WHY PRESS RELEASES ARE STILL NECESSARY FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

With insights into media behavior
SUMMARY

With so much changing in 2020, many events, exhibitors, attendees and sponsors are on edge, and needing to pivot strategies at the last minute.

Going from planning booth design, carpeting and signage to doing a 180 switch to a digital event seems like a big swing. But, there’s one thing that hasn’t changed – media outreach and event PR.

Aside from maybe a live interview at a physical event, media outreach remains pretty much the same since most PR is done online before the event or with a press release during the event. There may not be an on-site press room to drop materials off in, but there have always been online options like e-mail and pitching to the media is rarely done in-person.

And despite some slow adoption, many big events were already moving to a “green press room” which prohibits paper, USBs and CDs.

Yet, despite this constant, events and exhibitors seem to be forgetting about the media and PR communications when planning for virtual events. This is a mistake.

According to an industry survey presented by Evolio Marketing during their recent webinar “Success Metrics for Online, Hybrid, and In-Person Events”, exhibitors ranked the following objectives at most important when attending a virtual event:

- Connect with customers (1-on-1 meetings)
- Generate leads (1-on-1 meetings)
- Have a brand presence

Press release distribution can play a big part in helping exhibitors meet all of their desired goals.

"In an increasingly digital world, media want to access information online at anytime and we responded to the way journalists wanted to receive this information. This is an important benefit of the online press kit. Not only because people could find the information and quick when they wanted it – maybe a writer was doing something at 3 in the morning – also that it lives up there for a really long time. The other thing is, when you’re walking around a show the last thing you want to be doing is carrying around bags and bags of paper and it’s heavy. For the companies it was cutting their costs, and for the journalists it was making the information accessible any time, which in turn was beneficial to our companies. So that was really why we decided to make the move and we’re very, very happy that we did."

- Adrienne Appell, Director, Strategic Communications, Toy Industry Association

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Media and PR communications has always been done digitally and remains unchanged
- Sending press releases helps with virtual event objectives exhibitors rate the highest
- With dwindling resources, journalists are flocking to virtual events and enjoy covering them
- Journalists rate press releases as their most preferred format
Since the spontaneity of customer or prospect just dropping by your booth on the physical show floor isn’t as likely with a virtual event, PR and pre-show promotion is more important than ever.

Sending a release announcing your agenda for the virtual event with a well thought out call to action can ensure you’re driving customers, leads and the media to the right place and not losing valuable interactions.

One useful call to action would be to schedule a meeting. Depending on how an event is set up, attendees and influencers might be getting pop ups for a new product launch, giveaway or other event. Having meetings on the calendar is the best way to ensure you don’t lose traffic and leads to a competing pop up. Scheduled meetings also ensure you are able to have the staff available at the right time for meetings since you can’t risk someone trying to reach out with no response -- there isn’t a physical “I’ll circle back” mentality online.

In fact, many influencers prefer having meetings scheduled. Like this blogger’s experience with Sweet Suite@Home:

“While the event was online, I spent the entire time visiting with all the vendor booths and attending my scheduled meetings. Before the start of the event, I had brands reach out to schedule one on one meetings with me. It was great, I was able to plan my schedule ahead of time.”

- Savings with Denise Blog
MEDIA INTEREST IN VIRTUAL EVENTS IS GROWING

PRESS RELEASES RATED MOST USEFUL

As virtual events arise, there seems to be less focus on reaching the media, but that is precisely the opposite direction the media is going in.

According to Cision’s 2020 State of the Media Report staffing and general access to resources continues to be the biggest challenge for media and influencers. Many journalists responded that they file 10+ pieces a week (up from 2019). Scarce resources mean the media love virtual events since they can spend less time travelling (and less budget) and more time finding content and covering the event.

And for many years in the row, journalists also rated the press release the most useful brand resource and 72% of journalists said press releases and news announcements were one of the kinds of content they wanted to receive.

By distributing press releases via a large network before, during and after a virtual event, it increases the chance of earned media which can help with brand awareness and generating leads since buyers tend to trust earned media the most when making buying decisions.

QUESTION: 2020 State of the Media Survey

What do you believe was the biggest challenge for journalism in the last 12 months?
#1 - Staffing and resources (22%)
#2 - Social networks and influencers bypassing traditional media (18%).
PRESS RELEASES HELP COMPANIES STAND OUT

WITH BIG BOOTHS GONE – NOW IS THE TIME TO SHINE

With physical events, the only competitor you had was other exhibitors and event happenings. In a virtual space, you are competing with all of the event’s goings on, the rest of the internet and distractions in home environments.

On the other hand, virtual events level the playing field since booth size isn’t in play anymore – but using a “if I build it they will come” mentality is antiquated in this new virtual space.

The best way to stand out is to send newsworthy announcements out to catch attendee’s attention. Instead of letting attendees and the media gravitate toward familiar brands, use press releases to drive excitement about what your company has to offer.

Did you know press releases help with SEO?

Press releases utilizing SEO best practices allows search engines to find, match, index, and rank your press release for first page SERPs. PR Newswire has the highest organic search referred traffic in the industry, 2x more than its closest competitor.*

*Data Validated by SEMrush 2020
CONCLUSION

Press releases have been around since the early 1900s and even with this shift to virtual and hybrid events, they aren’t going anywhere anytime soon. The media depends on press releases to write stories and many rate them as the most useful type of brand content to receive.

Meanwhile, challenges like understaffed and under-resourced newsrooms make covering virtual events all that more appealing since they eliminate budget and travel time constraints.

With the virtual space leveling the playing field for brands, this is the perfect time to utilize press release distribution to stand out from the crowd and get desired attention of the media.

Earned media is the most trusted source when buyers are researching brands and helps give your company creditability and discoverability. Customers demand authenticity as they research, deliberate, and evaluate options during their path to purchase. Over the last several years, we’ve seen a resurgence of the public’s trust in journalism as audiences have turned to traditional and digital media publications to find credible information as their trust in other Information sources has waned (1).

To reach today’s modern customer, brands must invest in their earned media strategy. This was true before the pandemic, and remains true in the years to come.

Need guidance on promoting your virtual event presence? Reach us at VPO@cision.com and we’d be happy to help!

(1) 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer