

ONLINE MEDIA CENTRES
MANAGING YOUR
DIGITAL PRESENCE

[WHITE PAPER]



ONLINE MEDIA CENTRES - PR FOR PRS



Online Media Centre, Press Centre, Newsroom – no matter what you call it, every brand and business needs a press-friendly presence online. For some, a page or two on an existing website is sufficient, but for those that take their media relations seriously – an Online Media Centre is a must.

Working out what should and shouldn't be included in an Online Media Centre is a challenge in and of itself; the idea that it can just be a repository of forgotten press releases is long over.

When it comes to media outreach best practice, the ability to build and maintain good relationships with journalists and other influencers is paramount. Traditionally, PR professionals may feel they're doing all the work but an Online Media Centre allows the press to come to you.

It can be hard to predict where or when a story that involves your company is going to appear and journalists and editors may need access to statements, pictures, background information and PR contacts any time of day or night. If they can't find it from you, maybe a competitor has a comprehensive media centre they can use instead?

For Emma Hill, founder and publisher of His & Hers magazine, accessibility is a media centre's major appeal. She said: 'Company news rooms and media centres are invaluable when you're on a tight deadline and are keen to source info or images outside of office hours.

'Although they can't replace dealing with a friendly PR who can provide tailored information, quotes or specific images, they're a great backup, especially when you're burning the midnight oil to meet a deadline!'

KEEP IT SIMPLE



For a resource to be available 'out of hours' it should be simple to use and easy for any influencers to understand.

Many media centres have registration processes, where they 'vet' the journalists looking to access their media content – either to curate their own media lists (which is wholly unnecessary if you use the Vuelio Media Database!) or to stop the 'wrong' people accessing their content.

The latter is somewhat something of paradox, as the point of a media centre (if not public relations itself) is to help tell the story of your brand and spread the news you want to spread.

That said, your brand is valuable and making content exclusive for certain sections of the press can help to drive engagement; your media contacts, and by extension their audiences, feel part of an elite group 'in the know'.

A good example of this is Apple: the tech giant's product launches have press tickets so exclusive they've become an event in and of themselves. Journalists tweet pictures of their passes to prove they're 'in', and that also alerts their readers of upcoming coverage. Win win.



KEEP IT SIMPLE





Another reason to put up a registration wall is that some brands may fear competitors accessing content, but if the intention is for information to be published by the press – everything in your media centre should be accessible in the public sphere anyway.

Embargoed releases are a good reason to limit access to your media centre, and again, they make those with access feel part of an exclusive group.

For Emma, the registration process should be 'not too fiddly', as she wants immediate access. But John Harrington, deputy editor of PRWeek, goes further – he said: 'I don't register for media centre sites – I have the right relationships with the right people so shouldn't need to sign up.'

KEEP IT SIMPLE



While it is clear Online Media Centres can in no way replace a PR professional or a relationship between two people, they should be available to back up and, in some cases, start those relationships.

Some brands seem purposefully obtuse when it comes to their media centres, hiding contacts and putting barriers between their company and the press.

John explains the downside of this approach: 'I assume the ones without contact details don't want to communicate with the press, but if, as a journalist, you're looking for a comment for a negative story about a company, the lack of contact details can be a detriment to that company'.



MEDIA CENTRES FOR INFLUENCERS



It's not just traditional journalists that could benefit from media centres - bloggers and influencers also see the appeal of accessible information.

Craig Landale, director and editor-in-chief of Menswear Style (crowned Best UK blog at the Vuelio Blog Awards 2017), hasn't had much exposure to brands' media centres, but wishes he could use them more. He said: 'I often don't want to hassle busy PRs asking for imagery or to resend misplaced press releases. Having a website where I can quickly retrieve all this instantly would be great.'



The difference in traditional and 'new' media relations is a discussion for another white paper, but clearly media centres haven't yet permeated the blogosphere where collaborations are often campaign based and 'news' is sometimes side-lined. Influencers are, therefore, an opportunity for any brand using a media centre.

Just like journalists, bloggers need quality, relevant content on a regular basis and well-researched press releases with decent images could fulfil this need.

SPREAD THE WORD





Some media centres deliver regular newsletters with the latest releases, or on-the-spot announcements when a big story breaks.

These newsletters can be a great way to alert your contacts that there is news and information available on the media centre, possibly highlighting a story they would have otherwise missed.

But not all journalists like these releases – John ignores such communications believing the news to be old or untargeted – once again highlighting the importance of good relationships and knowing your media contacts.

Social media is clear route to your audience. Dedicated 'press office' accounts on Twitter can attract fans in the general public who feel like they're getting behind-thescenes access. This makes your media centre more exclusive and gives you another means to get your story to the people that matter – your fans.

As ever with PR – the more channels and routes to your content and message, the more likely you'll reach your target audience and achieve the results you want.



There are fundamental elements every press centre, no matter how basic, should include. These will make it easier for journalists to work with you and, by extension, improve your press coverage.

Contacts page

For John Harrington, finding contacts is a media centre's primary purpose. He said, 'If you want a relationship with journos, you should make PR contacts available'.

List as many members of the PR team as possible and include phone numbers, email addresses and any other relevant means of communication (LinkedIn and Twitter are both common). Department or regional breakdowns are also helpful, as are specialisms if your PR team and business is vast.

And finally, a professional photo can make all the difference – John said: 'A picture makes them seem like welcoming normal people'.





Press releases

A media centre needs to be updated regularly, so publish all your press releases in date order. The more recently you've published content, the more up-to-date your media centre will seem.

Vuelio Online Media Centre lets you distribute press releases to contacts and publish them to your media centre in one go, so you don't have to go through an arduous 'tick box' process.

Pictures and video

Being able to host large images and video files, which are otherwise too cumbersome to send over email, is a real draw for journalists and one of the major reasons journalists visit brands' media centres. This should also include brand assets and resources such as company logos and headshots of key people.

Sometimes these images may help journalists in ways you hadn't expected. For Emma Hill, Leading Hotels of the World's images are always useful: 'Leading Hotels of the World has an excellent press centre with a host of high res images available for download. I use this regularly when sourcing extra images for travel features.'

Like press releases, the image gallery should be kept fresh and images should be easy to download in common formats (JPEG or PNG are ideal).





Company information

Having a current overview of the company, its work and key people is another must.

A little history or timeline of events can also provide much needed background for journalists new to your brand. This is about giving your influencers what they want quickly, and the more general information available, the more likely it is you'll secure coverage.

Emma said: 'I think online media centres are perfect for providing a broad overview of a brand, and are useful when you're researching a brand you haven't worked with before.'

Social Media Profiles

Social media channels help journalists understand your brand better and sometimes even form the basis of their stories.

Chances are, you've spent a lot of time making your social channels excellent so you should be showing them off wherever possible. Include icon links in your media centre.







Search

Over time, all your content – press releases, images, videos – becomes a library of valuable information.

Having an easy-to-use search function allows journalists to quickly pick out historical facts, figures and dates for their work today. You want to make coverage of your brand obstacle free, so make a journalist's job as easy as possible.

Analytics

Knowing how successful your posts are can ensure you know which style of release or content is reaching the most people, at what times and in what locations.

If your numbers aren't huge, don't be disheartened.

The media centre's job is to reach influencers who spread the story further, so low audience figures don't necessarily mean the content isn't a success.



Benji Goodhart, press website editor, Channel 4 Press

Benji Goodhart is responsible for the Channel 4 Press website.

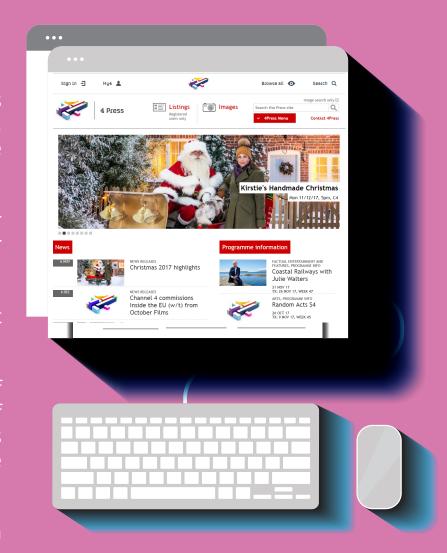
He both publishes stories himself and runs the team that creates content every day. Benji also manages the look and feel of the site, changing the homepage content and banner images to keep the site fresh and constantly updated.

His role further emulates that of a traditional news site editor by working with the technical team to ensure everything is user friendly and easily accessible.

His responsibilities extend to the Channel 4 Press Twitter account and daily email alert, which is sent to thousands of journalists.

As a freelance journalist by trade, having written for a range of publications including the Guardian, Benji also conducts most of the interviews on the site. This involves watching new programmes and meeting actors and presenters to create content and enhance the media resources available to the press.

We spoke to Benji about how he manages the press site for such an iconic brand.







How is content selected for the press site?

The group publicity managers across the different topics (drama, comedy, factual entertainment, entertainment) decide what content needs to be published, but generally it's an organic process. We know what needs the most attention before it goes live. For example, we're not going to publish a huge quantity about Countdown on the site – that looks after itself.

Mostly we're putting out content ahead of programmes being released, but occasionally we have to be reactive if something gains more attention than we expected or if something needs a bit more of a push.

How do you use the daily alerts?

When we put up a press pack for a show, we have to tell people it's there or it may be missed. So, we email all the journalists on our database – and there are thousands that have signed up – with all of the latest content on the site. This content is tweeted from our press account as well.

We also have a Channel 4 press app, with push notifications, so we can get headlines directly onto people's phone screens.



To what extent is the press site an extension of Channel 4's brand?

Our tone on the tweets and email alerts is different to what you would perhaps expect from a broadcaster. We're proud to be different and alternative and our content has a sense of fun and mischief, which makes us stand out.

That's an element of what Channel 4 is all about – it wouldn't be very Channel 4 to push out content without a nod and a wink and that's probably harder to do elsewhere.

At the BBC, for example, they're under so much scrutiny, they have to be careful what they do and say. We can afford to take more risks and make it fun.

This also means we're more likely to get engagement, which makes it more likely we'll get coverage.







How do you measure the press site's success?

You can quantify page impressions but that's irrelevant to what we're doing.

If a news release on our Twitter account is picked up by the Guardian, Daily Mail or Digital Spy, for example, that page could then get tens of thousands of views in a day but that content isn't really there to get page views.

If a post only gets 100 views but five are from feature writers or media journalists who'll cover the subject, then that's a success.

So, success of the site is whether it's serving its purpose, everyone is getting the info they need and we're not getting pissed-off people calling up (which we rarely do).

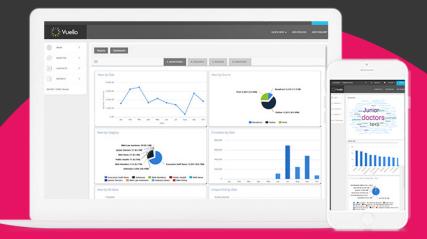
Reviewing PR software?

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- fully customise the experience, creating a branded environment that blends seamlessly with your organisation's website



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