

Chapter 1

Getting the Basics

PR and Inbound

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What Is Public Relations?

Whenever we try to explain a term, we tend to start with the textbook definitions that students learn when they go to university.

Public relations (PR) certainly is a mystery to many people, including some working in the industry or studying it.

The Public Relations Society of America which is the leading PR organization in the world, defines public relations as “the strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics” (PRSA, 2017).

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations the other leading PR body based in the United Kingdom—argues that “public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics” (CIPR, 2017).

Now admittedly, these two definitions are a bit hard to grasp as they entail a number of buzzwords such as “mutually beneficial,” “influencing,” “goodwill,” and so on.

If you read Guy Kawasaki’s book *The Macintosh Way* (1989, 123), you’ll see a quote by Jean-Louis Gasse—a former Apple executive—explaining that advertising is saying that you’re good, whereas PR is getting someone else to say that you’re good.

This definition is easier to grasp, right?

It doesn’t tell us exactly what PR people do, but at least it strengthens the point that PR is concerned with organizational reputation and building meaningful and positive relationships between various audiences.

For most of its existence, dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, PR has mainly dealt with media relations, events, reputation, crisis management, and investor relations. In fact, for a very long time public relations and media relations (or publicity) have been considered synonymous, where PR people write press releases and send them to journalists who then use those press releases to write stories for their publications and media outlets—newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, and so on.

Many are under that same assumption today, which is what has been driving PR's own reputation.

But with the emergence of digital technology and its mass adoption, this understanding is outdated, because PR is not just media relations—and it *shouldn't* be just media relations.

Heavily relying on the media and pitching them press releases has been the traditional view of PR, but with the growth of digital media, the need for an intermediary—the media—to spread the information has diminished. PR can now engage directly with customers, prospects, investors, and any stakeholder group using online channels to send key messages through various means such as articles, blog posts, e-books, social media, comments, and video.

Digital is the reason why the arsenal of PR activities has increased enormously. Media relations can simply be one of those activities. More and more PR people are now responsible for generating leads as well as nurturing them to help sales close new business. They do this by making use of content marketing (e-books, whitepapers, reports, videos, podcasts, webinars, blog posts), e-mail marketing, social media, search engine optimization (SEO), blogger relations, influencer relations, online reputation management, crisis communications, and more.

But the problem with the PR industry has always been this: it's been too slow to adapt to changes and jump on the bandwagon of new technological developments. This happened with social media a few years back when the use of social

channels was just starting to peak. Many felt that PR should be the owner of social because PR pros are the people who build mutually beneficial relationships with communities—basically what social media is all about. Unfortunately, PR was a bit too slow and so social media agencies arose, advertising agencies won social media awards, and so on. A similar thing happened with SEO as well, but let's not get into that here.

The reality is that PR needs to reinvent itself. PR needs to change the widespread perception that it's just about media relations. It needs to show that it's able to grow, adapt, and adjust for the digital economy and show sustainable results to clients. Because if PR continues to stick with the conventional ways of thinking, it's not going to be relevant or important.

And here's where the link between PR and inbound begins: using the inbound marketing methodology to drive tangible and trackable results.

So, what's inbound then?

What Is Inbound?

The way we make decisions and buy things has fundamentally changed. We used to rely on direct sales and direct mail, or on television and magazine advertising and media publications. We couldn't do much research; we didn't need much convincing as the array of choice for products and services wasn't as vast as it is today.

But we are a lot more sophisticated and empowered now. We do our research online, we check recommendations on social, we read and get information, we compare vendors and products, we barely speak to sales reps because we prefer the advice from peers and friends on social media. We do all that on our own, at our preferred time, using our favorite devices, apps, and websites. Essentially, we make decisions based on the content that we find when we need it.

We don't like when something—such as advertisements—interrupts this process, and we tend to skip them. But we like to be engaged, enticed, and drawn into something interesting.

That's what inbound is all about. It's about attracting people with the right content.

In essence, inbound is about getting found. It's about creating remarkable content and sharing it with the world so that people can find it and come to you, instead of you having to find and chase them.

As HubSpot puts it, the inbound methodology is “the best way to turn strangers into customers and promoters of your business.” It's more scalable, efficient, and cost-effective than traditional outbound techniques.

The major difference between the old-school outbound approach and the new inbound method is the notion of pushing versus pulling people in. Outbound marketers predominantly used to (and many still do) push their messages with top-down, interruptive communications and activities. Inbound marketers, on the other hand, use multichannel techniques that earn people's attention and trust by engaging with relevant content. By creating and fostering such meaningful, two-way dialogues, often driven by social media, people come to you on their own; you are not chasing them. This is marketing that people love. Why? Because it's seamless, transparent, authentic, engaging, empowering, and value-adding. It's human.

The inbound marketing methodology is based on four key actions that help turn strangers into promoters of the business: attract, convert, close, and delight. Inbound marketing relies on specific channels, tools, and techniques to guide strangers through the different stages of the methodology (see Figure 1.1).

Inbound marketing is more effective than traditional marketing because it uses blogs, e-books, whitepapers, videos, SEO, webinars, and social, whereas traditional outbound marketing relies on cold calling, TV and print ads, direct mail, and

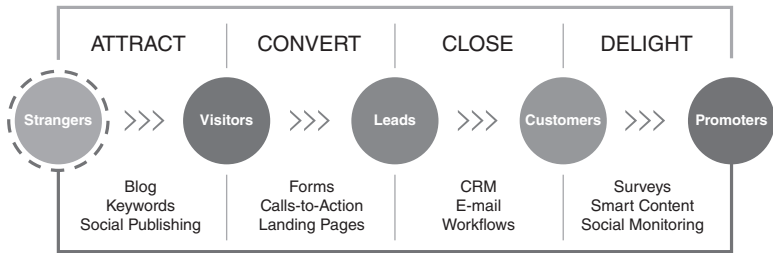


FIGURE 1.1 Inbound Marketing Methodology

Source: © HubSpot.

trade shows, which people nowadays know how to ignore, using things such as caller ID and ad blocking, spam filters, and so on. To give you an example, a 2015 research study from Fractl and Moz on outbound and inbound marketing concluded that consumers are fed up with low-value, high-noise marketing.¹

The key difference then is that outbound interrupts, inbound attracts. And it attracts with content.

We attract strangers to our website with blogs, social media posts, and SEO; we convert these strangers into leads through higher value content that we gate behind forms on landing pages that require visitors to provide their e-mail addresses (or Facebook and Google log-ins); we then nurture those leads with e-mail (which again provides content) to offer them even more value and turn them into clients. It doesn't end there. We continue to provide relevant content to delight and retain clients, because acquiring new customers can be anywhere from 5 to 25 times more expensive than retaining existing ones.²

All of this can be achieved through your website and online channels if you commit to it, develop a content strategy that covers each of those steps, and continuously create that content (on your own) and heavily promote it so that it can spread.

Nowadays, there's rarely a need to be offline with your marketing. In fact, inbound marketing is more than strong

enough to bring you customers because for 57 percent of marketers inbound practices provide the highest quality leads to sales.³

Content: The Glue between Inbound and PR

There's one thing that has been mentioned again and again in the previous few pages: content.

Both PR and inbound marketing heavily rely on content. Remarkable content is, in fact, the key ingredient of each practice. It's also the glue between the two.

We've said that PR is all about reputation and engaging in meaningful relationships with various publics.

In today's society, driven by digital, that engagement predominantly happens online. The only way to drive it is through content.

Content is something that PR people do better than anyone else in the creative industry—marketers, advertisers, web or digital experts. PR professionals are natural storytellers—writing and creating content for a particular audience is what they do day in and day out; it's what they learn when they go to college. Content that is audience-driven, strategically thought-out, and high-quality engages, entices, and converts visitors on your landing pages and website.

On the other hand, marketers and other digital professionals tend to struggle with content; it's a challenge because their specialty is data or technology rather than content creation. They think with numbers in mind not stories.

During my time as Channel Consultant at HubSpot, I worked with over 200 agencies from various backgrounds and I saw this firsthand. PR and communications professionals have no problem creating regular and consistent content; every other agency professional does.

This was the first realization that I had when inbound PR was materializing in my head.

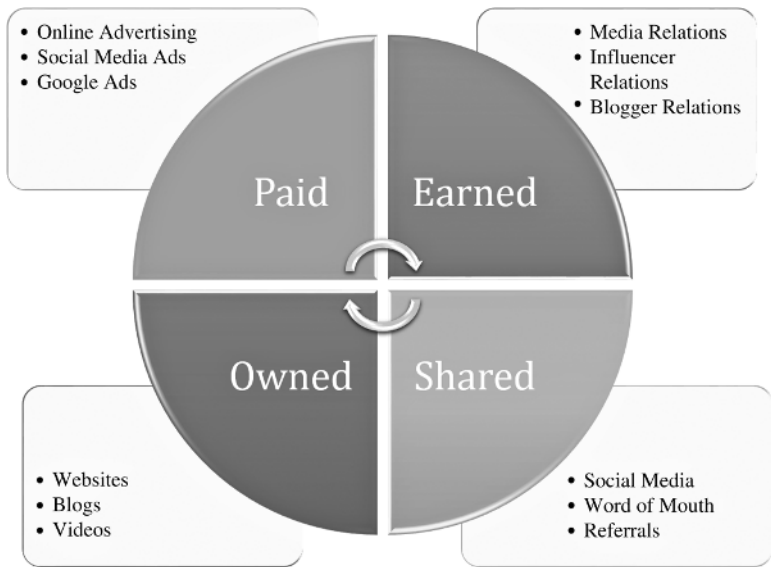


FIGURE 1.2 PESO

But when I actually began working on the concept, the starting point was to look at the four types of media (see Figure 1.2) that we have today: paid, earned, shared, and owned (PESO).

When we think again about PR being considered just media relations or publicity, we can see that this notion hasn't gone away. It falls under earned media; we are still earning coverage in various media outlets that people continue to read, follow, or buy.

Shared media is all about social media and channels that we use daily as they have become extremely important in our personal and professional lives: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and so on.

Paid media is gaining in importance because we live in an information overload era so when we use native and social advertising or sponsored content we ensure that our message truly reaches our intended audience. Today, without paid, your messages are pretty much dead.

And then we have owned media. Owned media has become hugely, hugely important over the last decade with the emergence of blogs and the necessity for businesses to have websites and a social presence with their own content online. That's inbound.

When we look at all of the media types, it's content that's at the center of them. Relevant content designed for a particular audience or a particular media type is at the center of PR and it's at the center of inbound marketing, too.

PR professionals understand audiences, and they know how to take a small bit of news and turn it into an entire story. This is where they excel, and it is what they do every day.

Inbound marketers use content to convert leads to give to sales. Without it, they simply can't follow the inbound marketing methodology.

Inbound PR itself arose through content.

In the spring of 2015, I started experimenting with the concept.

I have a blog that turned six on January 1, 2018. It took me three years to develop an audience that now averages about 10,000 visits per month with a 30- to 40-percent conversion rate on my landing pages.

Blogging is my thought process; it's my way of experimenting and learning. So I started researching and writing about this idea of inbound PR. And people were interested. They were sharing and commenting about how it all makes sense. Therefore, I continued working on this concept.

The moment when it hit me that inbound PR had become a thing was when Sarah Hall—a PR practitioner from the United Kingdom—reached out to me to ask me to contribute a chapter on inbound PR for the first edition of *#FuturePReof* last autumn. *#FuturePReof* is a crowdsourced book of essays contributed by more than 30 global PR professionals with the goal to increase awareness of how PR needs to reinvent itself to be viewed as a management discipline.⁴

The moment when it hit me that I really need to write this book was my 2016 talk at INBOUND—the biggest inbound conference in the world with over 19,000 visitors. Speaking in front of 300 people about inbound PR and seeing the positive feedback afterward and the array of questions and people wanting to learn how to do it was the ultimate proof that inbound PR is here to stay.

This is how inbound PR was born: out of the realization that it makes sense to combine PR's biggest strength (content) and alleviate its biggest challenge (measurement) with inbound and to create content to share through blog posts, slideshows, social media, books, and talks around the world to see if it will pull people in. It came about through a lot of research and writing and it ultimately serves the belief that digital is about connecting with people through content. It's content that drives our thoughts and decision-making, but when we flip it into the business world, we also need to figure out its return on investment.

