



FIVE DIGITAL TRENDS TO WATCH FOR 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although the economy may be slowing, the digital march keeps going.

Audiences are spending a lot more time on the web and marketers are investing in programs to meet them there.

Still, there's no doubt that, in 2009, the mood among marketers has turned more austere. Businesses are getting smarter about where they focus their time, dollars and energy, even in the digital realm. Many are looking to drive a higher return on their investment. And experimentation is giving way to tactics that will deliver ROI. These include public engagement, search and social networking — three themes that connect the major macro trends.

In the following white paper, the first in a monthly series, Steve Rubel, Edelman Digital's SVP/Director of Insights, draws on members of the Edelman team, as well as research, to highlight five digital trends to watch for 2009. Each includes a specific recommended actions.

The five trends covered in this white paper...

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Customer care and PR are blending as consumers use social media to demand service

MEDIA REFORESTATION

The media is in a constant state of reinvention as it transitions from atoms to bits

LESS IS THE NEW MORE

Overload takes its toll. Gorging on media is out. Selective ignorance and friends as filters are in

CORPORATE ALL-STARS

Workers flock to social media to build their personal brands, yet offer employers an effective and credible way to market in the downturn

THE POWER OF PULL

Where push once ruled, it's now equally important to create digital content that people discover through search



I - SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

SUMMARY:

Consumers are increasingly turning to social media rather than call centers to have their service concerns addressed. All of this conversation ends up in Google. As a result, the lines between customer relations and public relations are blurring. This necessitates that companies adapt and become more nimble, since customer issues now have a more direct impact on brand reputation.

TRENDS/INSIGHTS:

In the past, there was customer relations and public relations. The two were completely separate, though related functions.

“An entire generation is growing up that
will never dial a 1-800 number to reach
customer care”

Customer relations was handled solely via corporate call centers, email or online forms. It was largely a private affair — a one-to-one dynamic. Consumers called/ emailed, complained and hopefully had their issue solved by someone who was ready to listen.

Public relations, meanwhile, at least semantically, sounds like it should have a similar function, but it's really a misnomer. The profession has been focused on building relationships primarily through media, and increasingly, through direct customer engagement.

Now the two are converging, thanks to the social media explosion and the rise of Google.



An entire generation is growing up that will never dial a 1-800 number to reach customer care. Today, many know they have a giant megaphone at their disposal in social media sites. Thousands are turning to these venues to create a groundswell that gets their gripes (and wishes) noticed. The conversation knows no borders, either. The only barrier is language.

Wolfgang Luenenbuerger, Edelman's Head of Social Media for Europe, calls this "The Baby Monitor Principle." His postulates that the baby monitor changed the way children behave. They seem to know that if they cry, mommy or daddy will come and respond. The same applies with consumers who communicate through social media. Luenenbuerger writes...

But if you have been arisen with a baby monitor, this is not fast enough anymore. Like (author) Don Tapscott said: "Email is a former technology good for sending a thank you letter to your friend's parents." The Baby Monitor Principle means that now the audience expects you either to answer instantly — or have your answers online to pull them from your database.



Wolfgang Luenenbuerger

And The Baby Monitor Principle is not only something for young people. Lots of us that moved into the so called web 2.0 some years ago have already the same habit: If I wanna know something, I wanna know it now. And if you can't deliver now, I will go to someone else who can. Good bye. I'll never come back.

The web is littered with tales of companies that were brought to their knees by the Baby Monitor Principle. These events have had a direct influence on public opinion that is often amplified through search and/or media coverage.

According to a study by the Society for New Communications Research (SNCR), some 74% agree or strongly agree that they choose brands based on customer care experiences they read online. SNCR found that consumers use social media sometimes (37%) or often (29%) to learn about the level of customer care offered.



Slowly, companies large and small are recognizing this trend and adapting their business practices to be able to respond in real-time to consumers. A recent [Cone Communications](#) study revealed that 85% of Americans using social media think that brands should always have a presence on these sites.

However, this hasn't been easy. Social media participation around customer service requires that companies run a transparent, real-time operation that is empowered to act, and act quickly. It means that businesses need to closely coordinate PR, customer service, marketing, operations and in some cases, legal.



Small companies, understandably, have had an easier time jumping in. For example, blogger Rex Hammock [was able to find](#) a retail location that sells a special iPhone case he was looking for, simply by engaging the vendor, Griffin Technologies, via Twitter — even on Christmas Eve. Further, [he noted](#) that EyeFi, a small company that makes wifi-connected memory cards was chatting up its consumers on Christmas morning.

However, some giants are proving they can be just as nimble. Comcast and Dell — two corporations that were hit by the Baby Monitor Principle — are building relationships with customers one-by-one, by setting up “digital embassies” inside Twitter.

Both Comcast's and Dell's efforts have directly translated into positive PR and even sales. BusinessWeek [recently called](#) Comcast's Frank Eliason (who mans their Twitter account) “the most famous customer service manager in the U.S., possibly in the world.” Dell, meanwhile, has earned \$1M in revenue through its various Twitter programs, [according to Venturebeat](#).

Some firms are beginning to set up digital embassies in a broad range of communities, not just Twitter. For example, GetSatisfaction.com openly welcomes brands to set up shop inside their site for addressing consumer concerns. Traffic to the site is up nearly 300% in the last year, [according to Google Trends](#).



Taking it a step further, others are even using platforms like [SuggestionBox](#) or Salesforce.com's Force.com to build their own sites for soliciting/managing consumer inquiries and ideas. Two notable examples include Starbucks' [My Starbucks Idea](#) and [Dell Ideastorm](#).

In 2009 and beyond, businesses will need to allocate resources toward building a rapid response culture, as well as transparent, proactive programs that not only address customer issues, but aim to proactively build stronger relationships.

The trend, however, impacts more than just consumer-facing brands. Any business or NGO that has issues must be prepared to engage stakeholders openly online, even if just to inform the conversation.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: **Audit the Entire Online Experience**

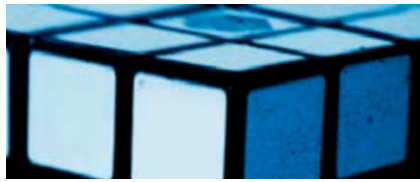
Most companies focus on quantifying the impact of their proactive efforts to influence the public. This includes tracking the performance of advertising campaigns and assessing the impact of social conversations and traditional media relations on public opinion.

“Brands today must take a broad view of the online experience”

However, as the SCNR study illustrates, a deeper level of understanding is now required. Consumers are equally influenced by everything they encounter online. Much of it is archived content they dredge up when researching products/services on search engines.

Brands today must take a broad view of the online experience and audit all of it, not just the usual venues. One immediate action item is to start developing a deeper understanding into how people search online and to assess the content that's there.

For example, most consumers generally Google for problems not solutions. They tend to be very mission-oriented. Delve into what they find around high value keywords. In addition, consider how the search engine result pages influence the opinions that media and bloggers might form when writing stories in the future.



Proactively Build Relationships with Digital Embassies and Ambassadors

As people spend time inside social networks, companies and organizations are recognizing that they must go where the people are to build relationships. Establishing digital embassies and ambassadors, that operate inside these same social networks are a simple way to accomplish this. However, organizations need to make sure they choose the right venues and staff them accordingly.

Build a deeper understanding of where your stakeholders spend time and what they do there. Conduct a digital anthropology audit to shape such thinking and also learn the nuances of the culture.

Take it slow and launch one embassy at a time. Many companies have been quick to set up shop inside several social networks but they often lack the energy and resources to keep the momentum going as Dell and Comcast have done well.

Finally, staff embassies around the clock with ambassadors who clearly identify themselves and are empowered to address concerns and also to empower their customers in meeting their broader goals. (Staffing is addressed further in the section on Corporate All-Stars.)

Be Prepared to Engage and Act Quickly

By now, many companies recognize they need to have a crisis communications plan for addressing issues that bubble up in social media venues and spread to the larger mass media. However, much of what's planned for is issue-oriented. Sometimes it's customer service issues that are unaddressed and spiral into larger concerns.

The solution is to set up the infrastructure to monitor all the key venues 24/7 and funnel concerns to the right people at the right time. Many customer concerns and complaints are common and can be planned for ahead of time. However, this requires close coordination between customer care, public relations, legal and marketing.



II - MEDIA REFORESTATION

SUMMARY:

The marketing industry's growth over the last two decades, in part, was fueled by a media ecosystem that flourished during the early stages of the Information Age. Now, however, some media are contracting and all are in a constant state of reinvention. The media is undergoing a "reforestation" as it transitions from atoms (printed matter) to bits (digital). The environment poses challenges. However, it also creates tremendous opportunities - particularly for PR.

TRENDS/INSIGHTS:

In the wild, ecosystems are prone to change. They are always in a constant state of reinvention — and response to changing external forces.

The media landscape is no different. However, unlike tranquil woodlands that change slowly, the shifts in the media environment over the last year have been rapid and in some cases quite dramatic. **Lately, the news about news hasn't been good. A major reforestation of the media is underway.**

The recession and the financial crisis have put a major dent in the industry's revenues. However, the current economic woes are only exacerbating larger shifts that began in earnest several years ago, with the digital boom. Taken together these pose great challenges for businesses that want to get their messages out. However, they also create opportunities.

There are at least three major trends reshaping the landscape:

- The erosion of tangible media
- The blending news and information sources
- The rise of search and aggregation technologies

First, offline media is shrinking and there are growing pains as the press transitions from atoms (printed media) to bits (digital media).



In 2008 the Internet surpassed all other media except television as a primary source for national and international news. **Currently, 40% of Americans say they get most of their news about these issues from the Internet, up from just 24% in September 2007. For the first time, according to a Pew survey, more say they rely on the Internet for news than newspapers (35%).**

As the Internet subsumes traditional formats, media companies are facing a revenue crunch. NBC President Jeff Zucker famously talks about the challenges of replacing analog dollars with digital pennies. Meanwhile, digital media isn't immune to the current economic realities. In November The New York Times Company posted its first decline in online ad revenue.



Newspapers, by far, have been hit the hardest. Mediashift in its 2008 trend round-up notes that readers are moving quickly online but that the industry hasn't made innovation a priority.

The result? Last October the Christian Science Monitor reduced its print frequency from daily to weekly. U.S. News & World Report went from a weekly to a bimonthly to a monthly in 2008. Two Detroit metro papers, meanwhile, recently said they are transitioning to three-day-a-week home delivery schedule.

In addition, there are early signs that other forms of tangible media - such as books, magazines, DVDs and video games - may soon be entirely digital as well. PC Magazine, what was once the most venerable technology title, recently folded its print edition and now only exists online. Meanwhile, smart phones like the and the Amazon Kindle are sparking interest in e-books and digital publications.

The second major trend reshaping the landscape is the increased blurring of sources. Today, readers and viewers are likely to find traditional editorial that is juxtaposed with entertainment, social media and branded content. In some cases, this intermingling shrinks the amount of space the media have to dedicate to news and thus the window for earned coverage. At the same time, it opens new opportunities to have commercially-inspired material carry weight equivalent to that now carried by traditional "news" or even "entertainment" content.



For example, according to Nielsen, 27 percent of TV households in the US have at least one digital video recorder. News programs have responded by deeply embedding brands into the actual programming. Some have segments that are sponsored by single advertisers. This can make it challenging for competitors to earn coverage

However, at the same time, as the press adapts, it also vastly creates opportunities for PR professionals in particular to generate even more substantive coverage.



Consider that in 2008 some 58 percent of newspapers featured some form of user-generated content on their sites, according to the Bivings Group. This is up from just 24 percent in 2007. The mix includes: user-generated photos (58 percent), homegrown video (18 percent) and articles (15 percent). Meanwhile, the number of newspaper sites that are allowing readers to comment on articles has more than doubled to 75 percent.

Further, social media innovation and experimentation abounds. CNN, for example, is actively using Twitter both on-air and off to connect with viewers in innovative ways. It is also seeking to build on its early success. Reddit, a social news site, is partnering with PBS on a weekly TV spot called “YourWeek.” The segment showcases material that was hot on Reddit in the previous week.

The edges between competing content sources get even blurrier when you consider that many independent content creators — such as bloggers — earn part or all of their living from advertising.

According to a survey released by Technorati last September, 52% of US bloggers, 50% of European bloggers and 60% of Asian bloggers all say they run ads. The New York Times reported in December that a year after YouTube invited select members to incorporate ads in their videos, the most successful among them are earning six-figure incomes — even in a down economy.

Finally, the third major media trend reshaping the landscape is the rise of search and aggregation destinations. This includes not only sites that focus just on news, but also the general search engines as well, which are becoming our de facto window on the world.



An overabundance of options, coupled in some cases with an increasing reliance on mobile devices, has created a hunger for news in context. **Overall, 15% of Americans say they have a smart phone, such as an iPhone or a Blackberry. More than a third of smart phone owners (37%) say they get news from these devices, according to Pew.** This trend is driving people towards sites that aggregate news.

The major aggregators, which include Topix.com, Google News, Yahoo News and vertical roll-ups like Alltop.com, all saw gains last year. Traffic to Topix.com is up 100% year-over-year. It's also recording over 150,000 new comments per day, according to Venturebeat. Topix is fairing particularly well in local news. Meanwhile, Google News and Yahoo News grew 49% and 37% respectively in 2008, according to data from Compete.com.



Large sites aren't standing still. Some are responding, by adding contextual content under a practice that's commonly being called "link journalism." The New York Times, for example, recently launched Times Extra, which features news from around the web. The Washington Post and NBC are also linking to sources beyond their walls.

At the same time, millions are also turning to traditional search engines for news — particularly as they have started indexing content in real-time. Yahoo, for example, has a feature called "Shortcuts" that automatically highlights contextual items in Yahoo News articles. This helps users locate additional news, web searches, maps and more.

No one looms larger, however, than Google. It's arguably the gatekeeper that sits on top of all gatekeepers. On a given day, many of the top 100 searches of the hour on Google Trends can be traced directly to media reports. Further, under a program called "Universal Search," Google now blends news stories, videos and blogs into its result pages across many of its topical keywords. According to comScore, 17% of all keywords include relevant video, blog or news results.

Google's dominance is driving some media sites to pivot their editorial content so that it performs better on high-value keyword searches. Others, meanwhile, are buying up Google ads to ensure that they reach searchers who are hungry for news.



Finally, while our appetite for news is increasing and choices are plentiful, it's worth noting that consumers don't necessarily read online. We skim. **According to Jakob Nielsen and the Nielsen Norman Group, on average, consumers have time to read at most 28% of the words during an average web site visit. In fact, 20% is more likely.**

PR professionals may have the upper hand in this environment, because relationship building is in our DNA. Public relations professionals understand how to have conversations and maintain relationships with stakeholders on clients' behalf. That positions them to quickly adapt to the reforested media ecology, particularly as the line between social and traditional media and search continues to blur.

Trust is a mitigating factor as well. **Consumer opinions online (61%) are nearly twice as trusted as search engine advertising (34%) and banner ads (26%), according to the 2007 Nielsen Online Global Consumer Study.** Meanwhile, a new study by The Future Foundation found that two-thirds of advertising agencies are not prepared for the industry changes prompted by social networks and new forms of digital media.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Take a Broad, Holistic View of the Media Ecosystem

Companies have done a decent-to-good job adapting to the new era of democratized media. For example, bloggers today are considered an important part of the media ecosystem. The best marketers view them as sounding boards that help shape strategies.

“today all media is social and all social is media”

Unfortunately, some of what we've learned may need to be unlearned — or at least modified.

Where once journalists were on one side, bloggers on the other, today all media is social and all social is media. Yet many, particularly in PR, still treat ordinary citizens, traditional journalism and branded content as distinct islands of media. Going forward, it's best to see them as a contiguous archipelago connected by a bridge called Google.

Consider, for example, that a single news report can often be the spark that starts widespread online conversations. The chatter gets archived in Google and will be later discovered by people who missed the news in the first place, as well as by journalists who are conducting research for future stories.



Much the same, today many journalists actively troll blogs and Twitter streams for news. This means that ordinary citizens are, without a doubt, what Edelman CEO Richard Edelman calls the “on-ramp” to media.

The upshot is that communicators need to take a bird’s eye view of media. Conceptualize it in the broadest sense when planning, executing and measuring campaigns with an understanding of how the pieces fit together both today and in the future. This advice applies equally to both marketers and public relations professionals, purchased and earned media.

Become a Curator of Content in Your Niche Before Others Do

Around the world, people are facing increasing demands on their time, both at work and at home — leading to an “Attention Crash.” This limits the amount of time we have for news. However, it doesn’t quell our passions, be it sports, politics, business or niches like knitting.



As the rise of aggregator sites illustrates, there’s tremendous value in serving as a digital curator of quality content. Just as there’s a role for museum curators who separate “art” from “junk,” the same need exists online across thousands of niches.

Over the last few years we’ve seen bloggers, media companies and dedicated aggregators sites all become valuable curators of content. One of the more notable examples is Guy Kawasaki’s Alltop network, which currently spans hundreds of topics.

However, it’s not a zero-sum game. Brands, too, can become digital curators in their niches and potentially establish themselves as go-to sources. The key is to be early and to fill a void.

Intel is one such company that has done this. The chip giant partnered with Popurls — an emerging Internet aggregation site — to create a special site for IT professionals called Popurls Blue. Since it debuted, Popurls Blue has received widespread acclaim and has also helped to promote Intel’s IP and blogs, which are also available on the site.



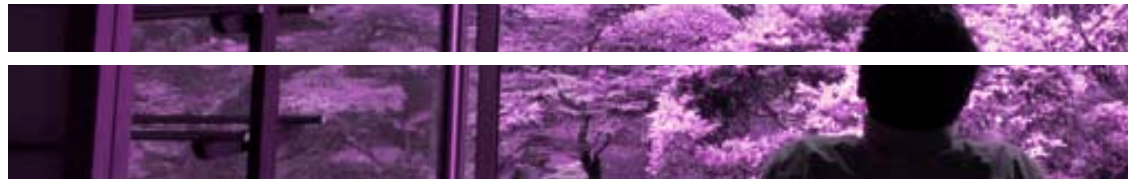
Re-think How Media is Measured and Valued

Although debates around marketing measurement have raged for years, almost no one disputes the value of commonly-used figures like circulation. However, given Media Reforestation, circulation may no longer be the best way to measure or value paid and earned media.

For example, The Wall Street Journal, which reaches 2.7M print subscribers and another 1.3M online, has long been a key attractive target — particularly in technology. However, it may not be the most valuable real estate in this new environment.

An or editorial placement on TechCrunch blog could be even more valuable, in a number of ways. First, it is one of the most often cited sources that other bloggers link to. In addition, for a variety of reasons, it generally has stronger sway on search engine results. This, potentially, can influence thousands of people for years to come.

The diversified media landscape — which now includes search, social media and the traditional press — also changes measurement. It's not as black and white as it used to be. There's no standard approach. Therefore, it's best to view how all the pieces fit together and to value it accordingly.



III - LESS IS THE NEW MORE

SUMMARY:

For awhile we gorged on information. Now, however, overload is taking its toll. There are signs that many are simplifying and cutting back. This is not a function of the economy. It's a defense mechanism. Devouring media is out. Selective ignorance and friends as quality filters are in.

TRENDS/INSIGHTS:

Perhaps it was a function of the long economic boom, but for a time we hungered for information and more powerful technology to bring it to us. We craved gadgets and computers that came packed with features. We looked up to peers who get more than 500 emails a day. We believed that he/she who dies with the most toys (or Facebook friends) wins.

Now, though, times are changing. Many are feeling bloated. "In 2009, less may well become the new more," Nielsen Online Exec VP Pete Blackshaw wrote in AdAge. He and others see the most info-addicted putting a higher premium on simplicity and quality of sources.

This shift is already being felt in the hyper-competitive world of technology. According to the New York Times, two of the bestselling electronics last year were also the simplest. Nintendo sold more than 30 million Wii consoles. The Flip camcorder — which is simpler, yet far cheaper than its competition — sold more than 1.5 million units since launching in 2007.



The less-is-more movement is also being felt by the press. In a lengthy piece on the subject in November/December 2008 issue of *The Columbia Journalism Review*, [Bree Nordenson](#) wrote:

“The tragedy of the news media in the information age is that in their struggle to find a financial foothold, they have neglected to look hard enough at the larger implications of the new information landscape — and more generally, of modern life. How do people process information? How has media saturation affected news consumption? What must the news media do in order to fulfill their critical role of informing the public, as well as survive? If they were to address these questions head on, many news outlets would discover that their actions thus far — to increase the volume and frequency of production, sometimes frantically and mindlessly — have only made things more difficult for the consumer.”

The media has benefited by feeding a public that has a seemingly endless appetite for news. Now, though, they need to be prepared to adapt, as consumers go on a media diets and get smarter about how they manage their attention. And while the trend of information overload isn't entirely new, what is different now is the rise of peers as sources.

Early adopters, being early adopters, are already turning to friends for information. However, even so, they, too, risk being saturated. Some will re-evaluate their social media consumption patterns, [according to Edelman Digital President Rick Murray](#):

“Many in the world of social media are obsessed with how many friends, fans and followers they have; in 2009, we will see that become taboo as people create personal filters within their own networks to keep out all but the highest quality people — those whom they find add real value to their personal conversations and communities.”

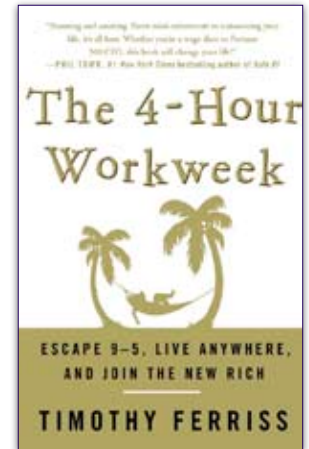


Rick Murray

So far, there are at least two ways the public is coping: selective ignorance and relying on friends as quality filters.



For the past two years, author Timothy Ferriss has had a slot on the Amazon.com bestseller list with his book *The 4-Hour Workweek*. Ferriss struck a nerve with overworked Americans who are hungering for more meaning, balance and fewer inputs in their lives. Toward that end, he challenges his readers to practice “selective ignorance” — in other words, to be OK not knowing what’s news. He also suggests that a “low information diet” is a key to healthier, happier life.



While Ferriss’ methods are thought-provoking and extreme, we may indeed be moving in this general direction. The rise of topical aggregators, which is covered earlier, hints that people are digging deeper into their interests.

In addition, the topical nature of the top 100 searches of the hour on Google Trends reflects that citizens are barely conscious when it comes to general news — until they need to be. Then, they pull on the search engines lever when they need to know more.

“If the news is that important, it will find me”

Billionaire media mogul, Mark Cuban, likens it to living in an open book world. A broad base of knowledge, [he maintains](#), isn’t needed today. Thanks to Google, information is always available like running water. Online behavior patterns seem to reinforce this thesis.

The second way that people are coping is by the increased reliance on peers, rather than pros for news. This has been a recurring theme of the [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) since 2003.

The professional filter, particularly among the young, is now overlapped by a social one powered by Facebook, IMs, email and text messages. In a widely quoted passage in [the New York Times](#), a college student reportedly said in a focus group: “If the news is that important, it will find me.”

Though its early, technology can help. Content we care about will find us through clever combinations of friends and algorithms. The Facebook newsfeed, Flickr’s “interestingness” feature and Friendfeed’s “best of day” tool are three early examples. In the years to come there will be many more.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Marketers and communicators will increasingly have to work harder to break through as new filters and consumer patterns enable us to fine tune how we interact with media. What follows are three recommended course of action.

Provide Utility

Content is king online — and it holds a tremendous potential for marketers (content marketing is covered in depth in Part V of this white paper). Still, creating and/or earning it is a lot of hard work. So it's not always for everyone.

There's a big opportunity, however, in providing utility. In other words, brands can create or sponsor applications, online tools and resources that people will regularly



use. This can help you break through in a less is more environment. Examples include mobile applications, web widgets, backgrounds, icons, themes, calculators, games, branded desktop applications and more.

In some ways, building utilities is easier than publishing. It requires an initial burst of investment, creativity and development, but not the same ongoing maintenance that content requires. In addition, the two need not be mutually exclusive

Utilities also offer a great deal of flexibility and options. If they're successful, brands can also earn a permanent spot on a consumer's social network page (Facebook/MySpace), web portal (iGoogle) and/or mobile phone (iPhone, Blackberry, etc.).



Some brands are also taking a “hub-and-spokes” approach, by housing tools on their site, but then activating them or creating miniature versions that follow consumers wherever they spend time online (e.g. Facebook). This is the strategy behind [Brita's Filter for Good campaign](#), which Edelman Digital helped to develop. In a recent feature in Advertising Age, columnist Bob Garfield rounds up a number of other examples.



Sow Seeds with Peers, Grow Plants with Pros

Peers and pros both are key filters of information but the two are increasingly linked. Brands should create integrated strategies that synergize the respective strengths of each.

For example, one potential approach is to treat each layer as a stepping stone. You can build momentum for a story and/or news announcement in ways that allow it to naturally trickle up from peers to pros.

Using tools like Backtype, you can discover which small to mid-sized blogs are frequently commented on (and therefore read) by the upper echelon. If you successfully generate word-of-mouth in this middle tier, it can lead to coverage on the larger blogs, which are often, more difficult to crack. This, ultimately, can generate traditional media coverage, and so on.

Shape the Search Shelf

Google is much more than a search engine. It's also media. Every day people make business and life decisions based on what they find on Google. This includes not only consumers but journalists as well.

Search engine optimization isn't what it used to be. These days, Google rewards sites that produce valuable content frequently and, in the process, earn links from other high-quality sources. Many search engine results today, therefore, are influenced by sources of social, journalistic and branded content.

As we previously mentioned, news and word-of-mouth drives search. With this in mind, communicators need to know what keyword levers consumers and/or journalists might pull and evaluate what's in those pages. Then, through smart content marketing and media relations strategies, you can influence results. Edelman calls this approach "Reputational Search" (which will be addressed in a subsequent white paper).

For example, media outreach targets can be prioritized based on their ability to influence search results, rather than just reach. Further, press materials and pitches can be written using more natural terms that people search for as opposed to what the company developed in its message track.



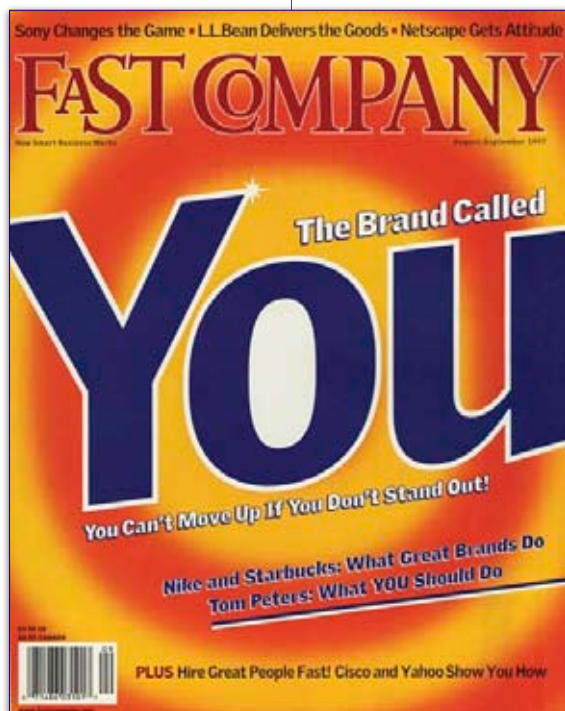
IV - CORPORATE ALL-STARS

SUMMARY:

Personal branding, while not a new concept, is hot. Many workers are flocking to social media venues in an effort to invest in their own brands, especially in these more uncertain times. Smart companies are recognizing that these individuals, if channeled, can become corporate all-stars that help them market in a very efficient and authentic way.

TRENDS/INSIGHTS:

Back in 1997, in a landmark Fast Company piece entitled “[The Brand Called You](#),” management guru Tom Peters envisioned a future where the Internet would give rise to powerful personal brands. Some individuals, he postulated, would strike out as independent free agents. Others would remain valued employees. Peters’ prescient vision is pretty much a reality today.



Over the last few years, millions of workers have flocked to social media venues such as blogs, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter and the like. For many, but not all, it’s been part of an effort to build their personal brands.

Employees, particularly knowledge workers, are recognizing that they must be the stewards of their own careers. **A powerful personal brand can be an asset, especially in tough times. It can lead to increased opportunities.** Although it has risks as well — especially if it’s not in sync with a corporation’s messages and mission.

The rise of personal brands comes at a critical time in PR when the role of spokespeople is changing.

In the past, the CEO and his/her executive team were the only ones who were authorized to serve as a voice of a corporation. For some companies, most notably Apple, this remains the case today. Only CEO Steve Jobs and his cadre speak for the company – even after his recent medical leave. Apple doesn’t have any employee bloggers and it continues to operate in a very top-down manner.



The model that Apple embodies, however, is becoming more rare, because of shifts in trust. **According to the 2008 Edelman Trust Barometer, 36% of opinion elites trust CEOs. Meanwhile, 39% and 58% respectively are more inclined to put their faith in an employee or “a person like me.”**

Much as perennial all-stars, Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez, help the Yankees sell more tickets and licensed merchandise, businesses recognize that strong personal brands — corporate all-stars — can help them market in a more authentic way.

Dan Schwabel is one example. Using blogs and other social media channels he has established himself as the go-to expert on, well, personal branding. Though he’s only in his early twenties, he literally wrote the book on the subject. Me 2.0: Build a Powerful Brand to Achieve Career Success will be released in April.

However, Schwabel is more than an expert on personal branding. He’s also is a Social Media Specialist at EMC Corporation. one of the largest technology companies in the world.

Drawing on his social media experience for insights, Schwabel has revolutionized the way EMC communicates and collaborates with its stakeholders. He is driving the company’s Twitter, Facebook, social media press release/newsroom, social bookmarking and blogging strategy.

Schwabel recently summed up EMC’s philosophy of having many online corporate all-stars in an interview with HubSpot:

“Visibility creates opportunities ... what would you rather have? A company that has no one on social networks or any blogs, or a company that has at least a hundred people on? You’d want the hundred people because those people will help you market for free.”

—Dan Schwabel

Corporations are not alone in leveraging their personal brands. The media has long recognized that all-stars sell. This is why columnists like the Walter Mossberg and Kara Swisher of The Wall Street Journal have not only survived but thrived in the digital age. The Journal, for example, has build a its highly successful D Conference by leveraging the Mossberg and Swisher brands.



Not every company will want Corporate All-Stars on the team. However, those that embrace the trend and get all the oars moving in a unified direction will be engender trust and be in a stronger position to be heard amidst the noise.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

In sports, players who perform and help win championships build the team brand and fill the seats. Much the same, companies should consider taking their all-stars (those who perform) and making them visible online. Those who do so successfully will have a competitive advantage. Here are three recommended actions:

Use Blogs to Connect Customers and Corporate All Stars

By now, many organizations have recognized the importance of having a strong social media strategy. Blogs in particular are becoming a key part of brand plans. **An October 2008 study by the Marketing Executives Networking Group found that more than 66% of executives are using blogs in their marketing programs.**

“A better approach is to use blogs as a way to build communities that **connect** customers and corporate all-stars around shared passions.”

However, according to Forrester Research, only 16% of online consumers who read corporate blogs say they trust them. Forrester maintains that the reason for this is that many corporate blogs focus too much on their products and services.

A better approach is to use blogs as a way to build communities that connect customers and corporate all-stars around shared passions.

A good example to follow is Larry Hryb (aka Major Nelson). As Microsoft's Director of Xbox Live Programming Hryb has long been active across a number of social media channels. He has firmly established himself as an authentic, credible human face. This has helped Microsoft not only build stronger relationships with customers, but also manage issues.

Give All-Stars Independence, Yet Ensure they Stay Focused

To be successful, employees with personal brands need to carefully balance their role as semi-independent thought leaders while maintaining a clear connection to their employer.



It's far too easy for employees to become known online in a niche. If you create quality content on a regular basis, it will get noticed. However, if personal brands are not guided strategically, they won't affiliated with their organization and its goals.

Therefore, the ideal situation is when the individual and company's goals are aligned, the subject matter overlaps and transparency reigns.

This is reflected in the gradient in the Edelman Trust Barometer between trust in employees (39%) and a person like me (58%). Aim to unleash corporate all-stars so they are viewed as both. The middle is where the magic happens. Have a clear strategy and ensure there's an open dialogue between employees and management.

Equip and Support Personal Brands in Becoming Active Listeners

The advantages of having authentic, online all-stars goes beyond relationships, branding and overall visibility. They also can become active listeners.

It's highly likely, given their predisposition to social networks, that a company's personal brands will be the first to hear about potential crises and issues. Most likely, they will hear about them hours and days before the media does.

At the same time, corporate all-stars' connection to online communities will enable them to uncover new ideas and unmet needs.

Organizations need to set up the infrastructure so this intel is not only shared, but appropriately acted on in a timely manner. Technologies such as wikis as well as policies and procedures can help.



V - THE POWER OF PULL

SUMMARY:

For more than 100 years, marketers have largely focused on reaching stakeholders through push, e.g. paid and earned media. Now, however, in an age when Google dominates, it's equally important that we turn our attention toward digital discoverability. This requires that brands create relevant content that people will "pull" through search engines and social networks.

TRENDS/INSIGHTS:

For 100 years marketing has largely operated under a push paradigm. We create messages and funneled them through the media to reach stakeholders, either by paying for play or earning it.

This mode of operating remains viable. It doesn't fade. However, the dispersion and blurring of sources, as noted earlier, means that we need to earn more coverage these days or place more ads to really effect behavior change.

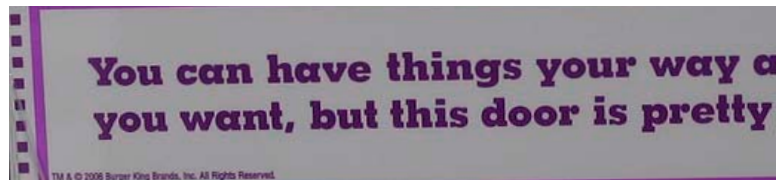
In PR, the almighty pitch remains a key arrow in our quiver. Sometimes it is apropos. Increasingly, however, it has a tendency to annoy. Bloggers, for example, openly disdain email spam from PR professionals. They enjoy the thrill of discovery.

Meanwhile, veteran journalists are turning to sophisticated search tools like those available in Gmail and/or Google to call up information when they need it rather than taking pitches seriously. Consumers are behaving the same way. They're tuning out marketing and, to paraphrase Mark Cuban, using Google as a big open book.

Saul Hansell, a veteran writer for the New York Times, sums it up this way:

"I was responding to a pr pitch about a widget company, and i wrote this back: 'Keep me posted on what these folks are up to, with an occasional e-mail. Don't worry if I don't respond. The way my life seems to work, suddenly something happens, and then I'll be interested in, say widgets. I'll remember you sent me something on a cool widget company, search my e-mail and get on the phone.'

When I sent it, I realized that I'm probably not alone in how gmail and other e-mail search is changing how I find information. And I wonder if PR people should think about what tools of search engine optimization apply to pitches."



In an era where Google dominates, it's critical that PR pros help brands and organizations become more digitally discoverable. We need to ensure that our external and internal clients are findable at the right time and on the right themes. That's what the power of "pull" is all about.

Advertisers know the power of pull. This is why search engine marketing channels like Google Adwords have thrived. Ads are only triggered when consumers search for relevant keywords. This ensures that the right message is delivered to the right place at precisely the right time — and very efficiently.

“Advertisers know the power of pull”

PR professionals, to a lesser degree, do not think about pull. Nevertheless, there is a Google Adwords equivalent in PR, and that's socially connected digital content. Those who create it and do so regularly are rewarded.

Their content ranks highly in natural search results — which is far more credible than ads, according to [a recent Nielsen study](#). Those who don't are invisible to search engines.

With that, marketers are now recognizing that they need to create more social content. **According to** a study released in December by Junta42, **more than half (56%) of marketing and publishing-decision makers plan to increase their content marketing spending for 2009. Social media tops the list (68%), followed by newsletters/email (60%), blogs (56%), case studies (55%), online video (51%), white papers (46%) and microsites (43%).**

In the past, this was primarily the role of interactive marketers, search engine optimization specialists and ad agencies. Today, things are different. The greatest reward goes to those who create dynamic content at a regular frequency that is discussed, remixed and linked to by other high-quality sources online. This requires storytelling and dialogue. It's an area that many PR pros are good at, especially now that all things social are media and all media now social.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Public relations professionals, by their nature, are best equipped to help brands create content. Storytelling and conversation are in our nature. However, this requires we learn new skills, which are covered in the recommended actions below.

Create Resources that Inform the Conversation

In a recent speech to communication students, Edelman CEO Richard Edelman outlined his broad vision for how public relations needs to shift toward public engagement. One of the key attributes is informing the conversation, [Edelman blogged...](#)

“If Andrew Heyward, former president of CBS News, is correct in positing that ‘Every company today is a media company,’ then smart businesses will take the opportunity to become public resources on areas of expertise, by providing credible well-researched data on its own web site, and correct on-going discussions, whether on discussion forums or in the press, if there are factual errors.”

Communicators can use a number of different tactics to create such resources. Generally, however, these should be frequently updated and social to ensure optimum visibility. Becoming a curator of content is one approach. Another involves creating custom search engines that allow visitors to more easily mine a select number of sites rather than the entire web.

Adopt Rather than Invent

Although it offers a great deal of reward, creating content is a lot of work. This can be mitigated by finding and leveraging corporate all-stars (as described above). Not every company has such personal brands in their stable, however, and it can take time to cultivate them.



An alternative strategy is to find existing content creators and/or online assets that you can adopt. Edelman Digital Creative Director Jared Hendler summarized this in a [blog post last year](#)...

With digital being all about the law of attraction, we strive to create programs with rich media content that will attract our client's target. What has a better chance of success? Adoption; whereby we 'adopt' a trend or relationship that is already authentically connecting with both the target audience and closely aligned with the client beliefs, or Invention; whereby we invent, from scratch, an initiative, movement or trend in the hopes that what we think is brilliant will be just as well embraced by the consumer.

My vote is for adoption. We cannot be so naive as to think that we will have any better success at creating a winning concept over the entertainment industry who have been fine tuning the process for years with limited success. True cultural hits are few and far between. We too are creative, but the risks of success are high and unlike the entertainment industry, our clients expect return every time.

I am not saying the days of creativity for us are over. What I am saying is that there is an abundance of cultural content waiting to be supported and the right partnership can be a win for everyone.



Jared Hendler

Write for Searchers, Not Just Readers

Most of us write for readers. It's what comes naturally to us. We have learned how to craft email messages, for example, that get opened and often generate a response/

However, the power of pull means writing for searchers. And searchers aren't necessarily Googling for our messages. One way to think of it is that Googlers are looking for "how to get rid of roaches," not necessarily "bug spray."



To Saul Hanell's point, mentioned earlier, PR pros will now need to create content with a human voice, rather than a corporate voice and with search engines in mind. Using keyword assessment tools and web analytics, PR pros will need to learn how people search, as well as how to optimize both banal assets, like press releases, and new ones, like blogs.

Reputation Management expert Andy Beal suggests writing blog headlines for two audiences: readers and searchers.



CONCLUSION

For some, the trends outlined in this white paper will surely sound challenging:

- As customer service moving into social media, brands are becoming more vulnerable to having their flaws exposed.
- The reforestation of the media is upending the potential value of individual PR placements and ad creative, just as some consumers cut back on consumption.
- Personal brands may be steering corporate messages in a different direction than where businesses ideally want to see them go. And Google makes it all easily discoverable.

That's certainly one way to view the world.

The more optimistic outlook, however, is that these trends in these times offer an opportunity to build stronger relationships in very creative and efficient ways.

Here are three macro takeaways to consider:

- **Publicly engage** - Companies that put many voices online stand to gain a competitive advantage as customer service moves into social media and personal brands grow.
- **Create content** - As the media landscape shifts and Google rewards content producers, companies have an opportunity to create their own media to reach stakeholders directly.
- **Be simple and utilitarian** - Now is not the time for complexity. Simplicity rules as do online applications that are continually useful and fill a void in people's lives.

These are the themes that Edelman Digital feels be pervasive throughout the year.



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STEVE RUBEL

Steve Rubel, SVP, Director of Insights, is responsible for keeping Edelman Digital, Edelman and its clients in the vanguard. Rubel studies global technology and social trends and shapes actionable insights on how they will influence marketing communications.

In this role, Rubel serves as a strategic advisor to clients such as Unilever, Microsoft and others. In addition, he supports the account planning processes, intellectual property development and the firm's innovation and business development efforts. He is a member of the Edelman Digital senior leadership committee.



Steve Rubel

Rubel's Micro Persuasion blog on digital trends (www.micropersuasion.com) has 50,000 daily readers and has been cited as a must-read by the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, CNET, PC Magazine and Forrester Research. He also writes a bi-weekly column for Advertising Age and is often sought by the press and as a speaker.

Prior to joining Edelman in 2006, Rubel worked for 15 years in a variety of marketing communications positions in corporate, non-profit and small/mid-sized PR firms. Most recently, he spent five years at CooperKatz & Company where he pioneered the use of blogs as a marketing vehicle for clients such as the Association of National Advertisers and Vespa.

Rubel hails from Long Island, New York, and is a graduate of Hofstra University.