



B2B PR FOR GROWTH

The Power of Public Relations as a Tool to Achieve
Business-to-Business Expansion

A CHAMPION COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ironically for a sector relying on the art of persuasion, public relations (PR) has not always been able to convince clients and executive teams of its full worth. While commercial teams pride themselves on measurement and data, there still needs to be more research on the benefits of professional, targeted PR for B2B enterprises.

This report looks to bridge that divide. Based on surveys conducted independently by market research firm Vanson Bourne among more than 100 senior marketing managers and 50 chief executives from UK-based B2B companies, it covers their objectives for investing in PR, data on its effectiveness and their views on its use within their organisations. The research specifically asked respondents about the role of B2B PR as a tool for growth and business development, how PR impact is measured and the complexity of the relationship between Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs).

The study found:

- A major disconnect exists between B2B CEOs and senior marketing professionals on the value of PR in aiding the growth of their businesses.
- A blind spot within sales functions, with 43% of business development teams stating they do not see or use editorial coverage as a sales enablement tool.
- Continuing lack of trust in PR measurement metrics, with 45% of senior B2B marketers confessing to using “instinct” and “anecdote” to evaluate their company’s public relations performance, despite 66% viewing their PR measurement as “extremely accurate”.

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74%

of all new business opportunities

While the report identifies major challenges for the B2B PR industry, it also reinforces its vital role in nurturing and promoting the growth of business success, with senior B2B marketers reporting that PR contributes to or is responsible for 74% of all new business opportunities. In a rapidly changing media environment, PR remains more relevant than ever for new and growing enterprises.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A Major Disconnect

Relationships between B2B businesses and their marketing and PR professionals can be strained, with 42% of chief executives admitting they find speaking to their chief marketing officer “really awkward”.

When asked about PR, and its use within their organisations, 96% of surveyed CEOs claim they see PR as a cost-centre rather than a revenue generator. Some 76% declare they don't understand the value of PR to their organisation. Nearly half (45%) of respondents understand their organisation needs PR but don't know why. Revealingly, 49% of CEOs admit their main PR priority is to raise their profiles.

On the other side of CEO-CMO relationship, the study finds that the misalignment between the two groups cuts both ways. Some 49% of senior marketers say discussing PR with their CEO is awkward. In contrast, just under half (48%) of senior B2B marketers admit they have “given up” trying to educate their boards about the value of PR.

More than one-third of the marketers report their CEO doesn't understand the value of PR (37%) and 58% report their bosses seem more interested in promoting themselves than highlighting the achievements of the business. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the above findings, 61% of marketers admit reporting the return on investment (ROI) of their organisation's PR strategy to the board is one of their biggest challenges.

76%

of CEOs don't understand the value of PR

Dom Monkhouse of Monkhouse & Company, a business coach focussing on the science of CEO and leadership success, argues that the discomfort associated with accountability is one of the biggest challenges in management, particularly when executive teams operate in silos. “The CFO might not feel it is their job to tell the sales director how to run sales, and the CMO doesn't want more flak from the sales director. Even the people doing a good job don't want more scrutiny.

“As CEO you may be stuck in the middle and acting as a bottleneck. In PR this gets more complex as you have a dual role as a spokesperson and business figurehead, where you become dependent on your marketing and PR teams who are putting you forward to engage with their media contacts. The best CEO's have their own relationships with a small number of the most relevant journalists and read the media.”

Maarten ten Broeke, Co-Founder and Chief Executive of consulting firm Paal15, believes that the CEO-CMO relationship has changed dramatically in recent years. “CMO’s used to just be the people who managed PR campaigns and were therefore very much focused on execution,” he says.

“Now, CMOs are increasingly required to think with their businesses and translate that into what needs to be executed. This level of thinking makes them more of a senior partner with the CEO, rather than just being told what to do. If CMOs only focus on execution and cannot have discussions with their CEOs about priorities, business dynamics, analysis, propositions, and narrative, by default they will have little relevance for CEOs. That’s what’s making the conversations awkward.”

Monkhouse contends that it is vital to compartmentalise the role of the spokesperson within the PR programme, and the relationship with the CEO is vital. “Separate meetings will help keep things clear,” he advises, “so that when it comes to assessing the performance of PR, this is not confused with the evaluation of your performance as a spokesperson. Ask for metrics that matter to you. If you are looking for growth, speak to sales. Are they using the coverage to start or nurture conversations? Are you looking for awareness? Then ask for a comparative share of voice study.

“Hire the best team you can internally and trust them to hire the best agency partner for your business. Your team should look for an agency that understands you, where you will not get lost amongst bigger accounts. It is important to ensure that it has the resources, databases, and technologies to give your PR programme the edge.”

“

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A Blind Spot

When B2B marketers were asked what percentage of their organisations’ marketing-qualified leads (MQLs) were generated through PR efforts in relation to last year’s sales results, 41% gave their answer as “80% or more”, with the average response being 74%. When asked about their objectives for investing in PR, 60% of senior marketers from B2B companies say generating trust, validation, and credibility. More than half (54%) reference the creation of brand awareness and nurturing sales conversations. Exactly 50% agree that generating sales leads is a major factor and 46% say they are motivated by increasing demand for their organisation’s products and services.

Less encouragingly for the B2B PR sector, 43% of business development teams admit they did not see or use editorial coverage as a sales enablement tool. And 36% of senior marketing decision-makers report their business development teams do not appreciate the power of earned media coverage.

Ken Deeks, director of The Amber Group, a provider of training and coaching services to PR and creative agencies, believes that the onus is on PR professionals to demonstrate the value of their propositions. “Public relations can help produce the only truly independent promotion of a product or service,” he says, “but marketing and PR people are typically very poor at selling the benefits of PR. There’s also a lack of engagement by public relations professionals in the sales function which has helped create a chasm. PR companies are very good at telling their clients about output, but they don’t typically refer to end outcomes, which is what marketing teams are focused on. Using more of the language of CMOs would help B2B PRs focus on how they can help them to sell.”

Clarissa Horowitz, head of marketing at Californian payment technology business Lithic, points out that not all PR professionals respond to getting a great piece of editorial coverage by thinking about how to package it up for their team members. “They often just let it stand for itself,” she says, “but you need to make things beautiful for people. A salesperson should look at a story and consider how they can use it to generate business. PR people need to be much more actionable, telling their bosses what has appeared, why it matters and how it can help drive the money execution if the strategy forward. For many reasons, a lot of PR people do not do that.”



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Francis Ingham, director general of the Public Relations and Communications Association, feels that the data uncovered in the research for this report serves to highlight the ongoing and increasing value that B2B public relations delivers in terms of business development. “Whilst other marketing tactics come in and out of fashion,” he says, “the ability to tell a good story to the right audience in a way that generates third-party endorsement has never been more vital at a time when B2B buying is ever-more complex, and decision makers need answers to problems the world has not faced before.”

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A Lack of Trust in PR Measurement

Some 66% of senior marketing decision-makers view their company's metrics for measuring the true value of B2B PR as "extremely accurate". Asked which they use to measure and evaluate the success of their organisations' PR output, nearly half (47%) cite social media engagements (47%), followed by website visits (45%), SEO rankings (44%) and brand awareness studies (40%). Respondents also note downloads (36%), share of voice calculations (35%) and backlinks. (32%).

On the topic of PR measurement, 82% of surveyed CEOs agree with the statement: "The metrics my CMO uses to demonstrate the ROI of our PR program aren't useful to me." Some 45% of senior B2B marketers confess to using "instinct" and "anecdote" to evaluate their company's public relations performance.

"This is a shocking finding," says **Eric Brown, vice-president of corporate marketing at JumpCloud**. "A lot of the public relations people who say they don't use PR metrics are old school and think that relationships drive coverage. It's true that a relationship with a journalist might get you a lunch or coffee briefing, but journalists are under so much pressure these days that they might not take a briefing nowadays regardless of how good the relationship is. The story has to matter and how does a PR know if their story matters if they are not doing analysis? If you're solely using intuition, you're a dinosaur in the world of marketing and PR, because data influences everything."



PR does drive sales but it's all about how you prove that. If you can't measure accurately, then you can't point to revenues or impact on sales.

Becca Chambers, senior vice-president of global brand and communications at US empowerment and productivity software group Alludo, argues that PR professionals need to use the same language as the marketing and salespeople who are looking to them to justify their investments. "PR is hard to measure, full stop," she says. "You can measure mentions, but it's harder to measure impact, which is why you have this feeling from sales and management that PR does not contribute to the funnel or to revenues. PR never gets all the attribution that it deserves. PR does drive sales but it's all about how you prove that. If you can't measure accurately,

Craig Hodges, founder of Informing Decisions, a platform of independent media evaluation experts who work with companies to help them get the most from their existing media monitoring and evaluation tools, is convinced that communications teams need to define what the C-suite expects PR to accomplish. "What does success look like to them," he asks. "Only when this is established, can you identify the metrics that will resonate with the CEO. The PR community must do this to get and retain a seat at the table."

TOP TIPS FOR OPTIMISING THE POWER OF B2B PR FOR SALES GROWTH

- 1. Start with a clear understanding of the organisation's business objectives.**
- 2. Identify where growth and sales are coming from.** What percentage is coming from existing clients versus new clients? Which products are most profitable and easier to sell and will best support the business objectives. Each may involve different narratives, audiences, media, and approaches.
- 3. Conduct a competitive audit** that evaluates other brand's strengths in terms of earned media, social media, and SEO. Run a gap analysis against your own brand to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- 4. Strategise around what can realistically be achieved most efficiently and effectively from a PR perspective.**
- 5. Speak to the business development teams,** from those making the initial cold calls to the professionals you entrust with managing the largest accounts. Who are they talking to? Where are they struggling? How are these teams using editorial, awards and other third-party evidence to support their roles? What stories and messages work, and which are less effective?
- 6. Speak to prospects and clients.** Go to sales meetings and watch how they develop. If possible, speak to companies working with competitors. What is shaping their decision-making? What media are they consuming? Where do they get their insight?
- 7. Once you have selected and prioritised your audiences, build your media lists** and tier them according to their relevance to your audiences. Build relationships with the most important writers so you can develop mutually beneficial relationships with them.
- 8. When generating coverage, ensure it is shared with the business development team** and make it as easy as possible for team members to share it with their clients and prospects. Consider running a workshop to help build a better understanding of how third-party validation earned through PR can be used to start conversations, build awareness, credibility, and trust and to keep relationships alive after a sale.
- 9. Set up monthly meetings with the business development teams,** to learn and record how PR is helping, what's working, what's not, and what else they might need.
- 10. Create a simple spreadsheet that records how PR is used to help grow the business.** Share this with the board to let directors see the connection between editorial and sales success. It's a team effort. Position it as such.

To discuss any of these points or to get templates that we use to set up these systems, for free, just [email us](#) 



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