

# The B2B marketer's guide to driving more business impact

Integrating earned media with owned &  
paid media to build enduring brand trust



Modern marketing technology has increased accessibility to data and enabled highly personalized targeting. Marketing is now a more strategic division of B2B business than it was in the past, and it's also under increased pressure to deliver tangible results.

Marketing departments everywhere need their dollars to work smarter, not harder. You need everything from demand generation and sales enablement to events and branding to be more measurable.

One area ripe for transformation is public relations (PR). Impressions and clip counts just don't cut it when the C-suite is asking for concrete ROI data. The pressure to drive business growth, quickly, is increasing. There is very little patience for action and results.

#### Our B2B clients are asking us:

- How can we efficiently and cost-effectively create more brand awareness with the right audiences?
- Where can we find the right audiences?
- Our PR efforts need to deliver more tangible results, how can you help?
- How do we better gauge the quality and effectiveness of our PR and thought leadership efforts?

#### The answer:

The only way to derive more meaningful PR metrics is to get PR out of its silo in earned media. Earned media also must become better integrated with owned and paid media. And, PR must be held accountable to the same metrics as paid and owned programs.

This e-book is for B2B change agents who are ready to take PR to the next level. If you're reading this, you understand that thought leadership, storytelling and non-commercial content and integration of earned, owned and paid channels can drive business impact. This concept isn't for traditional B2B marketers whose main function is to serve the needs of the sales organization. It's for B2B marketers who have the infrastructure and strategy to attribute revenue back to marketing activities. If that's not you, you're wasting your time.

In this e-book, we cover what's standing in the way of integrating PR and making it more measurable, and how to overcome those challenges to maximize the impact of PR.

PR must be held accountable to the same results as paid and owned programs.





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# Why the integrated approach makes sense

The third-party validation that comes from earned media brings authority in a way no other media does. Moreover, earned media has a stronger emotional connection to the buyer because it's a trusted platform. If you can harness the power of earned media and leverage it through owned and paid channels, you multiply its value. We've proven this to be true with B2B clients like 3M and Stratasys.



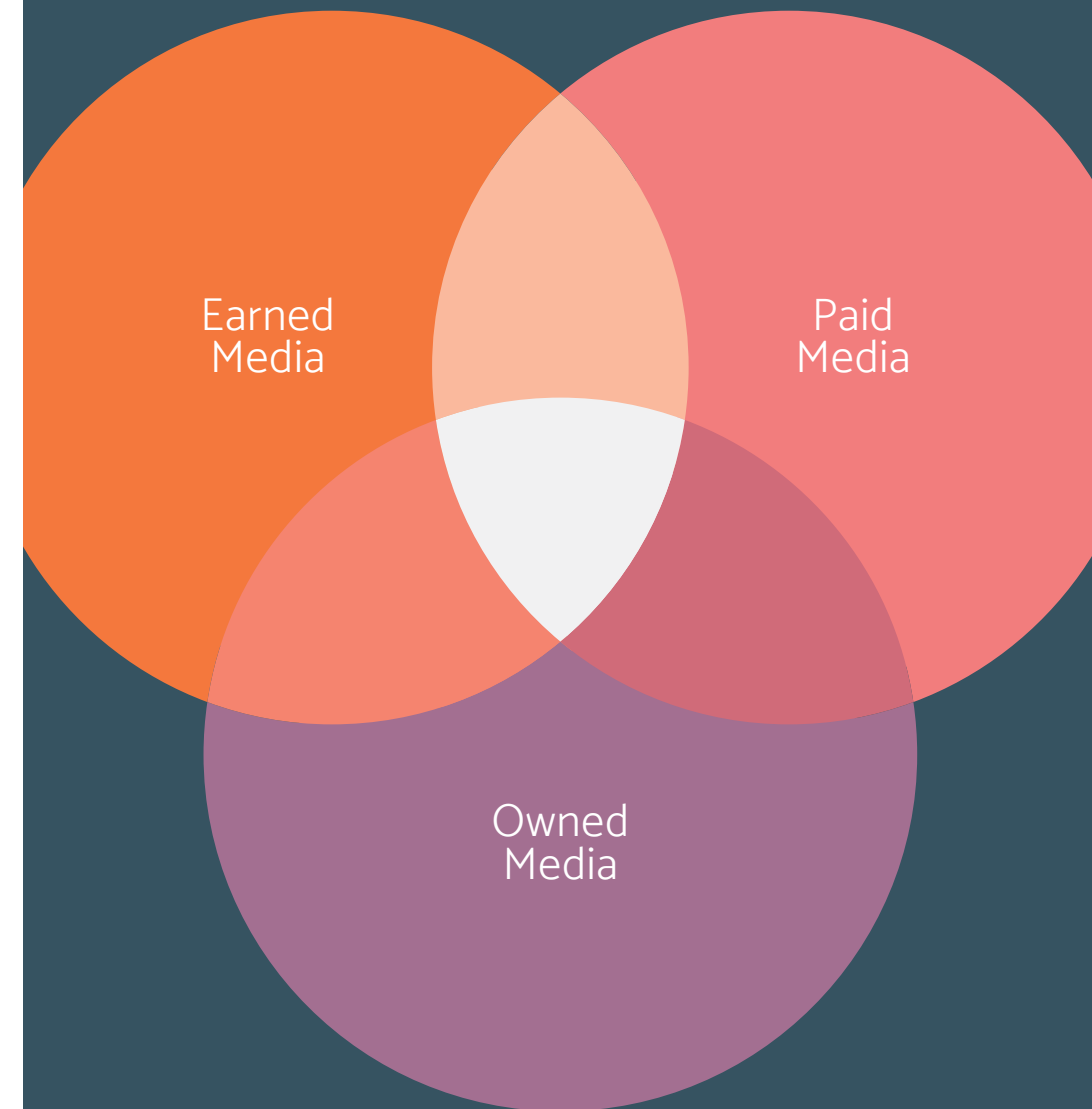
“62 percent of marketers said they plan to increase internal staffing to support PR over the next five years, and 75 percent said they plan to increase overall spending on PR.”

– *Global Communications Report 2017*,  
USC Center for Public Relations

The Mad Men era of attracting audiences with witty copy and shiny product features and benefits is long gone. Audience attention spans are low. If content isn't valuable, doesn't offer a clear audience benefit and isn't validated through a trusted source, prospects won't waste their time..

Selling only works when people are ready to buy. You must offer non-commercial content that supports conversion before someone is ready to buy. Successful PR, rooted in a journalistic-style of writing, goes beyond selling to offer a strong point of view, thought leadership and valuable content. This non-commercial style should be applied outside of the earned media silo.

However, there are elements of PR that are out of a brand's control, whether it's the way a journalist interprets your messaging or if a publication removes a backlink to your site, PR is often more unpredictable than owned or paid and therefore is left in its silo. The first step in deriving more business value from PR is to identify the barriers to integration and measurement in your organization.



# 7 limitations B2B brands face in deriving real business value from PR

The integration of earned, owned and paid media sounds simple enough, but doing it effectively is not without its challenges. In order to do so, you have to understand the factors that have long kept PR in its silo.



Earned and paid media use very different content and messaging.

## Realities

Paid media is inherently commercial. Company advertisements and other paid promotions are designed to sell product. Earned media is the opposite. Journalists' roles are to tell independent, unbiased stories to educate their audiences. So, PR activities are typically excused from adhering to the strict brand standards that all other marketing activities must follow and often the brand is lost.

## Ideal state

The key to effective integration of earned and paid media is to stop looking at them as opposites and find ways to pull third-party endorsed content into paid media and non-commercial brand messaging into earned media placements.



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## The view of PR is limited to awareness-building (top-of-funnel activities).

### Realities

We've found that each marketer's biases and experience contribute to their perception of PR and what its role should be. It's common for B2B brands to limit PR's role to generating awareness of product and company developments and miss out on opportunities to engage prospects with thought leadership content, or high-value, educational content focused on topics an organization or individual knows a lot about, deeper in the sales funnel. Yet, research shows thought leadership not only raises awareness, but aids in the vetting process and influences buyers.



"88% of business decision makers and 90% of C-suite executives said their respect and admiration for an organization increases after engaging with their thought leadership"

– *How Thought Leadership Impacts Demand Generation*, An Edelman-LinkedIn Research Study

### Ideal state

The ideal state is to use journalistic-style content written from a customer-centric point of view, addressing pain points and offering solutions that help customers do their jobs better throughout the funnel, not simply at the top in awareness building and earned media. Content that takes a point of view on industry trends and provides helpful insights builds credibility with prospects and strengthens your relationship with existing customers.

Commitment to thought leadership content and PR throughout the buyer's journey starts at the top. Everyone throughout the organization needs to understand how customers perceive the brand so that they hear the same messages at every touch point.

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## PR planning is episodic, rather than continuous.

### Realities

The approach to PR tends to be episodic for many companies. It's based on the major "news" items throughout the year – e.g. we have a product launch on this date and a key conference or event happening on this date. But that lens prevents PR from contributing to a bigger picture goal.

### Ideal state

The culture of PR planning has to change. Sophisticated marketers and communications pros who are having the most success proving the business impact of PR are looking at it more holistically, on an annual program basis, with a series of campaigns throughout the year.



The culture of PR planning has to change. Look at it more holistically with a series of campaigns throughout the year.

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## Effective buyer engagement platform is lacking.

### Realities

High-quality owned media ensures the conversation doesn't end with one earned media placement. Relevant calls to action, backed by valuable, customer-centric content, keep readers engaged and build a relationship before they're ready to buy.

Many B2B marketers are dealing with a hard-coded website that's difficult to update on a regular basis and without the budget for an entire overhaul. Therefore, their ability to update messaging and publish ongoing owned content is limited.

## Ideal state

In order to integrate earned, owned and paid media, you need the infrastructure and marketing technology stack in place to regularly update your website without a developer, publish owned thought leadership, and attribute touchpoints throughout the buyer's journey. The ideal buyer engagement platform contains:

- Customer-centric messaging in which the value narrative comes before product information and is consistent with all inbound promotional copy.
- Meaningful conversion opportunities (both soft and hard calls to action) at every level to capture and nurture leads through the sales and marketing funnel.
- The ability to regularly publish owned media/thought leadership content.

“Irrelevant content is the #1 reason consumers don't engage more often.”

– *The State of Engagement*, Marketo

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## Content strategy is not integrated across all marketing efforts.

### Realities

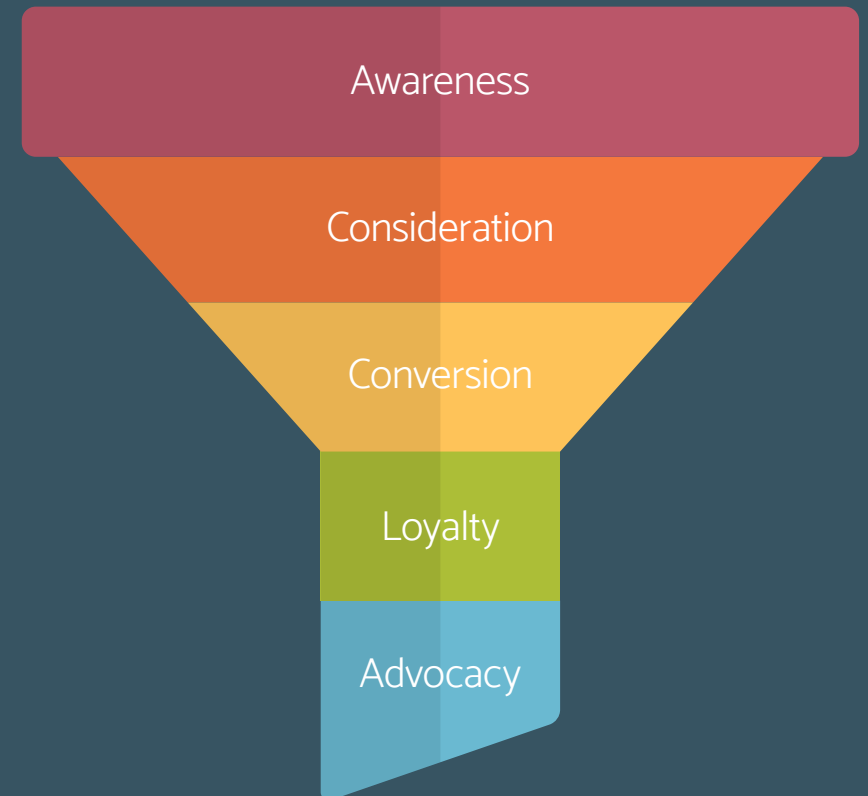
Corporate marketing teams, external agency partners, contractors and freelancers, are all responsible for understanding business objectives and following the same marketing plan, but without a documented content strategy that links assets to those tangible business objectives, content creation and execution happens in silos.

And while the PR firm often leads the development of the thought leadership and messaging strategy, the marketing team doesn't always view thought leadership as the key branding driver or a foundation for the content strategy.

### Ideal state

There's one, central content strategy and calendar that all team members—internal and external—are held accountable to. It's built on a solid foundation of thought leadership campaigns tied to business objectives. Additionally, a well-defined messaging platform and point of view in every channel and outlet, ensures a consistent brand story throughout the entire buyer's journey.

Marketing teams also see success when all partners are committed and accountable to creating valuable content that buyers need and helps them do their jobs better, not focused on product features and benefits.





## Team and culture not built for agility.

### Realities

We live in a 24/7 news cycle and B2B buyers expect brands to always be on. Proactive companies that can respond to customers' needs in real-time, leverage timely news and offer an expert point of view win the race for mind share. However, many B2B corporations aren't structured for this type of agility and require many layers of approvals, making it a challenge to engage quickly.

### Ideal state

A documented "rapid response" process with well-defined roles for select time-sensitive content accelerates approvals. Also, when all stakeholders are educated on the marketing objectives and importance of speed, specifically those outside of marketing, such as legal and general management, they understand the need for agility.



## Strongest content assets aren't deployed across earned, owned and paid channels.

### Realities

Sirius Decisions reports that up to 70 percent of content created by B2B marketing teams goes unused. Part of it is due to marketers not having a clear understanding of what topics and formats audiences want, but it could also be due to lack of a cohesive distribution plan.

B2B marketers typically remember to promote self-created content on owned and paid media channels, but they often forget to incorporate third-party-generated content (earned media) into owned and paid channels. Yet, if we don't do something with earned media content after it's been placed, we're wasting it. Another reality: tagged links to company websites are often removed by publishers, making it difficult to measure engagement and leads from earned media placements – more on this later in the measurement chapter.

### Ideal state

The ideal state is to use paid channels, like LinkedIn Sponsored Content and programmatic platforms, to target very specific demographics and companies, ensuring your content is consumed by the right audiences at the right times. Companies can maximize their return on paid advertising when they not only promote branded content, but third-party trade articles to help extend the reach of earned media and make it more measurable. Similarly, marketers can get more mileage out of in-depth gated assets when they're able to repurpose them in many ways and promote derivative assets across owned, earned and paid media channels.

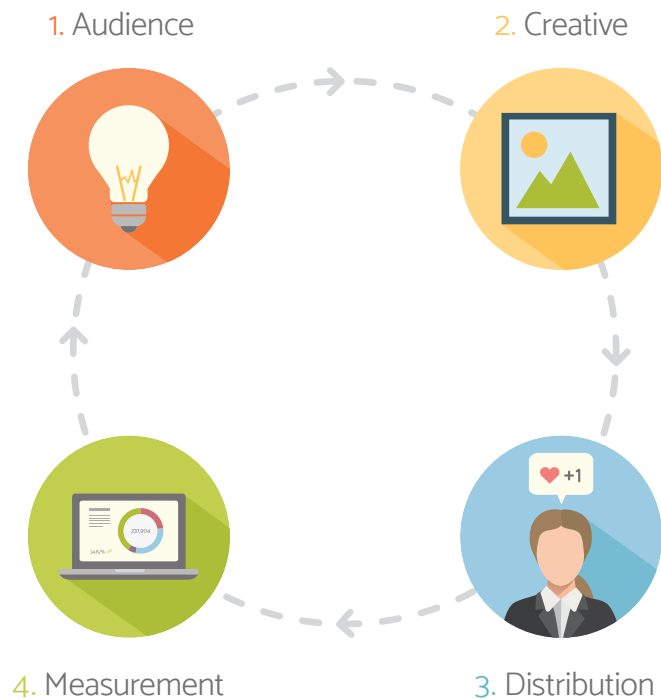
Maximize the ROI of earned media content by sharing it on owned & paid channels.





# How to maximize the impact of PR

We've seen PR enhance customer loyalty and generate sales leads. If that's exactly the kind of results you're looking for, follow these three steps to unlock more business impact from PR.



## Focus your PR strategy on fulfilling your brand promise.

In order for PR to integrate with commercial channels, PR must have stronger alignment to the brand positioning and promise. So, start by developing a strong narrative and content strategy that authentically demonstrates how the brand promise is delivered through means other than goods and services. Without effectively integrating the brand promise into PR content, the brand promise lacks authenticity and PR is flash-in-the-plan publicity. The best way to find out how to communicate the brand promise through non-commercial messaging is to ask your customers what information matters to them. Voice of customer (VOC) isn't just for product developers. VOC principles can be applied to content strategy, messaging hierarchy and persona development as well.

At Inprela we frequently spearhead VOC projects for clients to define and develop the non-commercial, emotional narrative aligned with the brand to infuse into earned, owned and paid media. Once you have insights from a VOC study, you can use them as a filter to:

- Audit content, messages and platforms to identify gaps and develop a roadmap for improvement.
- Refine target personas with relevant content types and topics for each one.
- Establish a consistent tone, voice and personality based on the main differentiators your customers see in your brand.
- Prioritize your time and spending based on what appeals to your prospects and customers on an emotional level.

VOC strategy doesn't end with marketing. It can yield benefits across the organization, from business development to customer service to product development.

In addition to nailing the narrative, the right distribution and promotion channels are essential to fulfilling your brand promise. It's important to research where your prospective buyer gets their information and spends their time online to ensure you're reaching the right audience. Beyond researching trade publications, look at your web analytics and top referral sources, investigate social media channels, analyze trend data or ask your customers through a survey or focus group.

“US B2B buyers say they want more insight from industry thought leaders (96%) and less focus on product specifics, more focus on value (92%).”

– *Content Preferences Survey Report*,  
Demand Gen Report

### Develop an integrated content strategy.

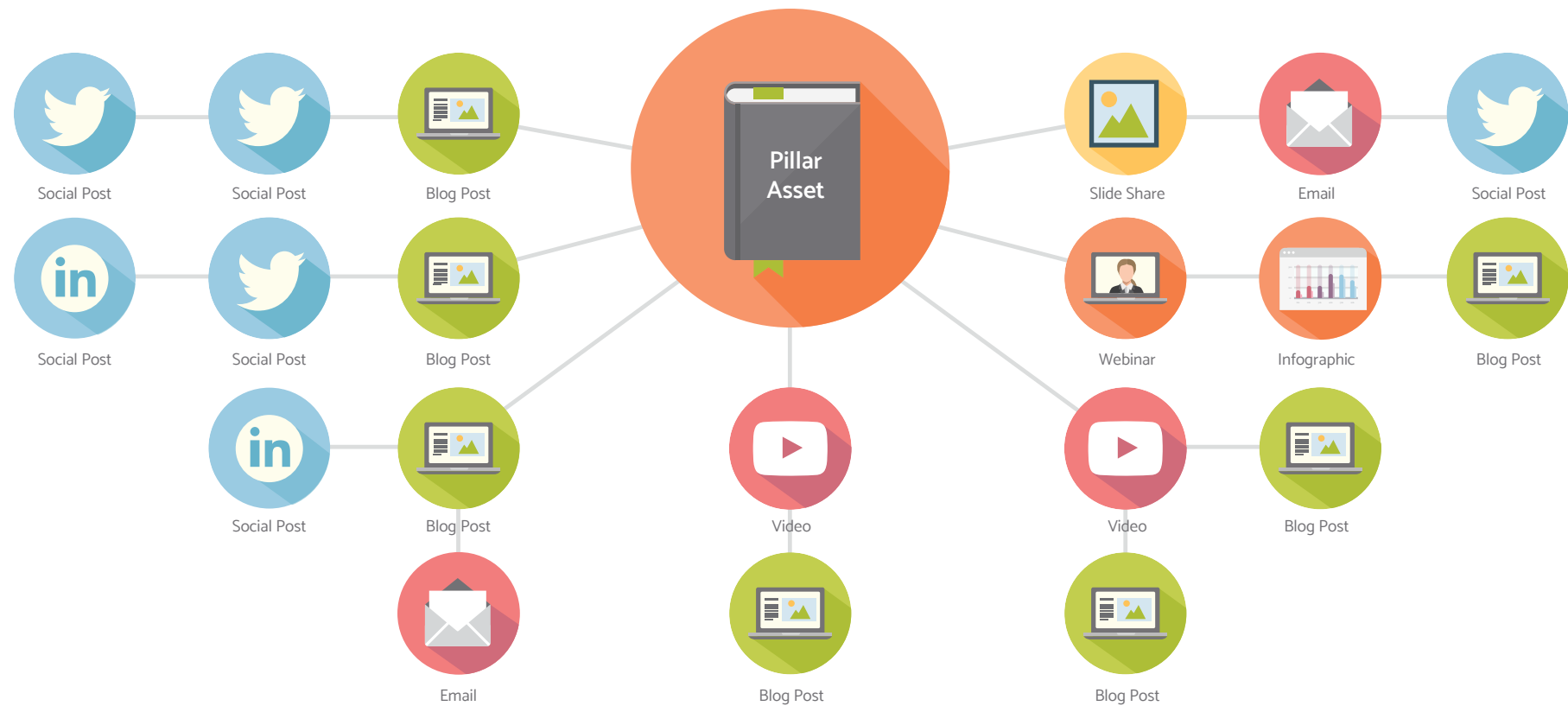
Kristina Halvorson, queen of content, said, “content strategy defines how you’re going to use content to meet your business goals and satisfy your users’ needs.” It aligns topics, themes and formats to the buyer’s journey and what information the user needs to get to the next stage. All marketing functions have a key role to play in content strategy as it ties all marketing functions together and ensures everyone is rallying around the same business goals. Here are some tools and tactics that make it real.

### Content/editorial calendar

A content or editorial calendar is a master view of all of the various content being published across the organization, including blog posts, case studies, gated white papers and webinars, video, etc. outlining the persona each piece is targeted at, user needs it fulfills, primary call to action and how it will be distributed. This calendar could also include events, product launches, speaking engagements, industry themes and campaigns so that teams can identify support needs and overlap.

### Pillar assets

Pillar assets are substantive, in-depth pieces of content, such as guides, reports, white papers and eBooks (like this!) that can be sliced and diced into derivative topics and materials. Not only does this approach save time and money, it can serve as the glue and main call to action in an integrated campaign. Two to four high quality pillar assets can carry a content engine for an entire year with derivative blog posts, contributed articles, infographics, speaking topics, and more.



## Implement effective deployment and distribution.

A strong, established narrative and an integrated content strategy won't get you anywhere without effective execution. Distributing and deploying an integrated strategy is the most crucial part of optimizing PR ROI. Here are some key tactics and best practices for integrating execution and maximizing distribution.



## Integrating earned and owned

Start with a high-value, piece of owned pillar content built on your brand narrative. Extract derivative topics and angles relevant to earned media outlets that your target audience is consuming. Pitch and secure derivative contributed content with the call to action to download the full piece on your website. Or if it's big enough news, such as an industry report or study, announce it via a press conference and/or press release with a link back to full piece. Earned media not only extends the reach of owned content, but garners a third-party endorsement, building brand trust and increasing downloads and lead generation. It also builds referral traffic and backlinks to your website, boosting SEO. Story angles extracted from pillar assets can be distributed through earned media in a number of ways, including:

- Contributed or bylined articles in industry media outlets
- Speaking engagements at industry trade shows or events
- Podcasts
- Guest blog posts
- Influencer or key opinion leader engagement

Earned media extends the reach of owned content to garner third-party endorsement, build trust & increase lead generation.

Also consider flipping the approach: distributing earned media placements through your owned channels to extend the reach, support sales, build employee engagement, increase customer loyalty and improve SEO. For example:

- Publish or embed excerpts of earned media placements on your website in an "in the news" section, resources page or blog with a link to the placement.
- Enlist an influencer or well-known journalist in your industry to write guest content for your website.
- Share speaking engagement slides on your SlideShare account or publish a video recording on your site.
- Send earned media placements to the sales team to use as a sales tool and to add credibility to sales pitches.
- Use earned media content in email newsletters or lead nurture programs to enhance brand credibility.
- Promote the respected awards you've earned on your website home page and in email newsletters.
- Leverage your employees—your best brand advocates. Send them earned media coverage. They'll be proud to see their company in the media and motivated to share the news with their networks.

## Integrating earned and paid

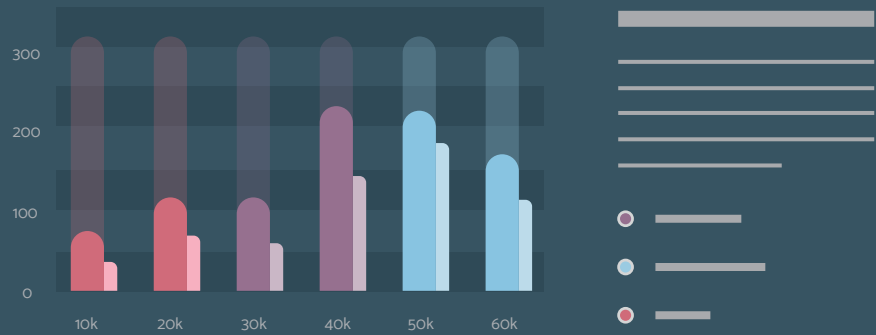
Amplify earned media content through paid media channels to extend the reach, get valuable thought leadership content in front of your target audiences and build trust with prospects and customers.

- Share contributed articles and news coverage through paid social media amplification. Paid social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, allow you to target specific job titles, companies and industries.
- Retarget your website visitors with ads promoting earned media articles and content to augment other reengagement activities.
- If your spokesperson was a part of a video media interview or speaking engagement, extend the reach via YouTube advertising.
- Promote earned media content to key industries and audience segments through programmatic display advertising.

Tip: The headlines and creative you use to promote earned content through paid channels should not follow the same style and approach as the headlines and creative you use to promote products through paid channels. Employ a team who understands the fundamental difference and is skilled in the development of that content.

Driving growth with PR requires doing something new. Results don't follow rinse and repeat programs.





# How to measure and refine the new approach to PR

## Expand your KPIs.

You must have proper key performance indicators and tracking in place in order to prove PR's business value and have earned media be held accountable to the same metrics as digital marketing channels. Incorporate the following KPIs to measure PR's impact and to make better informed marketing decisions.

- Placements & impressions – This is still important in assessing the reach of your brand narrative.
- Prominence – A simple product mention is not as valuable as a full 1,500-word bylined article by one of your company's subject matter experts so it's important to measure the prominence of each individual piece of coverage.
- Sentiment – Is the media positioning your brand in a positive or negative way?
- Share of voice – How often is your brand mentioned compared to your top competitors?
- Organic social shares of earned media placements – Are your earned media placements driving engagement on social extending the reach?



“Nearly 70% of communications professionals don't have enough data and analytics to properly attribute how their earned media programs impact key financial and business results.”

– 2017 Global Comms Report: Challenges and Trends, PRWeek and Cision

## Incorporate web analytics.

The metrics above still don't truly measure PR's impact on the business like you can with digital marketing. That's why it's important to leverage web analytics for PR measurement to answer: 1.) are PR placements motivating prospects to engage on your website and, 2.) out of those who engage, are they buying from you? Start by tracking the following KPIs:

- Referral traffic – How many referral sessions are generated from earned media backlinks? Make sure to properly tag links in contributed content and press releases so you know exactly which publications, articles or press releases are driving referrals. If you have a marketing automation system, tagging links also ensures any new leads that come in through PR are attributed for.
- Spikes in direct and organic search traffic – Some publications remove backlinks in articles and often readers won't click hyperlinks, but instead will search for or go directly to a company's website. When you get coverage in a publication with a high number of unique

visitors per month or perhaps make a big announcement, add annotations to your web analytics so you can watch for spikes in organic and direct traffic that can be attributed back to PR efforts.

- Goal completions – Goals in web analytics are important calls to action that indicate buying intent on your website. A goal could be filling out a form, clicking contact us, or finding a rep – you define the goals and web analytics platforms can track those actions and where the user came from, including earned media backlinks.



# B2B brands mastering the art of earned, owned and paid integration

Is the concept of this e-book revolutionary? No. But developing the strategic foundation and making integration successful across your cross-functional marketing organization, consistently, can be hard. There's hope. Our most sophisticated clients are bulldozing roadblocks and reaping the rewards.

“You’re getting us thinking about stuff in a way no other marketing partner has done.”

– Marcom manager for a multinational manufacturer of healthcare products





Case study:

# 3M Vascular

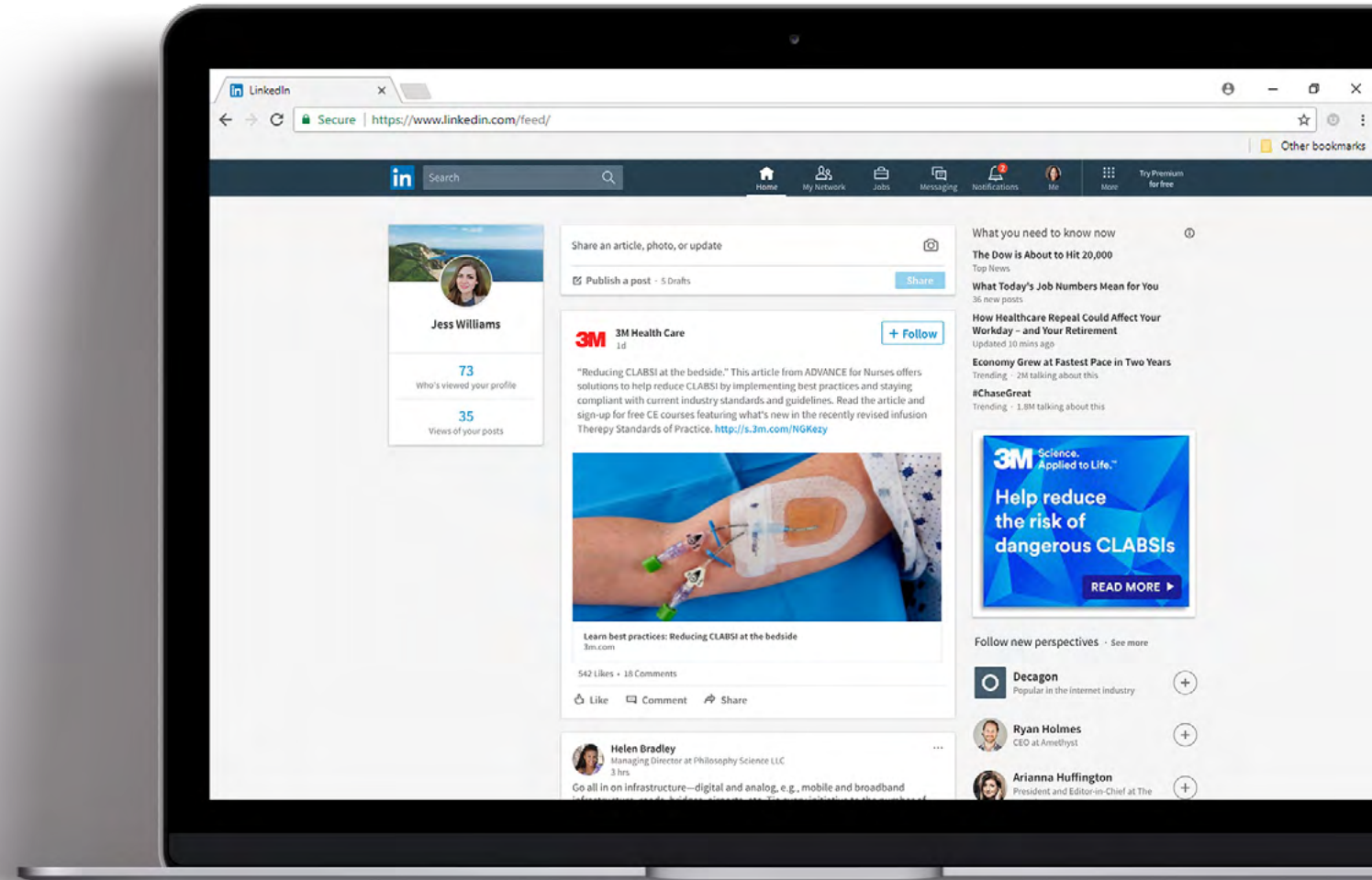
Bloodstream infections are some of the deadliest and most expensive hospital-acquired infections. 3M's vascular access solutions business, a division of 3M Health Care, set out to raise awareness of this critical issue and educate nurses, infection preventionists and procurement managers on strategies for preventing bloodstream infections with relevant, non-commercial content and credible clinical spokespeople.

While key infection prevention trade publications were very interested in 3M's non-commercial point of view on the topic, they reached a relatively small niche audience. To boost reach, Inprela recommended using LinkedIn sponsored content. This tactic allowed 3M to target specific job titles, companies, and interest groups, and resulted in a 143% increase in the reach of two of its most compelling earned media placements.

The LinkedIn amplification campaign increased traffic to 3M's vascular access solutions web page by 100% during the campaign period. Click-through rate (CTR) for the 3M sponsored posts achieved 2X the LinkedIn industry benchmark, and engagement rate (likes, shares, comments) was 3X the LinkedIn industry benchmark.

At a higher level, 3M's earned media placements and paid social media amplification have consistently generated more impressions than any other marketing tactics deployed (SEM, display, email marketing, print ads, etc.) over the past year.

This successful PR campaign was a catalyst for 3M vascular access solutions to mobilize internal cross-functional teams and agency partners to collaborate and fully integrate the business's paid, earned and owned media programs.





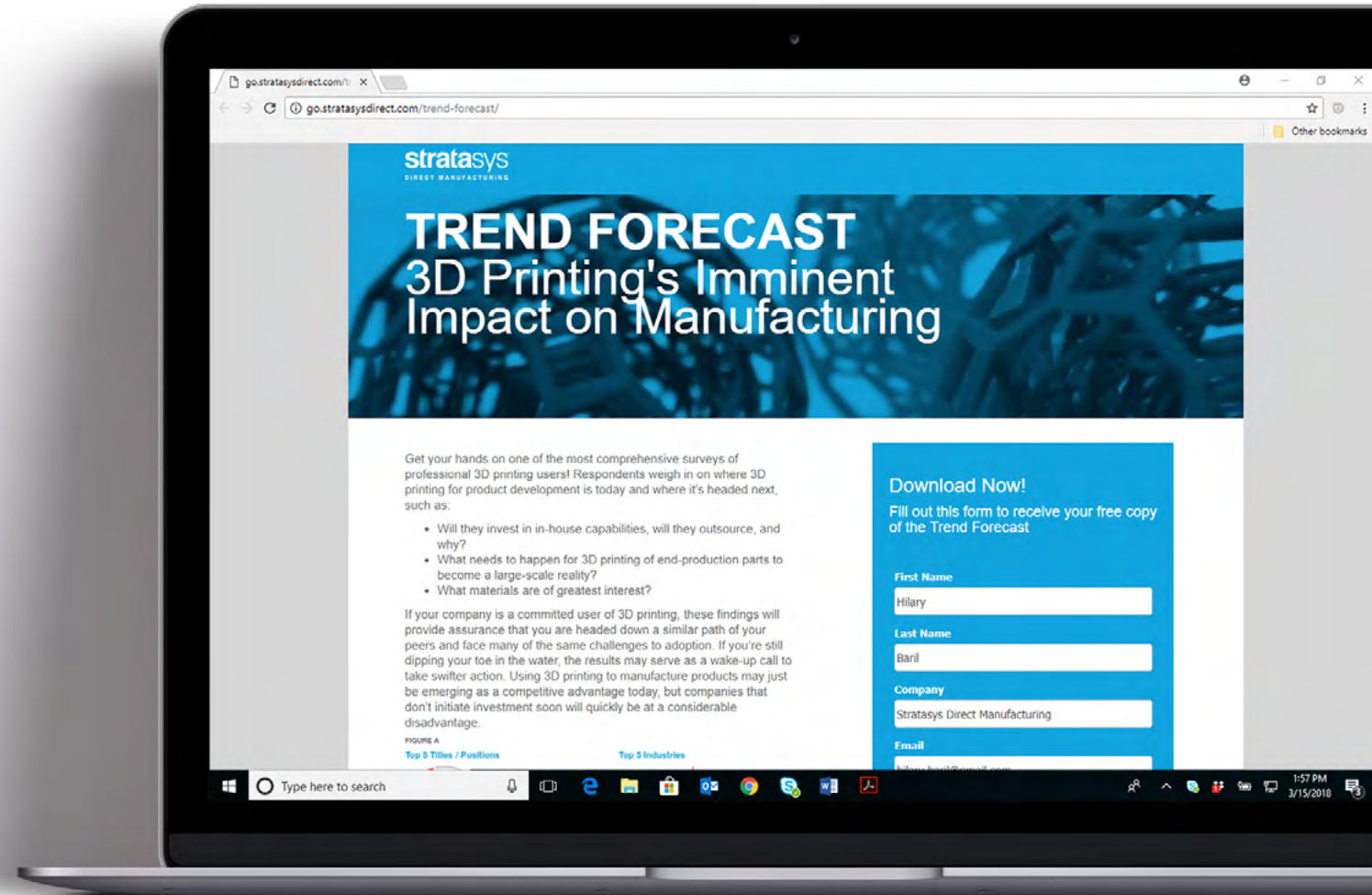
Case study:

# Stratasys Direct Manufacturing

Stratasys Direct Manufacturing, a division of Stratasys, the global leader in applied additive technology solutions, came to us with the assignment of using PR to generate leads. Inprela knew we had to develop compelling content in order to capture attention of business decision makers and generate demand. The team commissioned third-party research to survey manufacturers about the business value of 3D printing. We packaged the original findings in a report, “Trend Forecast: 3D Printing’s Imminent Impact on Manufacturing”, and exclusively released it to members of the press at an invite-only media summit.

Inprela secured 73 press mentions and over 200 social mentions, generating more than 7.25 million impressions. Stratasys Direct Manufacturing built an entire integrated campaign around the pillar piece of content, including a series of owned blog posts and emails, paid display ads, content syndication and social amplification and additional earned media articles – all with the call to action to download the full report.

The report was the second highest lead-generating marketing activity that year, generating 1,322 new leads and, out of those, 26 closed/won sales.



We've never done that before. It's too hard. My budget is too small. Our executive team will never agree to that. Trust us, we've heard it all. None of these excuses are good enough to prevent you from evolving your program. Unless you'd rather start polishing your resume. A new approach is never easy and effective integration isn't going to happen overnight. It takes a mind shift and a business change. Start small with tactics that show immediate results to gain buy-in, for example, put some budget toward amplifying an earned media article on LinkedIn. If properly executed, these quick wins can provide you with data points to build a case for an entire integrated campaign in the future with non-commercial, valuable thought leadership at the forefront.



#### **About Inprela**

Inprela is a B2B PR partner driving tangible value for healthcare and manufacturing companies. We help clients maximize the power of earned media by more effectively integrating it with owned and paid channels. With the Inprela team, you get straight talk, hard work and results, while having fun along the way.

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