and effective hashtags to make your content easy to find. Take the time to research and identify (and then use!) the hashtags used by others when discussing the topic you're tweeting.
- Structure the content to be Twitter-friendly. Encourage others to tweet your messages by offering plenty of "tweetable tidbits" like bullet points and well-edited headings.
- Encourage re-tweets (RTs) by keeping tweets short. Pithy tweets are catchy and leave plenty of room to accommodate others re-tweeting the message.

Tweet all of the angles

Instead of simply tweeting a headline, find multiple angles and tweet those. By doing so, you'll broaden the appeal of the content you're promoting by exposing different storylines to your audience. An influential blogger might ignore one tweet, but may find another irresistible when it surfaces a different aspect to the story.

- Tweet the facts/findings/tips your content offers, individually.
- Turn quotes into @mentions. If the content contains quotes from people who are already on Twitter, paraphrase those quotes in a tweet and include the quoted person's Twitter handle. For example: "Don't tweet headlines, tweet angles says [@sarahskerik](#) {link to story}."
- If you post related video to YouTube or have an accompanying infographic, you can tweet those elements separately.



Scheduling tweets over time exposes them to a broader audience.

Spread your tweets out

While I'm not a fan of automating tweets, scheduling them does have its place. Often, when I'm promoting a white paper or other content on Twitter, I'll spend some time writing a series of tweets about the content (using my own "tweet all angles" tip,) and I'll schedule them across a day or two. Dumping all of the tweets into the stream at once would achieve little – the same people would see my series of tweets. Spreading them out over time means that I expose my messages to more people as they dip into and out of their Twitter streams. Search engines also surface tweets, and they look for timeliness of the content. Spreading tweets out – especially if they are all pointing to the same URL – can help give you a little lift in search results, too.

Use correct and effective hashtags

Hashtags make the sea of information on Twitter navigable – they are how information is organized on Twitter. Using appropriate and relevant hashtags gives your audience one more means by which they can find your message. You can identify potential hashtags by searching Twitter for your topic and then scanning tweets to see what hashtags are used. It's always wise to vet specific hashtags by searching them to ensure that your messages will be seen in the type of company you want to keep.

Structure the content to be Twitter-friendly

I've offered advice on this topic previously, but it is worth repeating. You can encourage others to tweet your content by making it easy and appealing to do so. Tight headlines, a well-edited list of bullet points and interesting, pithy quotations will make your content easy (and interesting) for others to tweet.

Suggested tweets

I'm of two minds when it comes to providing suggested tweets and encouraging others to tweet content they didn't write. On the one hand, providing a little direction can help spread the exact message your organization wants to convey. On the other hand, avid Twitterers like writing their own messages. My conclusion: Go ahead and offer language for suggested tweets. Those who want to re-write the message will, while others may appreciate having the tweet written for them.

At the minimum, always provide relevant hashtags and a short URL for others to reference in their tweets. And make sure the tweets you suggest are short and well written!

There's a decided art to writing a tweet, however, requiring a fine balance between sparkling creativity, ruthless editing and a feel for the audience's interest.

Be careful about who owns the audience!

Before you begin using the tactics described in this chapter, first consider the ins and outs of building a presence on Twitter – especially what handle you'll use. At first, it's an easy decision for a brand – in most cases, the brand name will work well. But what about the employees who will be supporting your brand on Twitter? Many people advocate using a personalized branded handle combining a brand reference and a name – e.g., @SuzieAtDell or @PRN_Sarah. However, doing so poses a risk – if the person behind the handle leaves, the brand can lose that audience.

A good example was the situation at CNN when Rick Sanchez was abruptly dismissed. His Twitter account, @ricksanchezcnn, had more than 140,000 followers – built on CNN's time, under CNN's brand, by Sanchez through his own personal efforts. At the time of Sanchez's firing, [ReadWriteWeb](#) summed up the situation by asking "Did CNN lose out on the social media investment

they put into Sanchez's personal account over the years? Ought they have driven all followers to an official company account instead, in case something like this happened?"



ReadWriteWeb asked a number of tough questions after Sanchez left CNN. Click the image for the RWW story.










How did this shake out? You can change your Twitter handle and keep your followers, and that's what it appears Sanchez did – he's now tweeting under @RickSanchezTV and has 138,000+ followers. In this case, he took his audience with him when he left CNN.

My advice for brands is to stay clear of the grey area a personalized branded handle represents. Use a branded handle that can be easily portable between people (e.g., @CompanyNameMedia.) But allow them to tweet under their own names, too, if they're so inclined. Your brand will benefit from having more advocates. Though you can change handle names, there's some value in an established brand handle. Either way, it's very important to work out issues around ongoing account control and succession with your social media teams (and your legal and HR departments) before becoming really invested in the social layer. The division between the brand and the employee needs to be clear.

PR Newswire on Twitter

Join the PR Newswire family on Twitter! From notification of upcoming events to industry news, best practice tips and overall networking, PR Newswire employees and experts are tweeting away & engaging in thoughtful Twitter conversations.

Below you'll find a list of PR Newswire's associated Twitter accounts, including links to our employees' profiles. Follow us today!

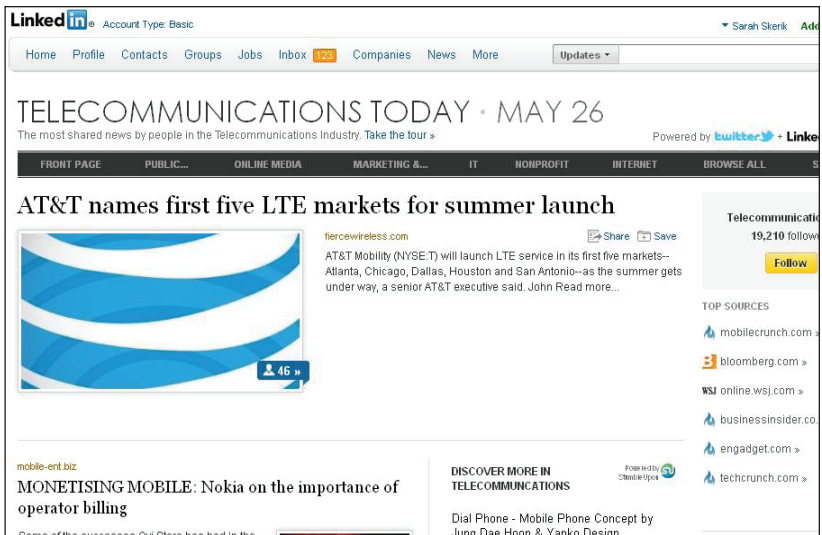
	PR Newswire @PRNewswire 50203 followers		ProfNet @ProfNet 16292 followers		Virtual Press Office @VPOeventzone 2865 followers
	PR Newswire Alerts @PRNAlert 2874 followers		Meet the Media @meetthemedi 1808 followers		Vintage Filings @vfilingslive 1030 followers
	MultiVu @multivu 959 followers		PR Newswire Events and Webinars @PRNevents 787 followers		Hispanic Digital Network @HDNweb 300 followers

A snapshot of PR Newswire's presence on Twitter. Click the image for a complete roster of our employee and brand Twitter presences.

Here at PR Newswire, we have our flagship @PRNewswire Twitter presence, along with a number of other branded handles, including @ProfNet, @PRNAlert, @MeetTheMedia and @MultiVu, to name a few. The audiences for those presences belong to the brand, not the employees who are managing the presence. But we also have a lot of people tweeting under their own names, myself included. We do risk losing a little traction if an employee leaves the company – my followers on Twitter, connections on LinkedIn and friends on Facebook are mine, and those social networks back that up in their terms of account ownership. Still, the upside for PR Newswire is that we have so many more advocates for the brand, some of whom tweet very actively about PR, investor relations, marketing and social media – our core business areas. And in the course of their own tweeting, they often choose to amplify company messages.

Related reading:

[Writing a Tweetable Press Release](#)

Chapter 8**Using LinkedIn
for Public Relations**

Telecommunications Today – a news page featuring content widely shared by LinkedIn users.

Twitter and Facebook undeniably garner the most attention in discussions about social media and marketing communications. As a result, many communicators overlook the excellent value and utility of sites like LinkedIn, ProfNet Connect and Quora. This chapter focuses on LinkedIn; the next couple will discuss Quora and ProfNet.

LinkedIn is interesting, and maybe even unique, because of the way it combines professional networking with breaking news and interaction. A good LinkedIn profile is a living resume that can be seen by the network's active community. What makes the site work so well is how well organized it is – users can tag their profiles to indicate industry and professional expertise, participate in industry

and subject-specific groups, and follow news and information related to their areas of interest. If you haven't checked out what LinkedIn is doing lately, put it at the top of your to-do list.

LinkedIn News and sharing

I spoke to members of the development team at LinkedIn in Spring 2011. While a lot was still in flux, one thing was clear – LinkedIn is really focused on acquiring content for their site, and the action of sharing content via the LinkedIn Share button is something they're stressing. Content that is widely shared among the people following an industry is featured in LinkedIn News, a sleek new feature shown in the screenshot accompanying this chapter. It does a nice job of surfacing content that is on the minds of people within a specific niche.

Because of the emphasis LinkedIn is placing on the use of its Share button, having that functionality embedded on your site's content pages is important. If your organization has a robust news section on its Web site or creates other content or hosts a blog and doesn't have those buttons embedded, get in touch with your Web team and ask them to add sharing functionality. (Note: PR Newswire encourages [sharing press releases in social media](#) by embedding the LinkedIn Share button on all press release pages, along with buttons for Facebook, Google+ and Twitter. Other sharing and interaction options, such as a variety of blogging tools, are available in the Share It! section on the right of each page.)

Tactical PR and LinkedIn

Public relations pros can use LinkedIn in a few different ways for tactical PR, including:

- **Researching and networking with journalists and bloggers.** Most people keep their profiles up-to-date and provide links to their blogs, Twitter accounts and Web sites. Once you've researched someone, you can invite that person to connect on the site. This is a good way to get to know someone, and add him or her to the virtual Rolodex that is your group of LinkedIn contacts.

- **Listening to your own audiences.** LinkedIn has scads of professional and special interest groups, as well as active Q&A discussions in the Answers section. Keeping an eye on the conversations in this section is a great way to learn what's on your audience's mind; it provides useful information for planning your own communications, especially blog posts and other content creation activities. When you start to see the same questions pop up over and over again, it usually means the market has done a poor job filling the need for that information. Can you spell "opportunity?"
- **Identifying influentials.** As you become more familiar with the people who participate in the different discussion groups and Q&A forums, you'll start to spot real influencers among the crowd – folks who are well connected in your industry and who have voices that rise above the din. Often, you'll find that these people have many "best answers" in the Answers section. Cultivate them. Build relationships with them. They can become powerful advocates for your brand.
- **Building your own credibility.** I just mentioned the "best answers" feature in the Answers section. LinkedIn allows the person posting a question to select a "best answer" from those received. Collecting "best answers" builds your expertise and visibility within an industry segment. It's a great way to establish your bona fides. Once established, more people will want to connect with you.
- **Honing your social skills.** As with any network, it's important to listen and observe the group dynamics before you interact. Notice what kind of questions generate responses in group discussions, and which responses garner "best answer" accolades in the Answers section. Certain types of messages are almost certain duds – if you pay attention, you can determine what sort of content the audience does and doesn't like, and plan accordingly. In addition to making your interactions on LinkedIn more effective, paying attention to what sort of content generates interest and interaction can also inform your future content strategy.

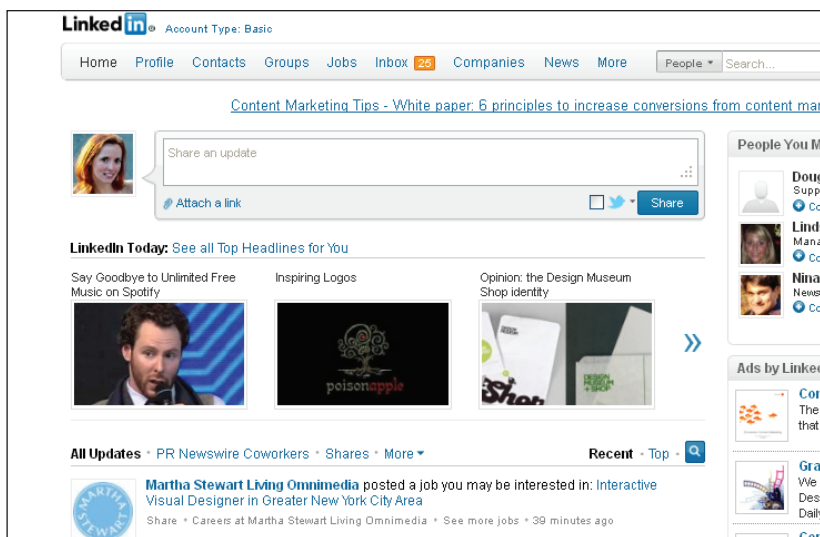
Company pages

In addition to providing powerful personal networking tools, LinkedIn also offers companies the ability to establish company pages. These pages are an important touch point within LinkedIn for your brand. You can plug your company's Twitter feed into your company page, along with an RSS feed from your blog. Other tabs allow you to highlight key products (including the addition of video and images related to the products.) You can even conduct polls and surveys. Page admins can access analytics, enabling them to see activity on the pages. All in all, company pages are good tools that are free and easy to set up.

The more time you spend with LinkedIn, the more opportunities you'll discover as to how this important network can be used in your PR workflow. If I've overlooked your favorite tips for using LinkedIn in your daily PR practice, let me know!

NEW! Chapter 9

LinkedIn Enables Brand-Follower Interactions



Administrators of Company Pages on LinkedIn can now issue updates and interact with followers. Updates appear within followers' Headlines.

There's no question that LinkedIn is a valuable social network for professionals. However, until the end of 2011, LinkedIn focused solely on the interactions and behaviors of individuals. Brand presences were relegated to Company Pages, which were largely static and out of the LinkedIn communications flow.

That all changed the first week of October 2011, when LinkedIn enabled a new feature allowing the administrators of Company Pages to post 500-word updates, distribute links and interact with their followers. Best of all, followers of brands will see the updates in their personal Headlines.

While this is yet one more thing for the to-do lists of busy social media managers, in this case, I don't mind. LinkedIn is unusual for the degree to which it enables (and encourages) users to self-select, define their interests and find (and interact with) like-minded people. The people who have elected to follow

brands on LinkedIn have done so under their own power. They're really interested in what that organization has to say. In fact, this is probably why LinkedIn is consistently a top referrer of readers to the [Beyond PR](#) blog.

Importantly, LinkedIn has built some analytics into the new updates, offering perspective on the size of your brand's audience and the degree to which the audience engages with updates issued by your brand via LinkedIn. LinkedIn defines the numbers as follows:

- **Impressions:** The number of times that a status update has been viewed organically on LinkedIn.
- **Engagement:** The percentage of time that members engaged with (clicked, liked, commented or shared) this status update organically.

Normally, I have very little interest in vague numbers like "impressions." But in the case of LinkedIn's impressions data, page administrators can learn something about their audiences – namely, whether or not they are actively engaging with LinkedIn. Ultimately, you can use this information to determine if your time spent on LinkedIn and on issuing updates is, indeed, well spent.

The engagement number is more interesting because it indicates how many people actually took an action related to each update you issued. The simple acts of a reader clicking on "more" to read the full update or (even better) sharing it with their networks are considered "engagement" under LinkedIn's calculus, and I think that's appropriate, and accurate.

I do think it's important to note that brands really do have a responsibility on LinkedIn (just as they do on Facebook or Twitter) to offer useful, credible and interesting information – and to mind reactions to your flow of content. Too many updates of the wrong sort feel spammy and will get a brand un-followed in the wink of an eye. You'll need to tinker with the type of content you share, and the frequency with which you share it. The analytics LinkedIn provides can help you identify the posts that were real winners – and the duds. As with any network, listening, paying attention and getting a feel for your audience's interests are cornerstones to brand success.

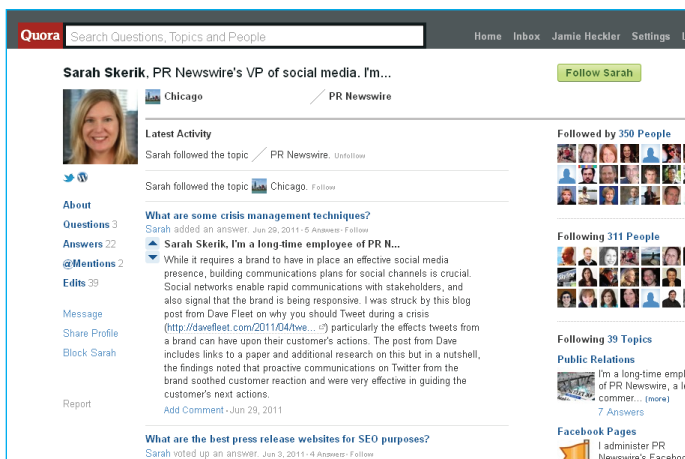
Chapter 10**Using Quora for Public Relations**

Administrators of Company Pages on LinkedIn can now issue updates and interact with followers. Updates appear within followers' Headlines.

Quora is a social media site of a different stripe. It's a Q&A site that is subtle and intellectual, rewarding thoughtful discourse but dispensing with badges and scores as measures of influence. The crowd votes good answers up and can express their thanks for answers. They can also vote answers down or flag them for a variety of reasons. Content is judged by a jury of your peers.

The vibe is different, too. Quora is more focused, and the crowd isn't very tolerant of flippant answers. And unlike many sites, Quora isn't terribly conversational – at least not in the Q&A section. A friend of mine found a blog post she penned was being discussed favorably on Quora. Delighted, she posted a note thanking the person who originally mentioned the blog. To her horror, she was told in no uncertain terms that such things simply weren't done on Quora. The crowd truly wants the Q&A to remain pure and focused.

In a nutshell, Quora combines potent content and discussion with an element of social networking. You can really get a handle on a person's style, professional know-how and intellectual bent by perusing their answers.



Sarah's Quora profile

Using Quora

Quora is easy and straightforward to use. Take the time to fill out your complete profile and post a picture. Then, follow the topics that interest you and add a few lines describing your expertise where indicated.

As with any social network, listen first. The look first/leap later approach is an especially good one to take in Quora. Browse the discussions underway in your areas of interest. Look at popular answers and compare them to those that are voted down. In many cases, popular answers offer sophisticated perspective and robust detail. This is not the place for chat shorthand and LOLs.

Applications for PR

Quora does offer PR pros some specific opportunities, but none are easy or automated. Quora demands a high-touch approach. In return, it offers a specific and focused audience.

- **Get to know peers and influencers.** Time and again, I'm struck by the high quality of discourse on Quora. It's due, in part, to the fact that the Quora community is populated by savvy – and often senior – people. Quora is a great way to get to know them, many of whom are influential within their areas of specialty. Quora is a good way to learn more about the interests and expertise of key influencers.
- **A source of ideas.** One of the coolest things about following a topic on Quora is seeing the questions people pose. Some generate discussion, while others go unanswered – and both types offer opportunity for PR pros. In addition to participating in the discussions, a thoughtful thread can also be the basis of a pitch, in which you offer your company's take. If you're charged with content production, threads can also be the basis of a blog post or articles. Here's an example of one I wrote in March about [getting PR for startups](#). Quora discussions – and the questions sparking them – are an ongoing source of ideas.
- **Search engine value.** Quora has a very search-engine-friendly design, and search engines make certain to index content from the network. It's not uncommon to see a discussion thread listed in Google results, which isn't surprising – Quora discussions are as real and authentic as content gets, and they are loaded with the common vernacular (versus incomprehensible jargon) that is also used in searches. Being relevant and adding value to a conversation is obviously crucial, but it's perfectly OK to reference a blog post or other Web page in your answer – as long as the context is there. And doing so will help build visibility for key messages within search engines. You can gild the lily by tweeting or sharing your answer, too.

Many of the same rules you learn from using Quora also apply to the forums and discussion groups that are so popular today. Mastering the art of engagement on Quora will stand the communications pro in good stead in the future and will generate important contacts and ideas in the present. Have you found other ways to use Quora?

Chapter 11**Discussion Groups and Forums:
Virtual Focus Groups for Wired Communicators**

The screenshot shows the ProfNet website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Home, Forums, Blogs, Groups, Events, Multimedia, Members, My Hub, and My Info. Below this is a search bar with options for Keyword Search, Expert, All Members, and Entire. The main content area is titled 'ProfNet Connect' and features a table of recent conversations. To the right of the table is a Poynter advertisement.

Forum	Threads	Posts	Last Post
ProfNet Connect Help Forum Need help navigating ProfNet Connect? Let us know here, and a site administrator will help.	18	28	8 months ago by Maria Perez
Promotional Opportunities Following are postings from members in need of gift-bag donations, endorsements, sponsorships, event partners, etc. To reply to any of these requests, please send an e-mail directly to the contact person in the listing.	61	71	2 minutes ago by Dusty Bastian
Calls for Entries Information on calls for entries	4	4	2 weeks ago by Jason Hahn
ProfNet Success Stories Got a nice hit from a ProfNet query, expert profile, Expert Alert or tweet? Let us know!	1	4	7 months ago by Chris Martin, MPH
Urgent Queries from Twitter View full text of queries posted on our Twitter feed	6	6	57 minutes ago by Jason Hahn

ProfNet Connect – PR Newswire’s expert community – uses groups and forums.

Before Facebook was conceived or Twitter was launched, before “community” became the flavor of the day and before “social media” was even coined, people were meeting online to discuss topics dear to their hearts and minds. All over the Web and in myriad languages, people gathered in discussion groups and on forums, where they chatted to their hearts’ content about topics they found interesting. And despite the popularity of social networks, forums and discussion groups have not lost their cachet.

Yet, despite their focused subject matter and audiences, these groups aren’t on the PR radar screen. As a long time denizen of a variety of groups related to interests both personal and professional, I think that’s a mistake.

ProBoards.com, the internet’s largest free forum host, is home to more than 3 million forums, with more than 20 million users. Industry associations, publishers,

special interest groups and brands host countless more discussion groups and forums. People flock to these groups to ask and answer questions, network and simply hang out with like-minded people. Most are also easily found via search engines, when search queries pull up related discussion threads.

Case in point: My farrier recently suggested that I consider a hoof supplement for my horse (i.e., vitamins to help grow stronger hooves), but he didn't recommend one in particular. So, being an intrepid Googler, I plugged in a pretty specific search string: "best hoof supplement for TB." (TB is the shorthand for my horse's breed, which happens to be predisposed to hoof issues.)

Okay, so clearly I am an advocate of forums, but even I was surprised by the results of my search. ALL of the top results were from forums.

Opportunities for communicators

You can find discussion groups devoted to almost any topic, from caring for all types of animals to fixing mountain bikes to planning healthy lunch box meals – and the discussions aren't limited to consumer issues. B2B groups abound as well, discussing supply chains, technologies and issues specific to professions and practices.

While discussion groups are not appropriate places to push PR messages, they provide a number of opportunities for the dialed-in communicator.

- **Market intelligence.** Forum discussions can be a rich and unending source of market intelligence. Members will discuss hacks – how they've modified an item to meet their needs, frustrations, unsolved problems and theory. They will share tips, tricks and tactics, and offer candid assessment of products, services, vendors and suppliers. Everything is on the table. In this way, forums are like ongoing market research groups. Actively listening to these groups reveals what's on your audience's mind and surfaces trends and issues quickly. There's far more value to be had than simply monitoring mentions of your brand.
- **"Fill-the-gap" opportunities.** When you frequent a discussion group, over time, you'll see the same subjects pop up again and again. You'd think the group would be annoyed at answering the same question over and over (and in fact, many discussion groups have published FAQs to which they

direct “newbies” when annoyance gets the better of them: these FAQs are themselves rich sources of information for PR pros), but the reality is that people will always try to fill in gaps in information. People pose questions on forums when they don’t find answers in search engines. When you see a question – especially one that starts with “What’s the best ...” or “How do I ...” – recur over and over, that’s an opportunity. It means there’s a gap in public information. Fill that gap!

- **Connections with influencers.** Many forum discussions name products. People will weigh in with comments about how much they love or hate their [item, product]. They will relay experiences. In addition to identifying enthusiasts who advocate your product, you will also start to see who on the forum carries more weight. Chances are good that these folks have followings outside of the forum, too, and are solid influencers. You’ll also find bloggers in the group. Forums are great places for connecting with enthusiasts and influencers on a personal basis.

Rules of engagement

Like any social network, forums are personal. People make friends on forums, and build associations that last for years. Just as Twitterers will hold ‘Tweet-Ups’ to meet in person, it’s not uncommon for forum members to meet up at events. So as you venture forth in forums, it’s important to remember that the denizens of discussion groups are not gathered around their computers eagerly awaiting marketing messages. They are seeking interesting and valuable information, and interaction with other enthusiasts and experts. Bear that context in mind.

As I mentioned earlier, there’s more benefit to be had in interacting with forum members and observing the interactions as you would observe a discussion group. There’s so much to be gleaned from watching and listening.

If you decide to start interacting, especially on behalf of the brand or organization you represent, keep a few things in mind:

- **First and foremost, be helpful and stay on topic.** This is a good time to remind ourselves that forums are about them, not us. When you interact on forums, your answers and comments should be about the topic at hand. Segues about related products generally aren’t well received, unless the

information being relayed is new and (here's that word again) specific to the discussion.

- **Get to know the board's style.** Are the conversations grammatically correct and more technical in nature? Or does the board have a more freewheeling style that is OK with abbreviation and "text speak?" Does the board support, advocate or eschew certain trends or practices within the field of interest? Finding and communicating within that context is important.
- **Respect specificity.** There are different disciplines and interests in all broad categories, from cooking (vegan, country, gluten-free, light) to cultivating daylilies (heirlooms, natives, hybrids) or cycling (road, off-road, cyclocross, fixie.) You can see where thinking in broad terms of cooking, daylilies or cycling could be way too broad. Focus on specific topics to which your brand or organization is highly relevant.
- **Be transparent.** If you are a representative of a brand or organization, put that in your bio, and put a little disclaimer in your answers reminding others of your affiliation. I've found that doing so actually increases my credibility. Furthermore, folks are often pleased that someone from an industry player is listening.
- **Don't feed trolls.** There are rabble-rousers and troublemakers on forums. Don't bite when they bait you, especially if you're new to the board and don't know the players and the vibe. Take the time to differentiate between trolls and those with legitimate complaints and concerns because, by definition, the trolls cannot be satisfied.

NEW! Chapter 12

Writing Press Releases That Resonate with Your Audience



Press releases that serve the needs of your audience first will garner more engagement than the traditional brand announcements.

Today's communications strategies hinge on content, and, traditionally, the press release has been an important part of a brand's content mix. However, to be successful, a content marketing strategy needs to serve the needs of the audience first, whereas the traditional press release has been geared toward telling the brand's story. Can press releases be made to fit into the modern content marketing paradigm?

According to the members of the [Public Relations Professionals on LinkedIn](#) group, the answer is a qualified "Yes," depending on how the press release is written. Tips sourced from the conversation include:

- Instead of a press release, write the news story. Eliminate jargon and hyperbole, focus the message and substantiate the claims just as you would

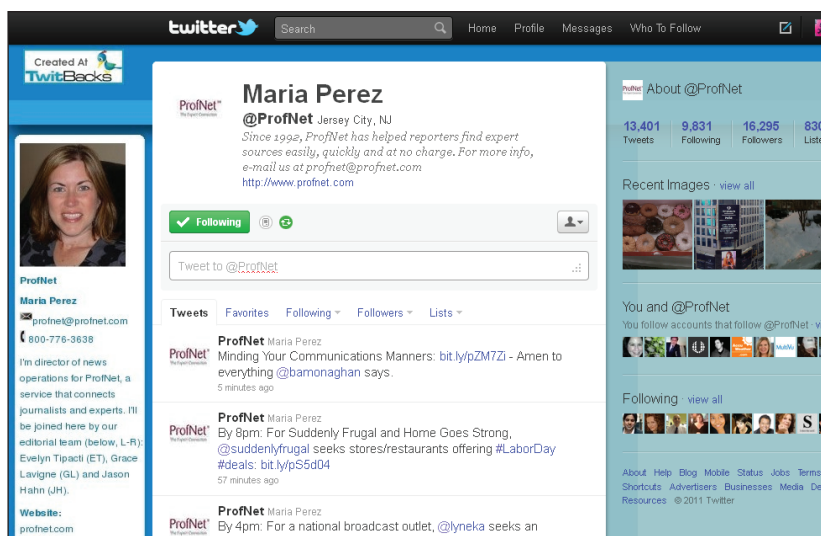
if you were submitting the final work to a ruthless news editor. Paying attention to the readability of the message is important and will produce a better final product.

- Make the obligatory quote in the second paragraph really work. Instead of a canned quote in which the quoted exec notes how excited he or she is about whatever is being announced, use this space to address – and answer – key marketplace questions, or to clearly describe what is special about today's news.
- Plan for and encourage online visibility by [using multimedia in press releases](#) – a tactic that we know generates more views and wider sharing of messages.

To these tips, I'd also add the imperative to write from the audience's perspective – which, I will concede, is a little counter-intuitive when it comes to press releases. Here are some ways you can bring this important point of view into your writing:

- “Listen” to your brand's Social Echo to develop a deep understanding of what your customers and prospects are talking about online – and update that understanding on an ongoing basis. That way, you can use frequently asked questions and unresolved marketplace issues to frame your communications, even press releases. Make the answer to a key question the focus of the announcement, rather than “XYZ Co. is Today Announcing Something.”
- Highlight actual people – customers, production staff, design engineers – in your writing. Involving a variety of people will surface more stories and angles, and help you create content that resonates with your readers.
- Speak in the language of your marketplace, not your marketing department. Present information and quantify data using metrics that are actually meaningful to the people you're hoping to influence. You'll need to do a little market research, but there's no better way to give your content a boost than to ensure that it's contextually relevant to your audience.

As you plan your next press release, try to incorporate a couple of these tactics. Pay attention to the results your press release generates – and look beyond simple page views as you do so. If you dig a little deeper into the results from your press releases, looking at the number of times the content was shared in social networks and the number of people who clicked links embedded within the release, you'll start to understand what sort of messages actually inspire your readers to action. That's intelligence you can use to fine-tune future press releases and improve their results.

Chapter 13**10 Tips for
Tweeting as a Brand**

The ProfNet presence Maria has cultivated on Twitter.

Chapter 13 is a “guest chapter” written by [Maria Perez](#), Director of News Operations for ProfNet and the voice behind [@ProfNet](#) on Twitter. She also blogs on [ProfNet Connect](#), a free interactive community linking PR pros, bloggers, journalists and experts.

When I was asked to start tweeting as [@ProfNet](#) in May 2008, I had a moment – OK, several moments – of panic. I had only just heard of Twitter and had no idea what to do. Apart from incoming queries, what the heck would I tweet about? And why would anyone care about anything I had to say? There were many times I would type a tweet, delete it, retype it, edit it, delete it and type it again – and then hold my breath as I hit “send.”

So what did I do? I found a mentor. For me, it was my colleague Vicky Harres.

I respected what Vicky was doing on the [@prnewswire](#) feed and decided to study her tweets and learn as much from her as I could.

What I learned: Friendliness and professionalism are not mutually exclusive. Your tweets can be conversational and still be professional. There's no reason you can't show a little personality, but remember: first and foremost, you are tweeting as @yourbrand, not as @you.

Once you've begun tweeting, be open to change. At first, we tweeted mostly ProfNet queries and news. Now, with more and more great content being created every day across the Web, we've evolved into more of a content curator, sharing links on interesting PR- and media-related articles. Because we track the hits on every link we share, we can see what works and what doesn't – and can adjust our strategy accordingly.

Am I an expert on Twitter? Well, educated people may disagree. What I have done, though, is find a good balance between “official tweets” and “Maria tweets,” and tweeted for a brand for three years. So, please take my suggestions below as just that – suggestions from someone who tweets for a brand.

- **Find Twitter mentors.** If you follow Twitterers who you think get it right, learn from them. What do they tweet about? How often do they tweet? How often do they re-tweet? How do they re-tweet (do they just re-send the original tweet verbatim, or do they put their own spin on it)? When and how do they reply to negative tweets? When and how do they reply to positive tweets? If your mentors are open to it, run a few tweets by them and see what, if any, changes they would make.
- **Keep it positive.** As tempting as it sometimes gets, avoid being negative, sarcastic or snarky. No matter how funny you think you are, always remember that you're tweeting as your brand, not as you.
- **Respond to negative feedback.** If someone says something negative about your brand and you don't respond, the tweet that lingers is the negative one. However, there are two caveats. First, don't be hasty. It's better to take time to think through your response. Second, beware of attempts to bait you. Weigh the pros and cons of responding. If you decide not to respond publicly, consider a direct message instead.

- **Steer away from controversy.** Controversial topics (politics, religion) are controversial for a reason – there are people who are vehemently on one side or the other. Why alienate either?
- **Humor is subjective.** There will always be someone who thinks your joke is in poor taste or inappropriate, so while I don't think you should censor yourself, stay away from topics or language/slang that could be taken the wrong way.
- **Get a second opinion.** If there's something you want to tweet but you aren't sure whether it's appropriate, ask your mentor for his opinion. And if you're still not sure, follow the next rule.
- **When in doubt, leave it out.** This golden rule of writing also applies to tweets. If you have any doubts, don't tweet it.
- **Don't get too personal.** Tweeting about Snuggles is innocuous. Tweeting about hemorrhoids or ingrown toenails is not.
- **Follow your followers.** I know not everyone will agree with this, but if you want to promote conversation with your followers, you have to follow them back. I explained my reasoning for this in a blog post titled [To Follow or Not to Follow: Take the Auto-Follow Challenge](#). When I see someone whose following/follower ratio is pretty even, I find myself thinking that he is more open, and that makes me more likely to interact with him.
- **It's not about @you.** I come back to this because it's really the mother of all rules, the one from which all the other rules grow. Every tweet represents your company – whether it's in a positive or negative way is up to you.

Closing

Lessons Learned from My Social Network Journey – So Far



My journey into social media has improved my writing and my audience radar, enabling me to more effectively engage with each new post.

Compiling this eBook has given me the opportunity to pause and reflect on my social media activities for the last year. My biggest challenge, bar none, has been the care and feeding of the *Beyond PR* blog, which has forced me to become a better – and faster – writer. But the truth is, I’ve polished a variety of important skills through my interactions in social networks – and so will you.

Writing

Like a good PR or elevator pitch, an effective tweet, Facebook status update or Google+ post is compelling, finely crafted, tightly edited and impossible to ignore. Social networks are a great place to test messages and hone your writing to the sharpest of points. There is a clear positive correlation between the improvements

in my writing – most noticeably in my new-found ability to edit myself and tighten the phraseology screws – and the corresponding growth and engagement of my audiences in social networks. Simply put, if you pay attention to what you write, you'll quickly learn what works – and what doesn't – with your audience. And there's more to that equation than simply subject matter. The structure of your missives and the language you select will help dictate the outcome.

Facebook: be interesting and pithy

Among the friends and family I interact with on Facebook, descriptive posts that are slightly offbeat generate the most interest. When I gabbled nonsensically about our recent house robbery, my rambling message received zero (!) responses. Are my friends and family heartless? No. But boring messages generate zero traction with any group.

On PR Newswire's Facebook page, the vibe is a little different. The crowd there appreciates the content we curate for them, but before they will follow the links we suggest, they need to be sold on why doing so is worth their time. I always take the time to give my take on why a link I'm suggesting to them is interesting or useful. That said, brevity is important here as well. Rambling simply doesn't work.

Twitter: edit mercilessly

On Twitter, my followers respond to short, crisp tweets. Seventy characters or less seems to be the sweet spot, and those characters have to sum up the value of the link I'm suggesting. When writing tweets, I challenge myself to trim and tighten my messages, distilling the tweets as much as possible. Here's a look at the most popular tweets I've sent this summer, in terms of the number of times the attached link was clicked. As you can see, all are well under the 140-character limit:

- With a single tweet, Lance Armstrong's PR machine blunts '60 Minutes' segment. *(79 characters)*
- Google shelves real-time, and my take on what it means for #PR *(63 characters)*
- Fewer than a dozen companies rely on the Web to meet disclosure. Here's why: *(77 characters)*

➤ Sharable content is the SEO king. (36 characters)

➤ SEO is really public relations. (32 characters)

I've also found it's helpful to allude to your own take on something you're sharing, and that it's entirely possible to do so with one word, or even simple punctuation. Appending "Really?" to a tweet is an easy way to convey skepticism or an element of disbelief. Adding a mid-phrase exclamation point in brackets (!) is a brief way to express your surprise.

LinkedIn: give the people what they want

LinkedIn offers all sorts of opportunities for brands. Some of the most valuable, in my experience representing PR Newswire, are found in the Answers and Groups sections, in which members pose and answer questions and discuss industry issues.

These discussions are not the place for the hard sell. However, that doesn't mean that you can't interact with others while also positively promoting your brand. The key is simple – give the people what they want, which most of the time is a straight answer.

I've found that directly answering a question – and being up front at the beginning by stating that I work for PR Newswire – can be a great way to share information, start a dialogue, and even win business. Often, company insiders are in a position to share unique insight or details about a service or industry that others following the conversation appreciate. However, one must be careful to give the people what they want. Listen to their questions, and give straight answers. It's about them, not you.

Applying the lessons learned

I know my writing skills have improved since I became active on social networks and started tracking the results of our efforts on behalf of the PR Newswire brand.

➤ The language used in a post/tweet/update plays an important role in attracting audience attention (and response.)

- Lessons learned about brevity, editing and interest in crafting effective social posts translate to headline writing.
- Relentless editing is an absolute requirement for effective writing. I'm now a merciless editor, with decreasing patience for extraneous language and superfluous ideas.
- Format content for the wired reader: make it easy to scan and share. I make use of bullets and sub-heads to make content easy for readers to scan, and to highlight phrases that are easy to tweet. *Case in point:* the sentence that started this bullet point is 71 characters, and would make a great tweet.

The real payoff: fine-tuned radar, more effective outcomes

The more time you spend in social networks and the longer you observe what sort of content sparks conversation, the more finely tuned your own story – and audience – radar becomes. It's easier for me to spot interesting angles for blog posts and press releases now that I've spent so much time immersed in networks with my PR peers. And I'm better able to guess whether or not a piece of content will resonate with my audience.

From a professional standpoint, involvement in social networks offers a bevy of opportunities beyond improving one's writing. You can test messages and campaign concepts, floating messages to your social audiences and observing which reverberate and which fall flat. By listening to social conversations, you can start to zero in on, not just the topics of interest to the group, but the very words that are more likely to attract and hold attention. You can increase the uptake of your messages as you start to spot – and highlight – tweetable ideas or concepts within the content you produce.

So what does this all mean? Clearly, social media is an important venue for the brands and organizations we all represent. However, the journey you undertake when you start developing presences and messages for your employer will have an impact on you, too. You'll develop new sensibilities, meet new people and hone new skills as you add an important new line to your resume. Best of all, your communications across the board will become more effective as you venture further.

This isn't the end. The social layer is ever changing. Join me in the ongoing conversation about unlocking social media for PR on [ProfNet Connect](#). And keep an eye on the *Beyond PR* blog, where we'll continue to discuss opportunities for you to engage your audiences everywhere they're found.

About the Author

Sarah Skerik is Vice President, Social Media, for PR Newswire. Her responsibilities include product development, managing PR Newswire's social media programs and blogging for the *Beyond PR* blog, where she writes about digital PR, social media and SEO. In previous roles with the company, she has managed the core wire service, including SEO, content syndication, audience development, media relations, customer reporting and targeted distribution products. Sarah is a frequent and well received speaker on the subjects of social media, search engine optimization and PR measurement. A graduate of Miami University in Oxford, OH, Sarah also earned an MBA from Notre Dame.

About PR Newswire

PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com) is the premier global provider of multimedia platforms that enable marketers, corporate communicators, sustainability officers, public affairs and investor relations officers to leverage content to engage with all their key audiences. Having pioneered the commercial news distribution industry 57 years ago, PR Newswire today provides end-to-end solutions to produce, optimize and target content – from rich media to online video to multimedia – and then distribute content and measure results across traditional, digital, mobile and social channels. Combining the world's largest multi-channel, multi-cultural content distribution and optimization network with comprehensive workflow tools and platforms, PR Newswire enables the world's enterprises to engage opportunity everywhere it exists. PR Newswire serves tens of thousands of clients from offices in the Americas, Europe, Middle East, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, and is a UBM plc company.

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