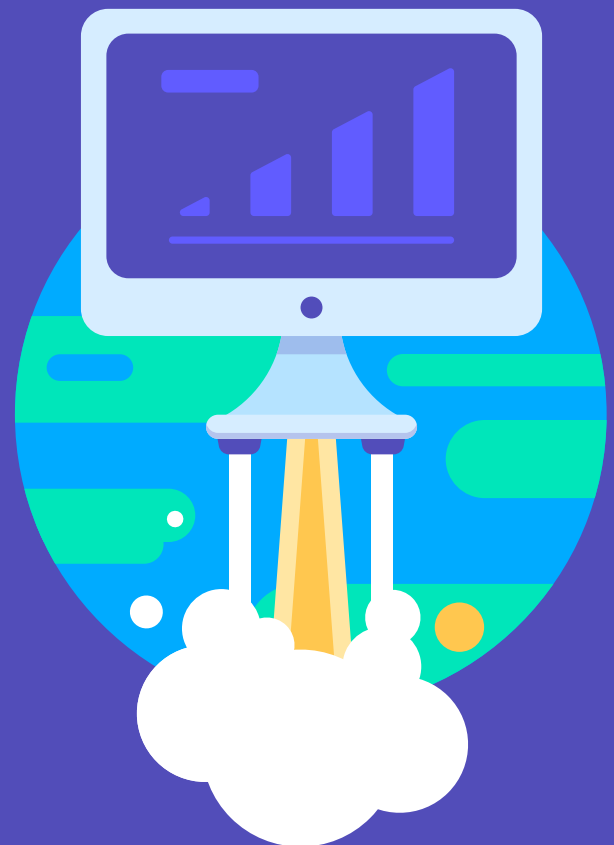


Building Online Brand Awareness

with Digital PR



A public relations specialist's guide to transforming their practice into the digital era

The future of traditional public relations has never seemed bleaker.

Today's customers ignore most brand-promotional content. And unless an event takes place online, they most likely won't notice it either.

It's no surprise that [87% of PR professionals](#) believe the term "public relations" will no longer be relevant to their work soon.

At the same time, so many brands regularly launch successful (and highly-profitable) PR campaigns.

Their efforts attract relevant customers, connect them with the brand, and drive sales.

What's different about what they do?

For one, their PR teams meet audiences where these people are — in the digital world. They position their brands in search engines. Place brand content in online publications. Finally, they embrace any other channel that's accessible on a person's computer or smartphone.

In this guide, we'll show you how you could do the same. You'll discover how to evolve your public relations practice into the digital era.

You'll learn:

- How the new buying behavior has shaped the public relations practice
- What is Digital PR and how it works
- How your practice must evolve and what new skills you must develop
- Examples of digital PR campaigns and tools that help you deliver them
- How to measure and prove the success of your efforts

So, let's begin.

About the Authors



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Your Target Audience Has Moved On

(And Why You Must Follow)



Discover How Shifts in Buying Behavior Have Shaped Modern Public Relations

I'm sure you've heard about the negative changes impacting the customer behavior already. Drop in attention span, over-reliance on technology or skepticism towards marketing messages, for example.

But there is something that continues to remain constant. It's the fact that customers still seek new products or services.

Perhaps even more so than before.

It's just that buyers no longer discover and buy them by the means to which you might be so accustomed.

Your first step towards digital PR, then, is to understand the contemporary buying cycle. And next, realize what place public relations play in it today.



The evolution of the buying cycle

The buying process used to be so simple. A person with a problem would inquire about it, be it with a salesperson or a store clerk. They, in turn, would recommend some solutions. And if a person felt these options satisfy their need, they'd buy one.

Customers' awareness of brands was limited by what they've heard about or read in the traditional media — publications, magazines, radio or TV.

The PR's job was to position information about a brand in such media to make more people aware of it.

The same process looks completely different today.

Modern customers begin their buying journey in search engines. And they do so before they're even ready to consider getting any particular solution.

In fact, [72% of customers](#) turn to Google to find more information about their prob-

lem and discover products or solutions that could help solve it.

Many scout review platforms and other online sources to assess their options further.

Customers also turn to social media. They visit Twitter or Facebook to find out what others say online about the brands they consider, scout Reddit for reviews, and openly ask about them on Quora or Slack. And often, what they find, provides the ultimate argument whether to engage with a brand.

For PR, meeting this new process requires positioning a brand in all those touchpoints — in search engines, social media or relevant online publications. And then, manage its reputation anywhere where customers could use to voice their opinion.



AS A RESULT, brands now have an entirely new set of expectations for public relations.

New expectations for PR

Modern PR must deliver far greater and more specific results than ever before. And do so much quicker, at that.

PR work must affect the company's bottom line now.

Traditional public relations delivered hardly any insight into the success of its efforts.

In the past, brands couldn't tell if a press release reached the target audience. Not to mention, whether it has made any difference to its sales figures at all.

But as you'll discover later in this guide, the situation is different with digital PR. With extensive access to data, professionals can now measure their impact on the bottom line. As a result, they have to show how their initiatives deliver a positive and measurable ROI.

Modern PR must create a dialogue with the target audience.

Traditional PR focused on one-way communication.

But today's audiences seek more. They want to engage in a dialogue with their favorite brands. Customers want them not only to listen but respond, and act on their comments.

And it's the PR's job to manage those conversations.

Finally, today's PR specialists have to manage brand reputation across many channels.

You already know that today's buyers rarely engage with a brand without prior research. Some of which includes visiting review sites and other channels customers use to share their opinion about a brand.

As a result, brands must pay close attention to what others say about them online. Digital PR specialists, in turn, manage those mentions, comments, and reviews across the Internet.

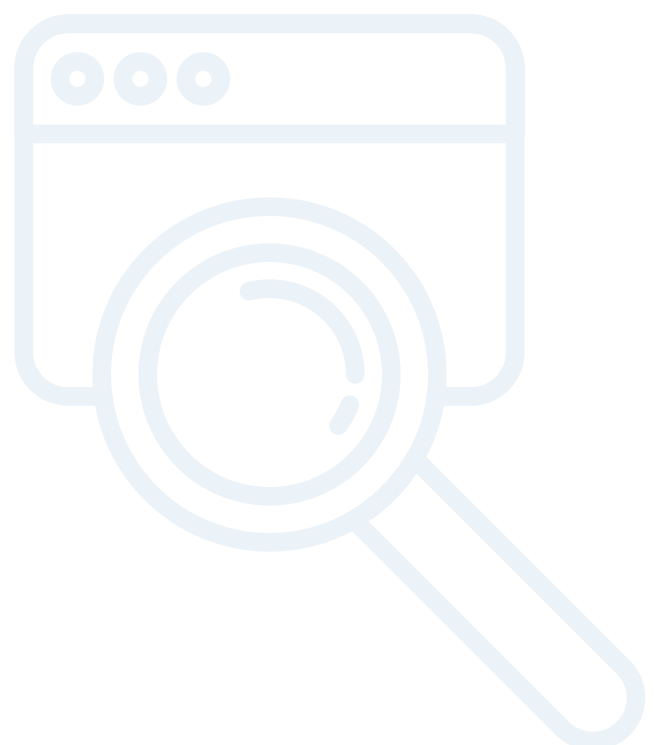


BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER, it becomes clear that digital PR does not focus on media relations anymore.

It aims to increase a brand's online visibility instead.

We've used the term, digital PR, a lot in this publication already. But we haven't actually explained it. So, let's define the discipline and show you what it involves.

(Later in the guide, we'll also show you what you need to do to transform your practice into the digital era.)



What is Digital PR?



Understand what the modern public relations involve

I'm sure you've already realized that digital PR involves more than just using technology to do what you've always done.

It doesn't concern itself with developing traditional media relations. It rarely focuses on press releases. And specialists hardly ever launch promo events to boost a brand's visibility.

Instead, the practice combines multiple modern marketing disciplines – content, SEO and social media, for example – to strengthen a brand's presence in search results, spark more positive mentions, reviews or commentaries about it, and even generate more backlinks to a company's website.



How Digital PR works: main processes and channels besides classical media relation

In short, it aims to position a brand in front of their audience online and start conversations with them. Conversations, mind you, that can often develop new opportunities and sales.

But let us show you how digital PR works in practice using a campaign we launched last year.

40 ERRORES TÉCNICOS EN SEO

ESTUDIO SEMRUSH 2017

Hemos recogido datos anónimos de 100.000 sitios web y 450 millones de páginas utilizando Site Audit de SEMrush para determinar los problemas y errores técnicos más comunes en SEO. A continuación, puedes ver el porcentaje de los sitios web estudiados y que se enfrentan a ciertos tipo de problemas.



Cada problema tiene un nivel de gravedad valorado de 5 a 1, donde 5 es el nivel más grave.

RASTREABILIDAD



ENLACES & REDIRECCIONES

Los problemas con los enlaces y las redirecciones son muy diversos. Algunos de ellos pueden ser muy graves y otros no han de ser considerados realmente como errores. Asegurate de que todas las páginas principales de tu sitio web están disponibles para los usuarios y no tienen ningún problema con las redirecciones, ya que según nuestro estudio, 1 de cada 4 sitios web tiene demasiados errores de enlace.



ENLACES INTERNOS ROTOS **33.29%**



It was called [“The 40 Most Common SEO Mistakes.”](#) And our objectives for it weren’t, in fact, so much different from traditional PR. We wanted to:

- Increase our brand recognition as a trusted SEO expert and data provider,
- Promote our Site Audit tool, and
- Reach at least 100 thousand people during the campaign run.

It’s how we achieved them that differed.

We converted the data we wanted to share into an infographic. This is a highly-engaging and visual content type that uses graphics to convey information. You can see a section of it below.

Once ready, we distributed it to journalists and opinion leaders. We also published it on our blog and even added a lead magnet showing how to solve those issues to convert some of the new readers into leads.

Then, we turned to social media. We used pinned posts on Facebook and Twitter; organic promotion on the major social networks and launched Twitter and Facebook ads too.

Finally, we advertised the infographic in search engines and sent an email blast to our database of users and subscribers.

With all this, we’ve exceeded our goals. Plus, the campaign received a nomination for European Search Awards as Best Use of PR in a Search Campaign.

Bragging aside, note how many elements were involved in achieving those results:

- A unique idea that corresponded with the audience’s needs,
- Engaging content that caught their attention,
- Extensive, multichannel distribution that positioned it pretty much everywhere our target audience hangs out online.

In the next section of this publication, we’ll walk you through it all in detail. You’ll discover what processes, channels and tools you’ll have to use in similar strategies.

Digital PR – Key Processes and Channels

Discover the processes
that replaced traditional
media relations



Channel #1 – Content Marketing

Content has always formed the basis of public relations. After all, press releases helped brands tell audiences about their news and other recent developments.

Today, however, content and PR teams work even more closely together. They create a wide variety of content assets that can help a brand achieve its business goals.

What's more, the digital PR team plays a three-fold role in the process:

- They assist in content ideation,
- Manage content distribution, and
- Increase its reach even further with repurposing.

Let's look at each of those in turn.

Content Ideation

If there's a dominant characteristic of a digital public relations specialist, it's this:

They do keep a finger on the pulse of what's relevant to the target audience. They understand what topics are hot now, and what information people are looking for. In turn, they know what content is going to engage the target audience the most.

And that's where the synergy between PR and content teams begins, in sharing ideas that lead to creating successful, high-quality content assets.

But from where does digital PR get all this insight?

They use various tools and resources to access and review relevant data. For example:

- Google Alerts help them discover trending topics or emerging news.
- With SEMrush, by analyzing the most common [search queries](#), they establish what information the audience searches for regularly. They also use the tool to conduct [competitive analysis](#) and identify [trending topics](#).
- Buzzsumo allows them to analyze what their target audience shares and discusses online the most.

Those insights result in content assets that the PR team then distributes through appropriate channels.

This brings us to the second role.

Managing Content Distribution

Typically, content creation takes no more than 20% of the entire digital PR campaign. The rest goes towards getting it in front of the target audience.

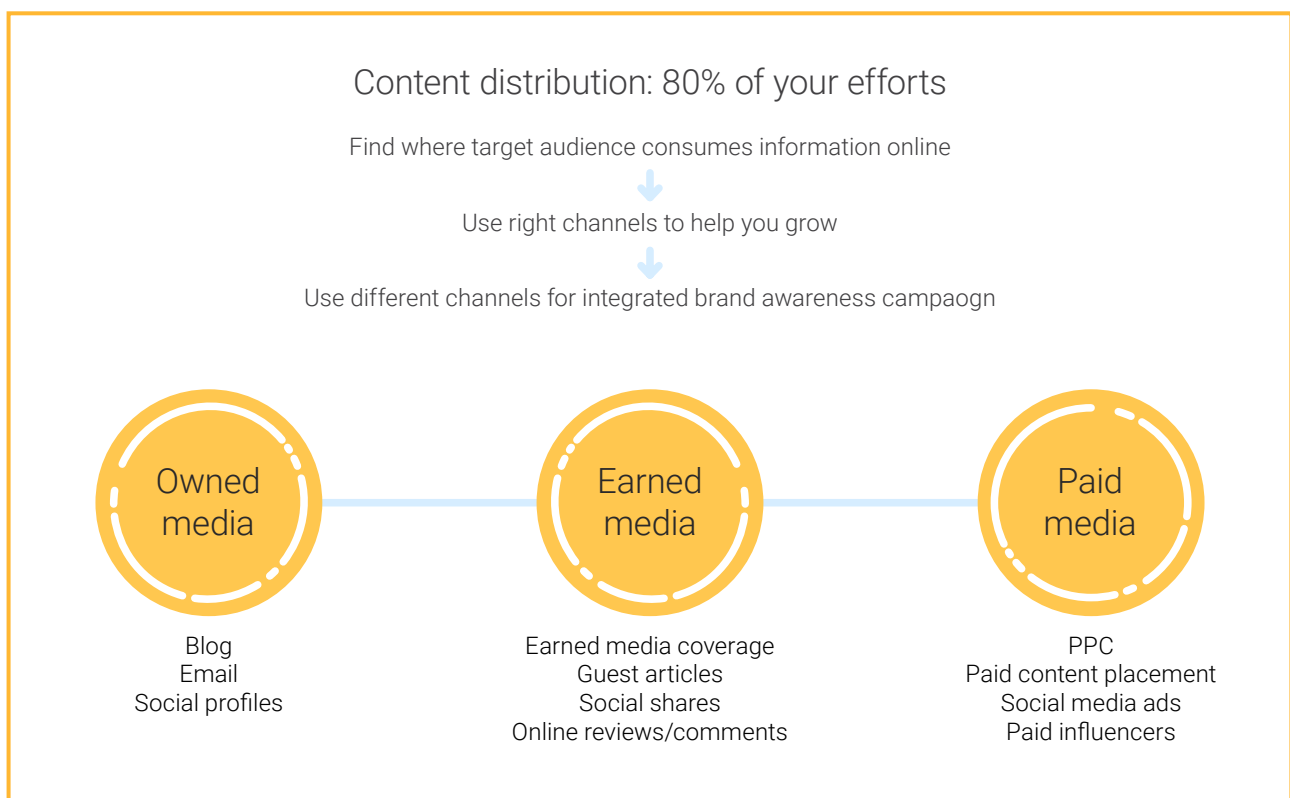
Take a look at the campaign we shared with you earlier. Notice how much effort went into producing the content, and what we did after.

We spent significantly more time and resources distributing the infographic than actually creating it.

Using a variety of channels, digital PR positions content where target audiences can quickly discover it.

For the most part, they use a combination of three channels:

- Owned media that focuses on channels a brand owns – its blog, social media channels or email list.
- Earned media – placing content on third party websites the target audience frequents. In practice, this involves placing guest posts and soliciting social shares, mentions or reviews.
- Finally, paid media uses online advertising, paid content placements, and social media ads.



Repurposing

Digital PR campaigns aren't limited to a single content type — a press release, for example. In fact, you could publish a variety of engaging assets to achieve your goals. Luckily, this doesn't mean that you have to produce fresh and original content all the time.

Quite the opposite, in fact.

Most content assets can be repurposed into something else, making them available in other formats.

A blog post, for example, could be converted into:

- A Slideshare presentation,
- An infographic,
- A video clip,
- An audio recording or a podcast episode,
- A guest blog post,
- Many social media updates,
- An interactive content, and much more.

Those assets can, then, be promoted using different strategies and channels, multiplying a campaign's reach further.

Channel #2 – SEO

The image shows a Google search for 'apple'. Three blue callout boxes highlight specific features:

- Rich snippets:** Points to the structured data for products like iPhone, iPad, Mac, Accessories, and Music.
- Top stories:** Points to the news snippets such as 'iPhone X2 Leak Reveals Apple's Essential Upgrades' and 'Petition calls on Apple to recall & replace failing butterfly MacBook Pro keyboards'.
- Knowledge graph:** Points to the right-hand panel containing the Apple logo, company description, stock price, and executive list.

SERP is your online “real estate”

You already know that today’s customers begin their buying journey in search, googling information about their problem and available solutions.

As a result, acquiring search visibility and online real-estate has become the focal point for most businesses. After all, the more people can see a brand online, the greater the chance for conversions and sales.

Digital PR specialists work closely with SEO teams to ensure that whatever content they promote is:

- Optimized for relevant keywords, so that potential customers could find it in search, and,
- Promoted to guarantee links and mentions to boost their site’s authority and rankings.

Channel #3 – Social Media Marketing

Gary Vaynerchuk famously said, [“every company is a media company.”](#)

And social media is the channel brands use for broadcasting and online communications. .

However, in digital PR, social media is more than just a channel for distributing content. Professionals also use it bring the brand closer to customers.

A good example of this are events in which a company can take part. By shar-

ing live coverage – be it real-time updates, photos or even a video coverage via Facebook Live or Instagram Stories – it can create a more personal connection between the audience and the people behind the brand.

For social media to deliver on this potential, a brand must understand the social landscape across its target locations first. And then, deliver relevant messages to specific channels customers in those areas prefer.

Channel #4 – Online Media Relations

Digital PR uses media connections to achieve two objectives:

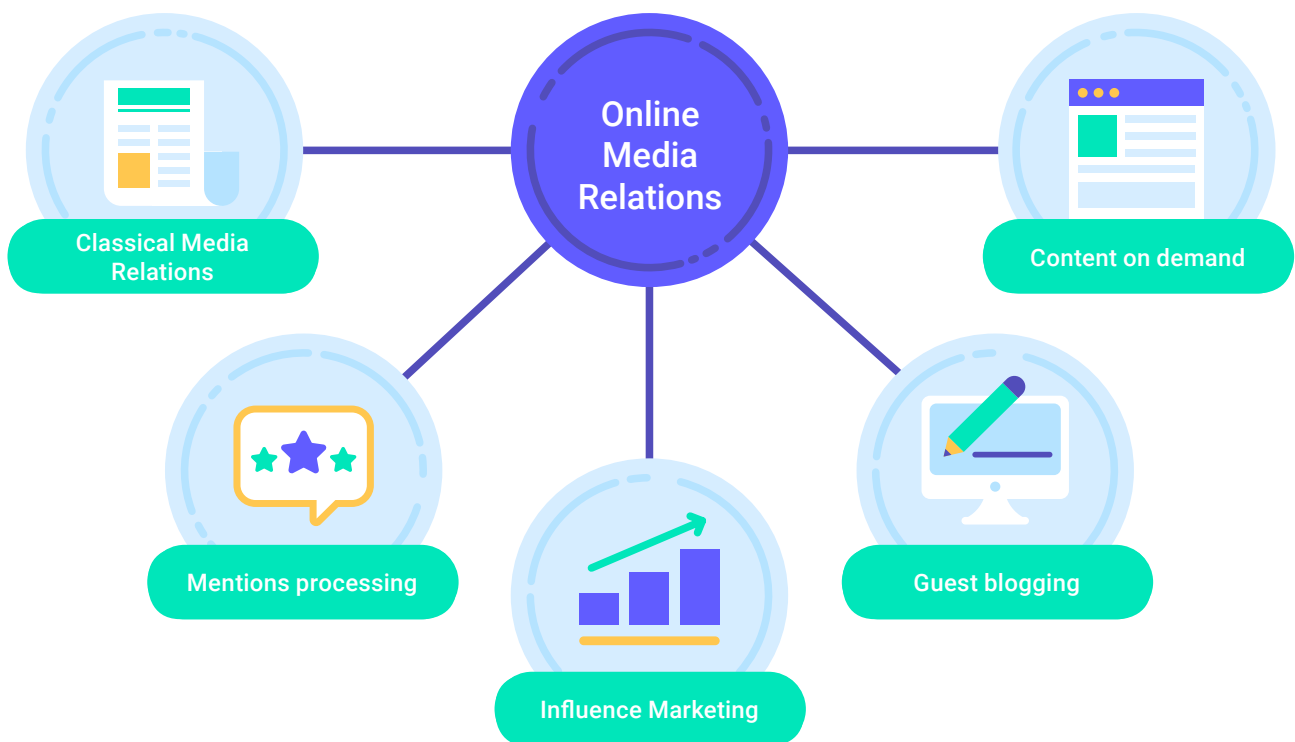
- Generate mentions, reviews and comments on relevant media that help increase brand awareness, and
- Build more backlinks to increase search engine rankings and attract new visitors to the brand’s website.

And today’s public relations specialists use a multitude of channels to deliver those results. For example, they create integrated PR campaigns that help spread content via various online channels:

- Media mentions – often in the form of links in someone else’s content,
- Influencer mentions on social media or a person’s blogs,
- Guest blogging,
- Paid content placements,
- On-demand content like online events, and much more.

Online media relations:

- More mentions you have higher your brand awareness
- Online mention + link = brand awareness – traffic
- Always ask for a link



Who is the
digital-era
PR specialist
then?

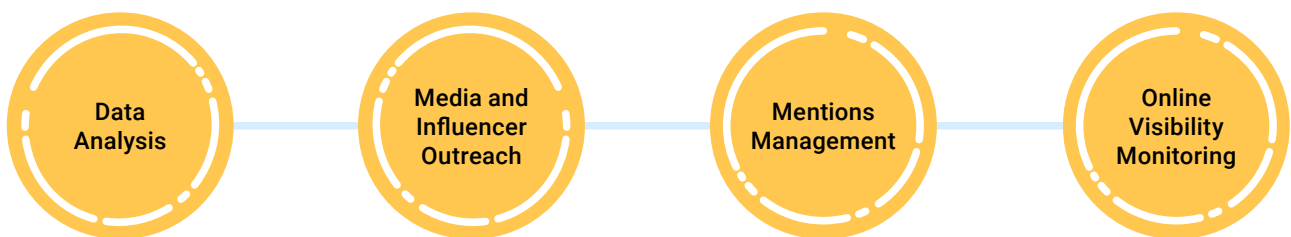


Let's talk about what you need to do to transform your practice into the modern market

Digital PR is made up of many distinct elements and strategies. Some of them are similar to the traditional press relations. Others, like content marketing or link building, are completely new.

Which means that to deliver campaigns, you need to do much more than what you would normally be used to.

So, let's see what a digital PR specialist does in her work.



Data Analysis

From identifying hot topics to assessing new distribution channels, digital PR uses data for every decision.

As a result, the modern public relations specialist spends a lot of her day on various tools to review and collect insight and information for new campaigns.

Media and Influencer Outreach

Ensuring a wide reach for content requires strong relations with media and influencer. And digital PR's don't shy from connecting and engaging people that could help place their content in front of the target audience.

In practice, this often involves emailing to find guest post placements, connecting with relevant influencers or getting them to share the content on social media.

Mentions Management

The success of digital PR relies on mentions and buzz. One way to achieve it is through publishing and promoting strategic content.

Another, by taking an active part in customer's online conversations about a brand.

And so, digital PRs monitor media mentions and engage in relevant discussions to create strong relationships with customers.

Online Visibility Monitoring

Remember when we said that digital PR relies on data? Part of it comes from regularly monitoring online visibility to determine the success of the efforts. And then, using it to improve future campaigns.

But looking at it all, managing digital PR seems almost impossible, doesn't it?

Luckily, there are many tools available to help.



Digital PR Tools

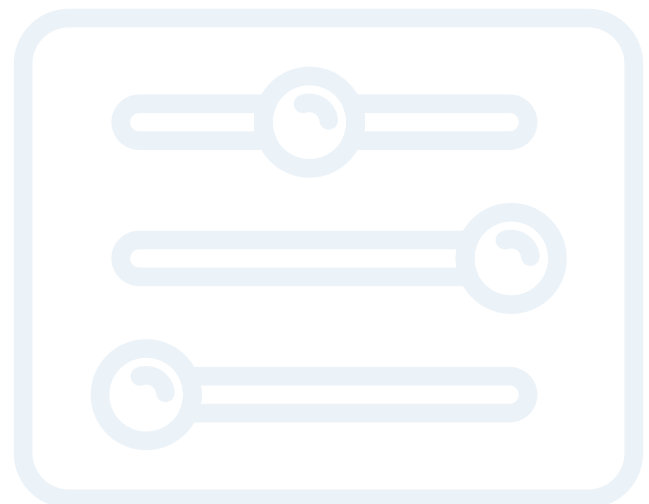


Discover how to leverage tools to deliver successful digital PR campaigns

Based on digital PR responsibilities we described above, it's clear that in your work, you should primarily focus on:

- Analyzing competitor strategies
- Identify the most viable strategies/campaigns
- Connecting with media sources
- Writing pitches

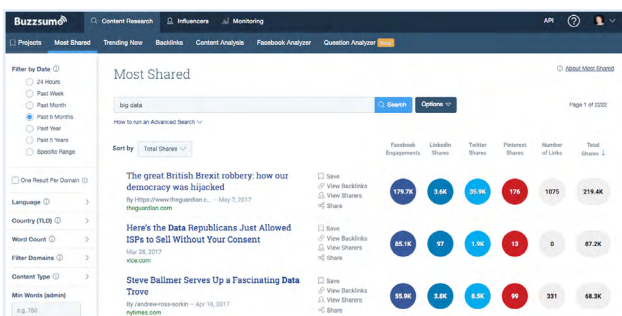
So, next, we'll walk you through each of those tasks and show you what tools to use to complete them.



Task #1 – Analyzing Competitor Strategies

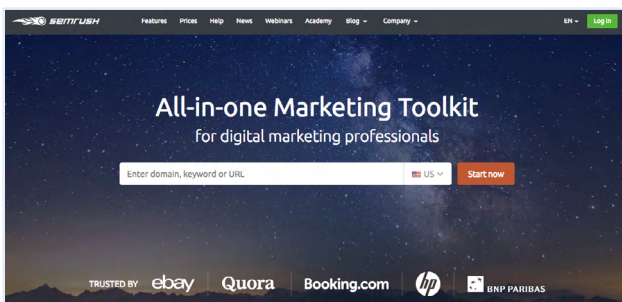
While it’s always a good idea for a business to keep a close eye on its competition, it’s invaluable in digital PR.

Even a quick analysis of what other brands targeting the same audiences as you do might lead to discovering new topics.

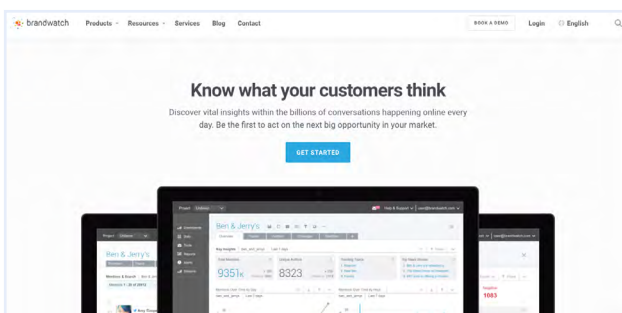


Tools like Buzzsumo let you identify the most popular content on a competitor’s website and even, find out what makes it so engaging.

The same tool can help you discover influencers who partook in promoting the content. They might be the best people to reach to introduce your assets.



With SEMrush, you can monitor your competitor’s [brand mentions](#), [most popular keywords](#) and [analyze their backlink profile](#) too. Combined, this insight can also influence your content creation and distribution strategies



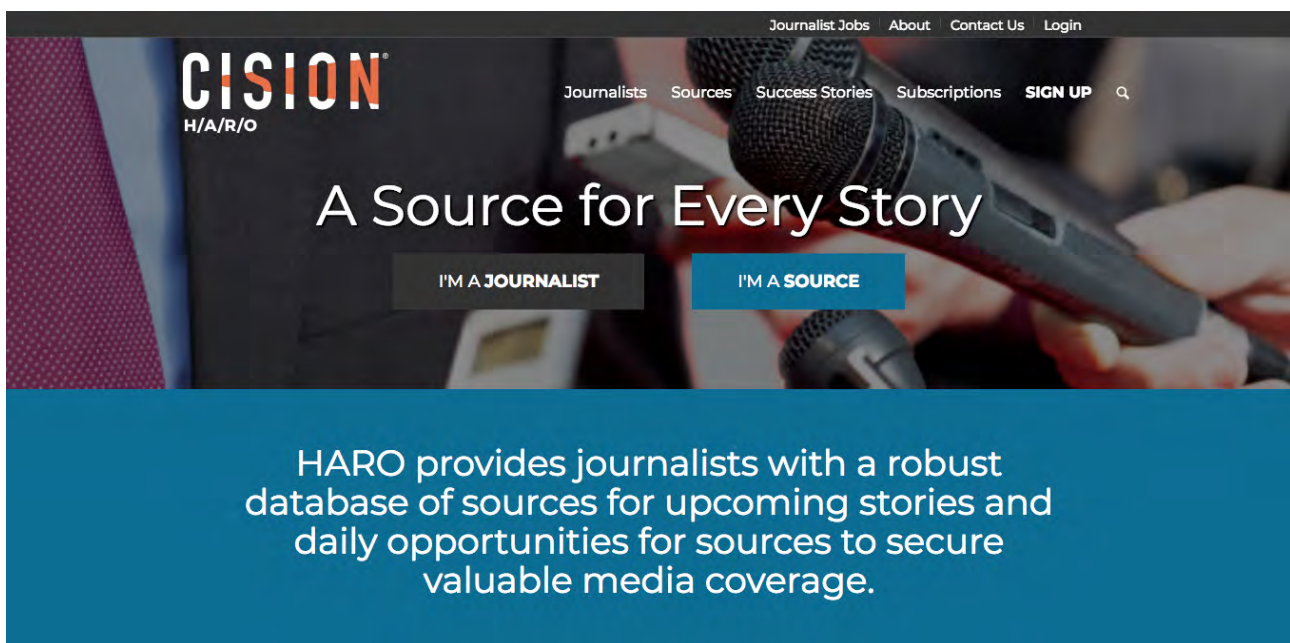
Finally, Brandwatch can reveal what customers say about your competitors. This, in turn, might deliver insights into what engages their audience and fuel anything from content to product development.

Task #2 – Connecting with Media Sources

It's true; you need journalists and bloggers to deliver your work.

But they need you just as much.

In fact, every day, countless content creators, journalists, bloggers seek sources to deliver insight and expertise to their stories.

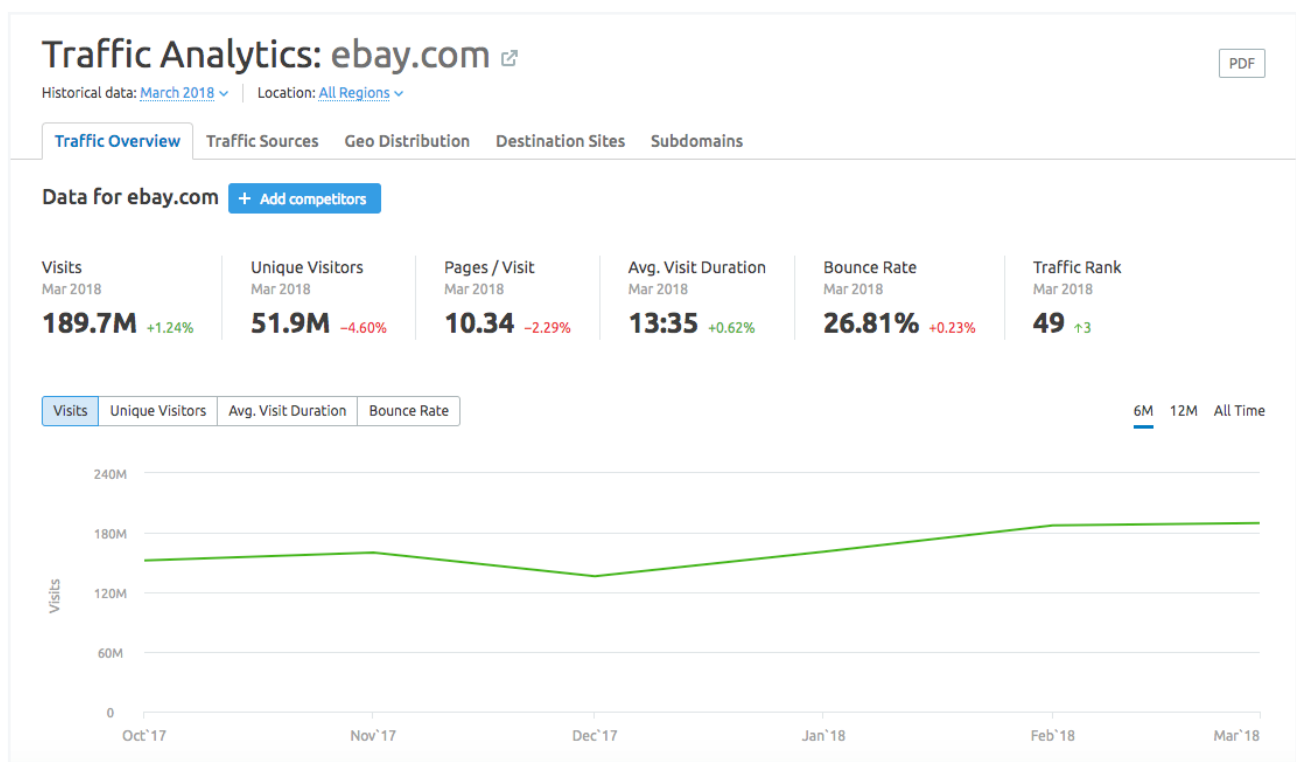


The image shows the homepage of the CISION H/A/R/O website. The background is a blurred image of a person holding a microphone. The CISION logo is in the top left, with 'H/A/R/O' underneath. The top right navigation bar includes 'Journalist Jobs', 'About', 'Contact Us', and 'Login'. Below that, a secondary navigation bar has 'Journalists', 'Sources', 'Success Stories', 'Subscriptions', and a 'SIGN UP' button with a search icon. The main headline reads 'A Source for Every Story'. Below the headline are two buttons: 'I'M A JOURNALIST' and 'I'M A SOURCE'. A blue banner at the bottom contains the text: 'HARO provides journalists with a robust database of sources for upcoming stories and daily opportunities for sources to secure valuable media coverage.'

Tools like HARO (Help a Reporter Out), Journo Request or Source Battle let you track source requests and pitch your brand to the most relevant requests directly.

Task #3 – Identify the Most Viable Strategies or Campaign Ideas

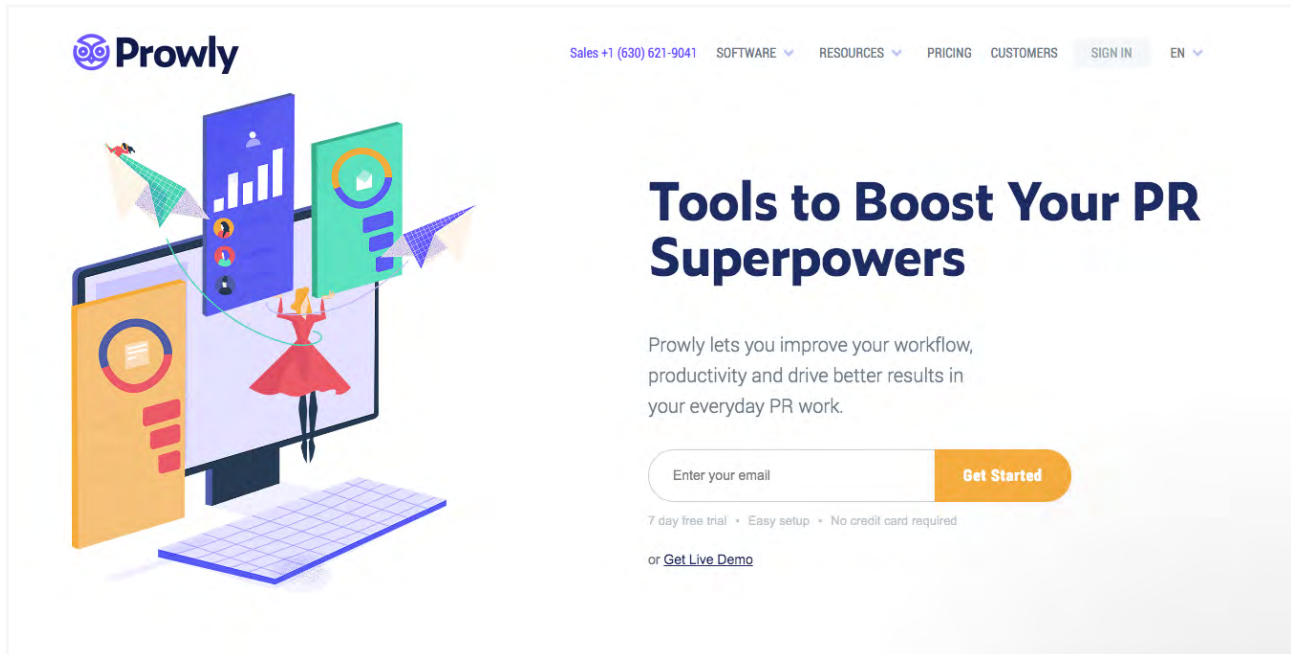
Not every website or media outlet is worth the time and effort. Some have audiences too small for a mention or a guest post to have any impact on your brand. Others, visitors with too broad interests to guarantee any engagement. And many will target regions not relevant to your campaign.



Before reaching out to a site, analyze its traffic levels and audience. With tools like [SEMrush](#) you can discover how many people visit it, their traffic source and location.

Task #4 – Pitching

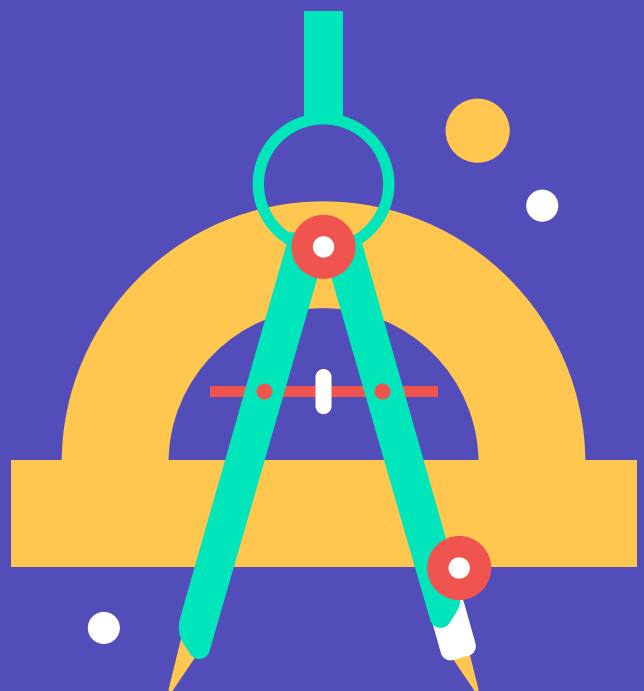
Writing media pitches takes time. A lot of it. Plus, the process can get messy, if you don't manage your media lists and track the progress of each inquiry.



The image shows a screenshot of the Prowly website homepage. The top navigation bar includes the Prowly logo, a phone number (+1 630 621-9041), and links for SOFTWARE, RESOURCES, PRICING, CUSTOMERS, SIGN IN, and EN. The main content area features a large illustration of a woman in a red dress juggling several floating screens displaying various data charts and graphs. To the right of the illustration, the headline reads "Tools to Boost Your PR Superpowers". Below the headline, a sub-headline states: "Prowly lets you improve your workflow, productivity and drive better results in your everyday PR work." A prominent orange "Get Started" button is positioned next to an "Enter your email" input field. Below the button, the text "7 day free trial • Easy setup • No credit card required" is displayed. At the bottom of the section, there is a link for "or Get Live Demo".

Prowly is a tool that makes this process seamless, from sending personalized out-reach emails to managing the progress.

Measuring Results



Learn how to prove the success of your efforts

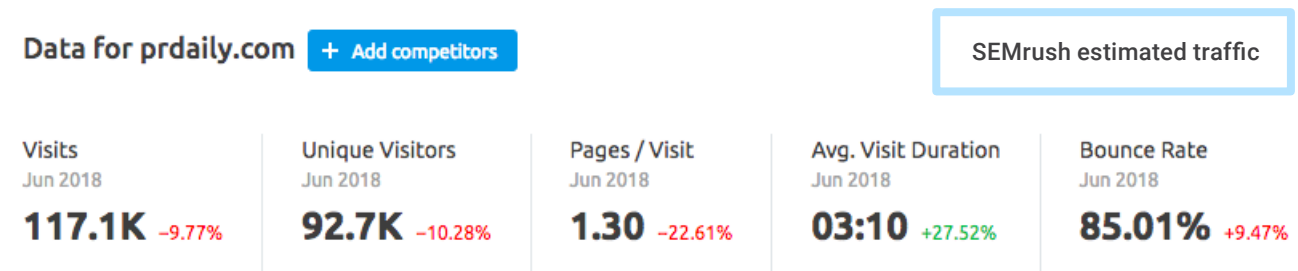
One of the biggest shifts in PR is access to performance data.

Traditionally, brands knew hardly anything about the success of their PR efforts. They couldn't tell whom a press release reached, even if it appeared in the desired publication. Plus, they had no way of measuring how many readers have actually acted on it.

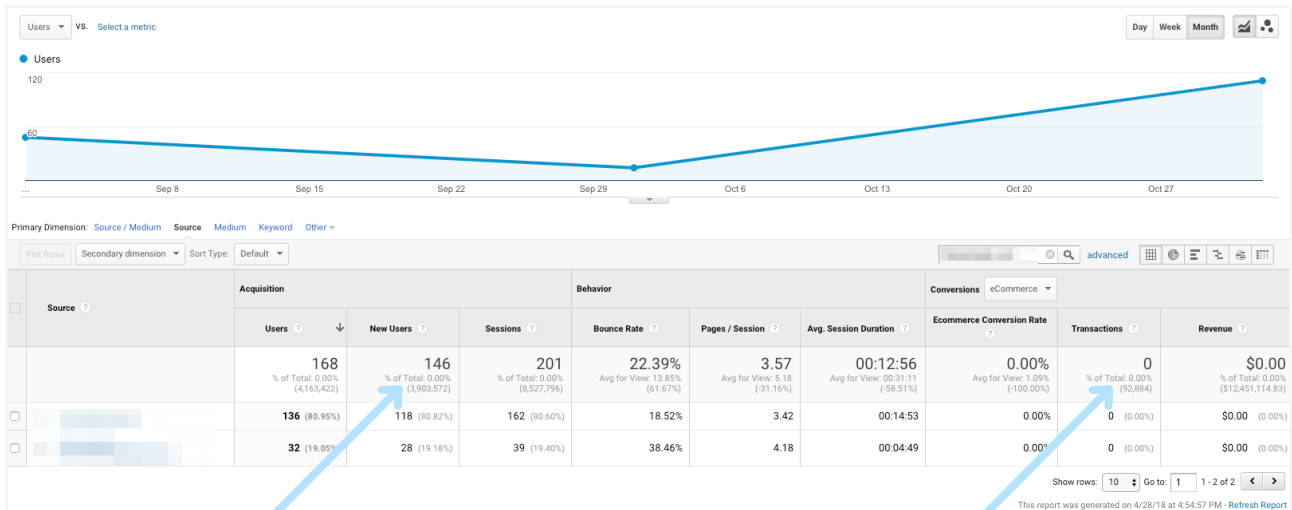
But today brands can analyze the return on almost every action and initiative.

Also, they can define the digital PR's ROI and use the data to improve its performance further.

Even a simple brand mention without a link can be converted into actionable insights. For example, the online media's traffic level can suggest its potential reach, while the social media audience and content shares, the engagement.



[Tracking](#) gets even simpler if your content contains a link to your site. With it, you can measure traffic this mention delivered. You can also segment those visitors into new traffic, customers, leads and even sales to analyze its impact further.



Google Analytics
Number of New
Visitors

Number
of
Purchases

Regardless of the campaign type, you can always monitor:

- Organic backlinks growth
- Number of online mentions
- Growth in social reach and audience
- It's effect on brand popularity, measured via Google Trends.

But let us be clear about something – Digital PR isn't a quick fix solution.

It certainly does increase online visibility, awareness, and brand loyalty. But it does so over time. **Achieving results requires consistent action, monitoring its performance and iterating based on the results.**

Conclusion



Conclusion

Hopefully, this publication has provided you with the knowledge you sought to move your practice online.

And I hope you've enjoyed reading it too.

For the end, let me reiterate its most crucial points:

- With the shift towards online, traditional public relations became ineffective in raising brand awareness.
- Digital PR replaced traditional methods, but its focus is broader on increasing online visibility.
- Digital PR uses multiple channels – content, SEO, social media – to strategically position a brand along a person's buying journey.
- Unlike traditional PR, digital campaigns brands can measure the ROI of their PR efforts.

What's left now is to get started launching digital PR programs that can help your brand achieve the growth it needs.

Best of luck!

Make Your PR Data-Driven

Discover the leading digital marketing toolkit for PR professionals.

- Research Audience's Needs
- Discover Trending Topics
- Analyze Competitor Strategies
- Collect Brand Mentions
- Measure Engagement and Performance

[Find out more](#)



About SEMrush

SEMrush is a leading digital marketing toolkit for SEO, PPC, SMM and Content Marketing professionals worldwide. With over 25 tools within the software, search data for 140 countries and seamless integration with Google services, SEMrush provides solutions for in-house marketing teams and agencies working with clients in any industry.

In its niche and pricing segment, SEMrush is an absolute leader in the number of tools available from one account and the richness of its data. By ensuring an easy workflow between marketing team members, SEMrush helps them become frontrunners in their industries.

For more information, visit www.semrush.com/content-marketing/



We love your feedback!

Was this research helpful? Is there anything you want to discuss or share with us? Tweet your thoughts at [@SEMrush](https://twitter.com/SEMrush) and join the conversation!