

Why rent when you can buy?

By  Natalia Rosa

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I write the words "Press Release" with some trepidation, and certainly not with any delight.

Being one of those journalists who crossed to the 'dark side', I know what it's like to get 100 press releases with no news hook and a follow-up call asking politely... hopefully: "if it's captured your attention and whether you'll deign to publish it". Some of the time that depends on good relationships and, dare I say it, advertising support.



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It doesn't happen often, but from time-to-time, at a brand's insistence, we are compelled to craft and distribute "press releases" that simply aren't newsworthy, add no value to an audience and are destined to fill the inboxes of editors who will probably never read them.

Even if there's a strong reason for writing a press release, I'll confess I still loathe writing them because I know it just adds to the content noise gatekeepers are grappling with daily.

And so, we try to get clever and write exclusive pieces for media, for complimentary brands' blogs, and for social media. We try to create specific content that isn't too brand-heavy, will entertain and inform an audience and hopefully tick the box of a busy editor who sees value in receiving content which has been written by an expert writer in our sector – travel and tourism.

As travel people, with many years' experience in the travel industry, there's nothing about Traveller Friction, how to write a killer travel RFP, or where to find the best beaches in the Seychelles, Mozambique and Mauritius we don't know.



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We don't always get it right, but most of the time the content is considered, authoritative and useful. Our departure point is to add real value to the person reading it and hopefully, by implication, the platform on which they found it. The brand wins. The publication wins. The reader wins.

It's a fine line, but when we walk it well, there's cause for celebration all round.

Of late, I've found it interesting, however, that brands put so much more value on earned media (press coverage, influencer coverage, social media, etc.) than their owned media (blogs, newsletters, mobile apps, etc.).

Note that social media is not owned media. Even though you may 'own' your Facebook page, you need to 'pay' to get any real reach and you have no control over how these platforms are going to change in future.

Content creation and distribution

I find this over-reliance on earned media curious because, unlike owned media, brands have little-to-no control over how their brand is being consumed in earned media. You can't own your message, you can't even measure its real impact. So, why would you work so hard on earning media, and not invest in building your own?

Content creation and distribution through your own platforms allows you to measure what resonates with your customer (audience) and once you know what story your community is interested in, and you're able to tell it well, there should be no reason why your owned platforms cannot be leveraged, in addition to earned media, to tell it.



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Admittedly, it's a lot of work to try and create your own community instead of paying to piggyback off someone else's, but I would argue a great deal more powerful. The future of your relationship with your customer requires you to regain control over customer insights and create relationships that go beyond once-off transactions. You can't do that if you're relying solely on someone else to tell your story.

My heart sang when I read a recent interview with Flight Centre's Head of Creative, Content and Digital Marketing, Luke Wheatley, in Marketing. He spoke about Flight Centre Australia's blog and mentioned how it strives to be the authority in travel. "We control our own branded content. We show our people enjoying travel and experiencing travel," he said. That's powerful stuff!

Generating awareness and engagement

I'm not suggesting for a minute that you would throw your earned media strategy out the window. Ultimately, the goal for both earned and owned media strategies is to generate awareness and engagement.

Rather, try introducing a little balance and putting additional focus on building your owned platforms by writing consistently, tracking what is working and creating more of that type of content on your blog, website, newsletters, etc.

As Wheatley so rightly pointed out in his interview. It's about being customer-centric and celebrating the organisation's own people through positioning them as the experts.

And, in travel, that's a great thing for which to strive.

ABOUT NATALIA ROSA

Natalia Rosa is the MD of Big Ambitions, a specialist travel and tourism communications and marketing organisation which helps tourism and travel organisations connect with their members and customers.

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