



# MEDIA RELATIONS IN 2018

THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS, PITCHING AND THE GDPR

[WHITE PAPER]



# WHAT'S NEW?



Relationships are at the core of everything we do in public relations and public affairs communications. No matter what industry you're covering, and no matter what type of comms you practice, good media relations is vital for your success.

In an age of the internet, digital media and influencers, it can be easy to think that the old methods of building and maintaining relationships have changed. While some things are certainly different, the fundamentals are the same – journalists still have power and influence, and comms is still about managing the reputation of an organisation, whether you're promoting the brand, mitigating risk, changing perceptions or dealing with crises.

We spoke to Ben Titchmarsh, head of media and marketing at Propeller Group who said: 'There is a famous French saying, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose", which means "the more things change, the more they stay the same" and that's true of media relations.'

In many ways, relationships are still the same too – they're based on trust and mutual benefits. But technology is continuing to progress and change the media, so here are three areas where media relations has changed.



**Ben Titchmarsh**  
Head of media and  
marketing  
Propeller Group

## 'Influencers'

Bloggers, vloggers and Instagrammers are at the forefront of what is considered the age of the influencer. These new outlets – and there are now over 10,000 listed on the Vuelio Influencer Database – have dramatically increased the number of stakeholders and strategies for reaching an audience.

Jo Middleton, top blogger behind Slummy Single Mummy, said: 'Over the last few years brands have really begun to appreciate the value of working with bloggers and, as a result, the approaches I get now are often far more creative.'

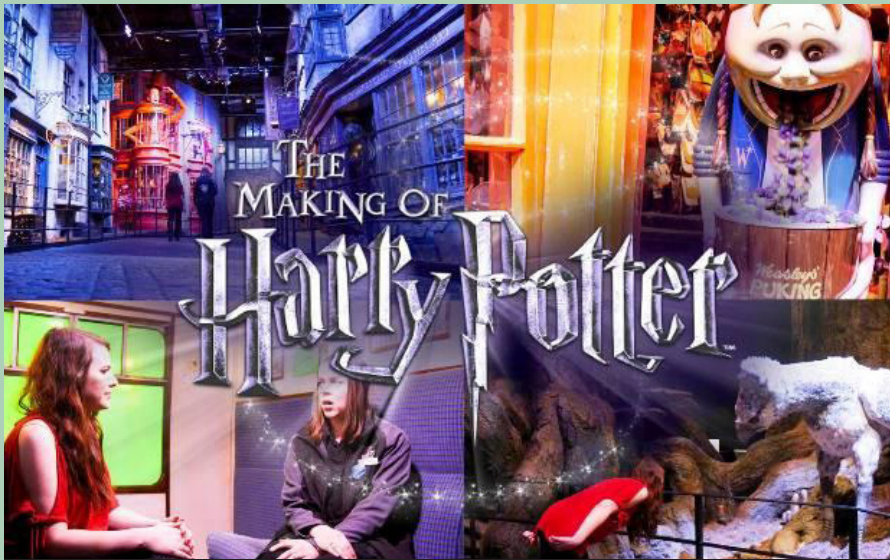


Photo credit: Cherry Wallis The Making of Harry Potter #ISeeMore

*Tin Man and IET's #ISeeMore campaign used vloggers to encourage more girls to study engineering. The campaign won the STEM category at the CIPR Excellence Awards.*

## Social media

Social media, and the proliferation of convenient technology, means we are connected now more than ever, and have a means to communicate with our media contacts 24/7 (whether we should or not). Traditional media relations required phone calls, face to face meetings and then email, but social has completely changed how we communicate on a daily basis.

Anne-Marie Lacey, managing director, Filament PR, said: 'Everything used to revolve around print coverage, but with the emergence of online, everything is changing and we've got more options: online, apps and social media.'

The media and news industry is stretched, with digital dimes not able to support print journalist wages and 24-hour news cycles requiring more content, more often on more platforms. Add to that the competition – anyone with an internet connection is a potential competitor – and you have a perfect storm that’s hitting the sector hard.

Lacey said: ‘I used to work with someone who did PR in the 80s and she said they would have a long lunch with a journalist, get drunk, put them in a cab and stuff a press release into their hand, saying, “We’ll see the coverage in tomorrow’s paper”.

‘It’s not like that anymore. Journalists are short staffed and they definitely don’t have time for long lunches. I want to be a help not a hindrance, so I look for a more effective means of engaging with them and building a relationship.’

## Timing drives the news agenda

Time is also vital for the type of news being created. A leading online news journalist told us she doesn’t spend much time with PRs because for hard news and breaking news, ‘We’re looking at the future and now, so we need information as it happens’. The newswires and the national news agenda provide story leads instead.

Being a respected authority in your field means journalists might reach out to you for comment, reaction or even guidance. Lacey added: ‘I feel like that’s the gold standard – if they know you’re a reliable and trusted source on a particular subject or area, they come to you for comment or help.’

There’s also a need for hard news journalists to reach out to press offices if there’s a story about the company or sector, so PRs should know their company’s news and market inside out.

## Understand your sector

Titchmarsh explained: 'Never underestimate the power of reading constantly and really immersing yourself in the sector you're pitching to.' Once again, you should know your industry so you can be reactive to breaking stories and fulfil any need for comment, but also so you know how the press for your sector writes, what they cover and why.

Sometimes this may mean getting to know your media contacts on a personal level, and meetings are not out of the question. However, they must be both relevant and convenient.

Titchmarsh said: 'Take time to buy a journalist a coffee, lunch or a drink, but make sure it's when they're available and not up against it. That develops a relationship which you can then use for story pitches.'

For news journalists, relevancy is the most important element. We spoke to one who said: 'Happy to meet people to build a relationship if it's relevant to the subject area. If it's an agency that's just trying to meet for the sake of it, it's a waste of time.'



# PERSONALISE YOUR PITCH



If you know the outlets you're going to inside out, why would you use a blanket approach? Great PRs never relied on the 'spray and pray', and now – with the advent of the GDPR – it's almost impossible.

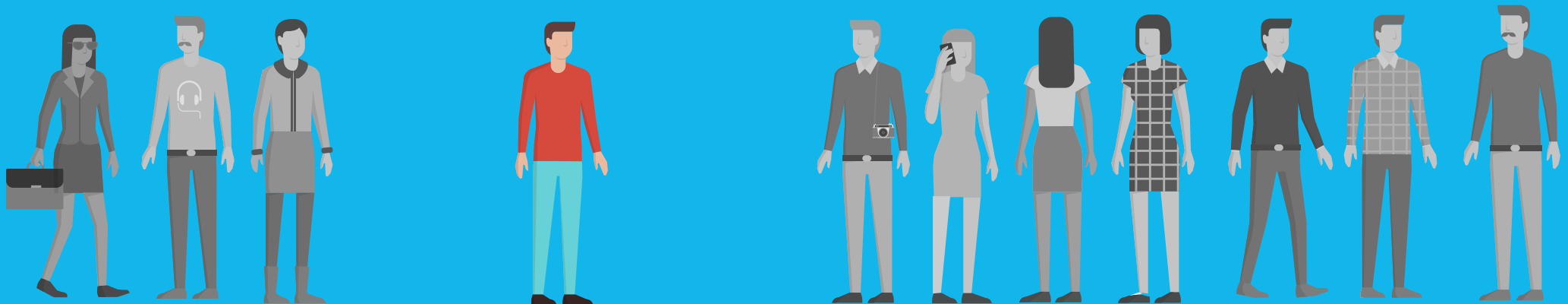
Titchmarsh added: 'When pitching, always personalise your messaging because journalists can tell if you've mail merged. I tend to make a shorter media list and personalise every line of the message. For subject lines, I would write 'Hi [name], story for publication – [story title]' and then in the first line I would reference another story they've done that was similar to my pitch.'

## Press releases as news stories

'If you're writing a press release, try to write it as a news story, which includes using the house style of the publication you're pitching to.'

This is true no matter what kind of journalist or blogger you're going to – everyone likes a personalised message and if you are hoping to build a relationship, then you must behave like it's a relationship.

Lacey agreed: 'We have to focus on demographics more and identify what content is appropriate for what outlet.'





# MAKE THEIR LIVES EASY



We know journalists are under resourced and busy with a hundred other stories that could literally be a matter of life and death. That doesn't mean your content is not needed, it just means you should do everything you can to make your pitch easily usable.

For Lacey, this means thinking outside the box: 'We create social media packages for journalists, which includes making sure you have newsroom-friendly content, info that is tweet length, appropriate handles or hashtags, and video and picture content that would work on different platforms.'

Titchmarsh thinks there are ways to make the copy itself easier to use: 'There are fewer journalists covering more news, so don't leave it to them to create the headline and clever puns. Put a pun in the headline, make references to pop culture – they might come up with something better themselves but the more of a news story you give them, the easier you're making their lives.'

'If you're worried they won't take a release that's been written for them, put the puns and the references in your email pitch, so it's there if they need it.'



*Taylor Herring famously makes as many resources available for the media as possible. For this multi-award-winning campaign that launched Samsung's QuickDrive, the agency provided a video clip for BBC Newsnight and a picture for the front page of The Wall Street Journal.*

# USE EMBARGOES



Embargoes are actually very useful for journalists. We spoke to one journalist who said: 'Exclusive is always good, especially under embargo. The earlier the better so it gives me some time for some digging.'

Titchmarsh has clearly understood this requirement, he said: 'There's a benefit of scarcity with journalists – they love an exclusive. They will always Google the story to see if it's elsewhere, so if you say it's an exclusive, mean it.'

'As we know, journalists have important stories to report; if your story is interesting but not "life and death" interesting, give them time. I like to put an embargo on for as long as a week to give them time to cover it in the way they want to.'





# WHAT NEXT?



As with any type of relationship, media relations require maintenance and ongoing care. If you neglect your contacts you'll end up back at square one. Equally, if you only contact people when you want something, rather than have something to offer, then you'll be seen as the wrong type of relationship and it's likely they will stop returning your calls.

Now you know your sector, and are keeping up with it on an ongoing basis, don't be shy about helping your media contacts out, whether it's making them aware of an industry development, chatting about an industry topic or making yourself available if they need any help with a breaking story.

Most importantly, don't rest on your laurels. You may think you have all the right contacts for your needs but you never know when they'll change roles, retire, change careers or be replaced. Keep expanding your network so that you're as flexible as possible.





**Jo Middleton**  
**Slummy Single**  
**Mummy**

'I've been blogging since 2009 and the way that I'm approached by PRs has certainly changed a lot over the years! Originally, I think bloggers were seen much more as an 'add-on' to traditional PR work and treated in much the same way as journalists – I was frequently just sent generic press releases and there was hardly ever any specific budget for blogger outreach.

'Taking a very personal approach and designing blogger campaigns to suit individual bloggers has massive benefits for both sides – for a start you're far more likely as a blogger to be enthused by a project if it's clear that proper time and effort has been taken in the research and planning stages.

'As a brand, you really maximise the potential from a blogger partnership if you can work together to create content that's relatable and interesting to individual blog readers. Often this only needs a little bit of attention to detail, but it's much more effective to have a small group of bloggers creating unique and personal content than it is to have a big group all churning out exactly the same stuff.'

**“ Work together to create content that's relatable and interesting to individual blog readers. ”**



The General Data Protection Regulation came into force on 25 May, which means now you need a lawful basis for processing the data of individuals in the EU. This includes journalists and bloggers.

There are seven lawful bases for processing data, but the two most common are consent and legitimate interest.

## Media relations and consent

Consent is complicated to roll out as part of your media relations practice because it requires affirmative action on each media contact's part to opt-in to communications. That's a tricky way to start a relationship and if they don't opt in, you lose the ability to contact them at all.

Legitimate interest is much more media relations friendly, but still requires you to understand what your needs are for building relationships and weigh those needs against the rights and freedoms of the media contact – this is called a balance test. Just like consent, you still need to tell your contacts that you're processing their data and why, but as long as you can also detail your carefully thought-out legitimate interest, you don't need consent.

We've written a number of guides to help comms professionals comply with the new regulation - find out more [here](#).

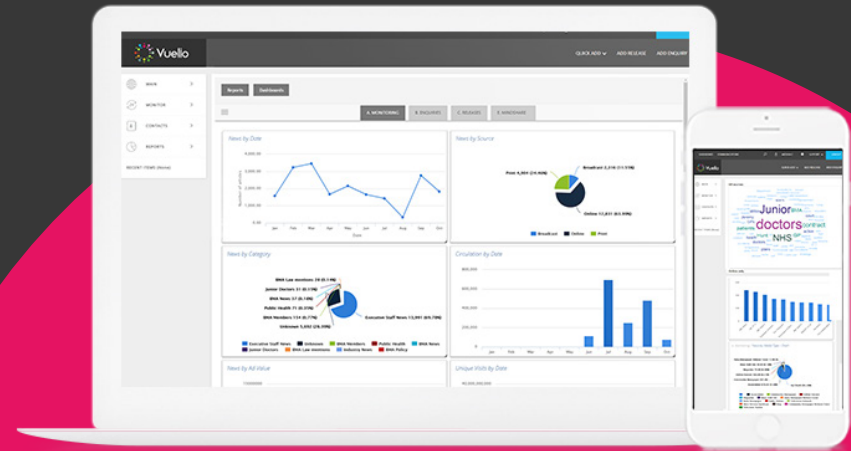
# Need to improve relations?

## MARKET-LEADING RELATIONSHIP AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE FROM VUELIO

Access the world's largest media and political database, distribute press releases, manage influencer relations, measure social media activities and analyse the effectiveness of campaigns. Vuelio's integrated software contains all the tools you need to build and maintain relationships – and what's more, it can help you comply with GDPR.

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