

Top 10 Strategies for Boosting ROI Despite Shrinking Budgets and Dwindling Resources

Best practices for public relations, investor relations
and marketing professionals on how to do more with less
in tough economic times



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It seems like the first budgets to get cut in an unstable economy belong to the marketing and public relations departments – and this can be downright frightening...and costly in the long run. Press releases, media relations, establishing and maintaining your online presence...these are all things that may fall by the wayside when dollars are tight.

The fact is, in uncertain times it is more important than ever to connect with and speak to your customers and stakeholders proactively and on a regular basis to maintain and further strengthen the relationships you've built with them. It's also key to catching the eye of new prospects and new opportunities. Your brand, your products and your corporate reputation are not luxury items – they are necessities. And, they lead the way to increasing profits.

So how do you do more with less – especially when you're tasked to perform as before or even better, regardless of fewer resources?

Start by taking advantage of a whole new world of untapped audiences, new media and lucrative opportunities that "PR 2.0" offers. Here are some strategies for maintaining strong communications and ultimately adding to the bottom line during tough economic times:

"Maintain marketing spending. It is well documented that brands that increase advertising during a recession, when competitors are cutting back, can improve market share and return on investment at lower cost than during good economic times."

Harvard Business School "Working Knowledge," *Marketing Your Way through a Recession*, March 3, 2008

STRATEGY #1 PR (2.0) – Not Advertising – is the Strategy of Choice

Interbrand, a leading London-based consultancy and marketing research firm, has named the recipient of its Brand of the Year survey. In a landslide, the winner is...public relations.

According to Al Ries, author of *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*, public relations creates brands. Advertising defends brands. Advertising, no matter how clever, funny, dramatic or aesthetically pleasing, is self-serving. It is a pitch and no matter how cleverly disguised, we all recognize advertising as a pitch. There is no company on the planet spending a billion dollars a year on PR. In advertising, there are more than 25. There is no comparison in costs. Or, many would argue, in effectiveness.

But in today's social media world of Web 2.0, today's PR is not like your father's PR. ***You can now get better mileage from your PR dollar than you can from your advertising dollar, particularly in today's new media landscape.***

According to Deirdre Breakenridge in her book *PR 2.0 – New Media, New Tools, New Audiences*, “PR 2.0 uses a combination of social media tools that are available to communications professionals to reach and better communicate with influencers and consumer audiences directly. Social media is a direct-to-consumer approach that allows audiences to drive the communication in their communities. PR professionals are beginning to incorporate PR 2.0 into their strategy and planning as an effective way to communicate directly to Web 2.0 audiences, to raise awareness and increase overall brand exposure.

“Today, social media tools are accessible to brands large and small to reach audiences who want to control their own communication. In a Web 2.0 world, where thousands of communities are built, the traditional methods of web communication are not suitable. Web 2.0 technology combined with an audience’s desire to build and share content has transformed our industry. As a result, PR professionals are incorporating Web 2.0 resources into their brand’s PR strategy and planning for more targeted and impactful Web communication.”

So we need to think about press releases in terms of their online value and how they can outshine advertising in terms of return on investment. Banner ads and other paid online advertisements have a shelf life, while press releases don’t; their ROI has a longer horizon. You can calculate this by the traffic to your site and partner sites over the life of the release and its associate landing pages and media. The return from a press release may last for years when posted on your website:

- Press releases have an upfront (known) cost but no incremental or variable cost as does pay-per-click advertising, which can vary day to day. For example, the cost of the key term “press release distribution” was \$1.57 per click in September 2007 and increased to \$5.14 a year later as competition for that keyword increased.
- Press releases and their associated media show up in organic listings, which get 94-97% of all clicks online (organic versus paid).
- News has a shelf life and it is being incorporated into search engine results pages, crowding out web pages. Make sure to feed the news engines.
- Press releases allow for targeting the media and consumers – paid advertisement usually has only one focused audience.
- Links distributed through press releases allow for search engines to find those pages, providing:
 - credibility with search engines and help in boosting page ranks and organic listings (paid advertisement doesn’t);
 - direction of web traffic to a call-to-action page.

In tough times, it simply makes sense to devote a greater part of your marketing budget to public relations, and a greater portion of your public relations budget to SEO and social media-optimized press releases, which can reduce costs and increase exposure and potential ROI. We call this PR 2.0.

You can learn more about PR 2.0 at www.marketwire.com/PR2.0.

STRATEGY #2

Maintain Your Brand through a Regular Web Presence

During a recession, it's important to repeatedly let people know why your brand is worth its price by maintaining regular communications and focusing on the advantages of your products and services. Frequency and continuity are critical. A great way to accomplish this is to distribute press releases at regular intervals. This is particularly important for public companies when sharing negative financial news and reports; in fact, it's required by law. By going beyond minimal requirements and regularly conveying non-material news you can help maintain your competitive edge and brand equity.



In an analysis of the 1990-91 recession, Penton Research Services, Coopers & Lybrand, in conjunction with Business Science International, found that better-performing businesses focused on a strong marketing program enabling them to solidify their customer base, take business away from less aggressive competitors, and position themselves for future growth during the recovery. That was before the advent of online marketing. During the 2001 recession, online marketing was largely unproven and got caught up in the dot.com collapse.

Online marketing is different this time around. Although it won't disappear, online marketing is not immune to a slowdown. Even though eMarketer reduced its 2008 estimate for US online advertising to \$25.8 billion – a 7% reduction from its previous estimate – online advertising use is still 23% higher than the total spent on online advertising in 2007 – and it is growing at a significant pace.

One thing that *will* recede during a recession in our new media environment is interruption-based mass advertising. To successfully maintain your brand in today's online world, you need to understand Internet dynamics and take advantage of the democratized Web 2.0 world. What this means is that your communications need to be relationship-based, taking advantage of search marketing, social media press releases, lead nurturing, and online communities.

For the IR Professional...

During volatile conditions, the demands placed on IR by investors – as well as internally by management – will stay strong. CEOs will have to come to terms with the fact that – with the credit crunch continuing – large share price moves will continue to occur. To minimize risk and maximize opportunity in this environment, IR professionals need to adapt to meet the new challenges of the current downturn.

Companies can fight negative online publicity with the right know-how. The 2009 Search Marketing Benchmark Guide by Marketing Sherpa explains how one major bank reacted to a highly ranked site attacking its reputation by contacting other sites linked to the negative one and getting them to de-link, lowering the negative site's importance to search engines like Google. The bank also added a lot of search-optimized content to its own site – blogs, videos and press releases – to fill up more of the top spots in search listings. As a result, the offending site was knocked from the top page of search engine results.

A recent SEC survey supports the idea that many investors now rely mainly on the Internet for their investment research, with more than half of those who have Internet access using it when making investment decisions.

It is not about communicating with more or less frequency – it is about communicating consistently. Consistency is essential when it comes to maintaining investors' trust. IROs should be open, proactive and dependable in today's challenging market.

For a wealth of information that can help both IR and PR professionals maintain their brand in tough economic times, read IR Magazine's supplement "[Successful Communications in Challenging Times](#)."

STRATEGY #3 Get Smart with Your Mix of Web 2.0 Tools

If your marketing plan is not shifting toward more online communications and integrated programs, you are not fully connecting with your customers. Proper integration of online media adds depth and measurability to your programs. But most importantly, it makes you more accessible to your customers. Accessibility is an important key to marketing in today's business environment. You have to make it your mission to understand how your products are researched and found, and serve as a resource to people who are in search of information.

Since Web 2.0 has given birth to many online channels, the media mix is getting more and more complex. There is simply much greater choice, but that choice comes along with increased fragmentation. How do you manage this complexity and retain balance in your marketing communications? It starts with an understanding of the Web 2.0 tools at your disposal, your audience, and a close examination of how each can best accomplish your business goals. There is no one formula, but the following studies and examples should give you ideas on how you can develop your own online strategy.

Studies Point to Increased Use of Digital Media

A recent study conducted by the Direct Marketing Association, "[The Integrated Marketing Media Mix](#)," reveals that over the past three years, marketers say they are using more digital media: 75.8% said they are using more email than they were three years ago, 61.1% are using more online video, and 62.9% are using more search engine marketing.

Asked to project how they will use media in the future, marketers essentially said they would continue doing more of the same - increased use of digital media:

- 81% of respondents said they expect an increase in email use, and the mean expected change in media use was 4.21 on a 1-5 scale.
- Other digital media outlets expect to see higher use that includes (in order) search engine marketing, new media, campaign URL/PURLs, online video, banner/popup ads, and mobile.

A recent BtoBOnline survey shows the marketing mix people are using:

- **32.5% = Blogs**
- **29.2% = Podcast/Video**
- **17.5% = RSS Feeds**
- **14.2% = Social Networks**

As more and more organizations explore the wide variety of available Web 2.0 options and begin to take advantage of them, they are recognizing that they often produce higher rates of return than do traditional, more expensive marketing methods.

BMW Group: Taking Full Advantage of Online Tools

BMW Group is a prime example of an international corporation that is taking advantage of a wide mix of Web 2.0 tools to engage its audiences. These tools include:



- Reusable content, RSS, corporate blogs, and social media tools.
- Search engine optimization (SEO) and marketing (SEM): 80% of online traffic starts with search, and 92% of the Internet users are researching their new car purchase online. Optimizing content for search visibility, relevance, and orientation and leveraging search engine marketing combined with other media works best and efficiently increases web traffic.
- User-generated content (UGC) via such tools as wikis, blogs, social networks and mashups: searching for BMW products, services, events, and activities results in millions of tagged sources, and these tools help a brand join the conversation.
- Corporate blogs, corporate podcasts, video podcasts and platforms: Audio- and video-on-demand platforms, Apple iTunes Podcast Directory, YouTube, Sevenload, and Dailymotion reach a huge audience and provide a basis for seeding as a social media hub (www.bmw-web.tv).
- Social media activities, social media marketing (SMM), social media optimization (SMO), and conversational marketing: in social media communities (Facebook, XING, LinkedIn, MySpace) as well as in social bookmarking (delicious, MrWong), and social messaging (Twitter, MSN, Skype), people share information on a strong conversational, personal, and relational basis. People value and trust “Word of Mouth,” so encouraging them to (re)use and (re)share topics and assets of corporate origin will support intensive customer relations.
- Mobile media channels: Mobile channels offer a mass and a targeted reach. Mobile data consumption of multimedia content is growing rapidly (iPhone, Android).
- Mobile Content: BMW Mobile Channel <http://www.bmw.mobi/>: Adapted mobile value-added content: images, wallpapers, ringtones and corporate information.
- BMW Podcast <http://podcast.bmw.com/de/>: Global reach, Top 40 in iTunes (resulting in more than 10,000 downloads within the first two weeks).
- BMW Videocast <http://vodcast.bmw.com/>: Videos from auto shows, products, and motor sports generate large numbers of views during and after big events.
- Event blog “behind the scenes” started with the Americas Cup 2005.
- MINI Vlog <http://www.vlogbymini.de/>: Videos from auto shows, products, and motor sport and related events combined with social network activities (Facebook, Twitter).
- M Power World <https://www.m-power.com/>: Social community for BMW M drivers; today, 20% of the German BMW M customers are active in this community.

(Tony Douglas, BMW Group and Dieter Rappold, Knallgrau New Media Solutions GmbH, discussed BMW's effective use of new media at the Web 2.0 Expo in Berlin Delaware on October 23, 2008.)

Rethink Marketing during a Recession – Boost the Inbound, Reduce the Outbound

As you develop your online strategy, one thing is clear: interruptive, intrusive methods of marketing are rapidly being replaced by permission-based, inbound tactics – your best bet to shave dollars off your marketing budget while increasing your ROI.

Outbound (interruption – can be expensive)	Inbound (permission – cost effective)
Telemarketing	SEO/SEM
Trade shows	Blogging
Direct mail	Social Media
E-blasts	RSS
Print ads	Free tools/trials
TV/radio ads	Public relations

STRATEGY #4 Integrate Your Internal Forces for Optimal Results

Align Sales and Marketing

Potential customers typically begin their buying process by interacting with online and marketing channels before they talk with sales representatives. Organizations that coordinate their marketing and sales efforts, integrating them into a single revenue pipeline, will be more effective in converting sales leads to customers. The old days of dysfunctional silos and poor communication between these two departments must end – and at no time is this more important than during a recession.

However, this is a challenge facing many companies, since marketing departments are typically responsible for generating leads for the sales departments, but pass little information about the leads to the sales teams. At the same time, the sales tracking system in many companies is not able to share what happened to the leads back to the marketing departments. The key, then, is integrating these strategies.

A company has an integrated marketing and sales program when the sales and marketing teams work together to take a prospective customer from initial awareness through to becoming a loyal customer.

Here are two ways to integrate the sales and marketing functions in your organization:

1. Ensure both the marketing and sales teams convey the same brand and product positioning messages during the entire awareness-to-decision-making cycle.
2. Use a unified database used by both the marketing and sales teams that includes all information about sales leads, prospects and customers. In this type of integrated environment, a sales person has greater knowledge about the potential customer before making contact, such as what offer the person clicked on or which web pages they visited. And when a sales rep updates a prospect's information, marketing folks gets real-time intelligence that can help them refine offers and databases as well as measure the effectiveness of their campaigns.

Without an integrated CRM application such as GoldMine, ACT! or Salesforce.com, however, it is difficult to accomplish a truly integrated sales and marketing information system that connects campaign and lead management, web content management, and sales force automation.

Integrate Marketing Communications

In the old and not-so-old-days, companies maintained separate advertising, public relations, investor relations and communication departments. Each entity often used its own external agencies and vendors, all the while striving to stay loyal to the corporate brand while targeting their audiences with unique messages and within specific communication channels.



Along with the rise and impact of the Internet came a renewed focus on marketing accountability. New metrics such as page views and clicks assessed success. Target audiences, once neatly segregated by media outlet or distribution channel, became mixed in the vast online world of the Internet where now the buyer or reseller, and the customer or end user are at the receiving end of the same messages.

For decades, major consumer packaged goods companies such as Procter & Gamble, Kraft and PepsiCo excelled at understanding their target audiences, with marketing a core competency and competitive advantage. Although still using a customer-focused approach to marketing, they are now collaborating with online giants such as Google and Yahoo! to increase their market share as consumers exert greater and greater power and influence on the Internet. In their effort to more effectively engage these new influencers, companies are evolving to integrate their previously segregated marketing areas to create fully integrated marketing approach. They are unifying efforts across geographies and business units.

“Integrated marketing communications” strives to ensure that all communications received by a customer or prospect on behalf of an organization are relevant and consistent, according to The American Marketing Association. The term can also be defined as a “holistic” approach to promote buying and selling in the digital economy. It means integrating all online channels (e.g., e-marketing campaigns, search engine optimization, pay-per-click, banner ads, webinars, blogs, RSS, podcast) and offline channels (print advertising, direct mail, public relations, outdoor, and broadcast).

Regardless of the size of your organization, you’ll get the most mileage out of the money you spend on your marketing communications if you:

- Integrate the various elements of the marketing mix to maximize competitive advantage for your brand – advertising, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing. They all need to work together as a unified force rather than permitting each to work in isolation.
- Find ways for both your IR and PR departments to converge, thus doubling resources and maximizing efforts. Although some companies separate the IR function from the public relations and internal communication operations, more are recognizing the value of combining departments under one strategic communication umbrella, or at least fostering tight integration when it comes to speaking on the record to their many publics. Such areas as developing corporate profiles for the business press, crisis communications, content for analyst and investor meetings and non-financial

media to promote new products, campaigns, special events or charitable activities are great areas for a combined PR/IR strategy.

- Foster internal cooperation and communication among different functions to ensure consistent execution of the brand's promise between:
 - different functions,
 - different geographies, and
 - different agencies and suppliers.

STRATEGY #5 Lower Your Paid Search Costs by Raising Your Search Engine Results

According to Forrester Research's US Five-Year Interactive Marketing Forecast, search engine marketing expenditures are predicted to reach \$25,323 billion in the next five years, topping what marketers plan to spend on all channels (including email marketing and emerging channels).

Google owns 70% of that market share in the US, and it is even higher in some other countries. According to Steve Rubel's blog "Micropersuasion," "Google is much more than a search engine. It's media. Every day people make purchasing and life decisions based on what they find on the Web. Patients visit their doctor's offices armed with reams of information they found on Google, some of it right, some wrong. Consumers are accessing Google from their cell phones to compare prices when shopping. And Wikipedia, a site that no one controls, tends to dominate many high-profile search results."

If your news isn't ranking high in search results when people enter keywords associated with your service or product, you are ignoring cost-effective opportunities to reach potential customers with your messages. There are several things you can do. You can buy paid search advertising, but this can be very expensive and is not necessary. Enquiro found that consumers were 16% less likely to consider a purchase if a brand didn't appear in search engine results pages. If you make some modifications to your website you can accomplish the same results through organic searches. A good way to do this is to take advantage of press releases with live hyperlinks and defined keywords.

Organic results are more trusted by both consumer and business searchers, with 94-97% of clicks in organic listings, according to Marketing Sherpa in June 2008.

In a presentation titled [The Brand Lift of Search](#), Enquiro found a 2.2-time lift in brand recall when the brand appeared in the top paid and organic listings, versus a 1.5-time lift if it only appeared in either the paid or organic alone.

To demonstrate the value of search, an Enquiro and SSI study (for Marketing Sherpa Search 2009 report) revealed:

- 79% of technical buyers use the Internet for their search, and 98% use Google before making a short list of vendors.

- Of the content that most buyers pass along:
 - white papers (57%) top the list
 - closely followed by product literature (49%)
 - and then articles from industry journalists (49%).

Website modifications increase Marketwire's SERP ranking

Marketwire's website underwent some critical changes that aligned several key pages with Google and other search engines. Now Marketwire products and services appear at the top of search engine results pages (SERPs) far more often when people enter key search terms related to them.

This alignment was a coordinated effort between Marketwire's marketing and IT departments. It consisted of analyzing search terms, adjusting the Marketwire website's sitemaps, changing content on key web pages, adding response forms, updating meta data coding, creating a script and adjusting the databases to allow for the new information. These are all steps anyone with knowledge of HTML and familiarity with your website can accomplish.

Within a 30-day period, the increase in search engine ranking almost doubled the organic traffic to Marketwire's website, resulting in a measurable increase in potential customers viewing Marketwire products and services and contacting Marketwire for more information. All this occurred without an increase in lead acquisition costs.

As an example, a key search term for people looking for news distribution is "Press Release Distribution." It's a term that's extremely relevant to the newswire industry, so it's one that newswire-industry

HubSpot, an Internet marketing software firm, points out that research suggests top organic search positions pull in 250% more traffic than top paid-for spots on Google.

advertisers pay highly for in paid search engine marketing. Although search engine rankings fluctuate, Marketwire increased its ranking for this keyword from page 4 to position #4 on page 1, as well as to position #1 on Google page 1. This represents a 186% increase in "organic" search versus paid advertising, equating to a savings of \$1,726 for just this one term over a 30-day period. So now, not only do we not have to pay for this term at \$5.69 cost per click, we're seeing an increase in all the traffic we receive for organic keywords. Since we

only optimized a few pages of our site (including our homepage) and those are producing higher than our site's average in terms increases in organic keyword traffic, we can assume that the work we did on the page and meta descriptions had something to do with (1) ranking higher in search engines results pages and (2) the snippet or summary in Google prompting people to actually click through to our page.

- Search term "marketwire.com":
 - Before:* 343,000 searches (as of July 19, 2008)
 - After:* 499,000, or a 45% increase in indexed pages
- Search term "Press Release Distribution":
 - Before:* Appeared on page four of a SERP
 - After:* Position # 1 on page # 1

- Pages included in the Google Index from Marketwire's site map:
Before: 85,000 pages, representing 16% of our sitemap content (as of Aug 1, 2008)
After: 265,000 – a 211% increase in our sitemap-indexed content, representing 49% of our current sitemap content

How you can use press releases to raise your search engine rank and drive traffic to your website

Press releases can be great tools to increase your search engine ranking and drive traffic to your website. You can do this by including hyperlinks in your release to reduce the time it takes for search engines to find you:

- Add a link to your press release. It's like giving someone your address – it helps people find your company, products, services or important events/announcements.
- Get your website pages picked up by search engines simply from distributing a press release. This happens in many ways, including when your press release is hosted on a site that is regularly browsed, or crawled, by search engines. Marketwire's website is crawled throughout the day, and links in press releases are picked up daily and put in search engine queues for possible search-engine crawling.



How do you know when your link has been crawled? You can review search engine traffic to the linked page in your website via your site's analytics. If you have no access to web analytic reports or would like an in-depth picture of your content's reach, Marketwire provides a [News Dashboard Report](#) after you distribute your SEO-optimized press release that shows when traffic was sent to your press release as Marketwire-hosted content. It also illustrates when your press release was crawled by search engines and when your links were put in the queue for possible search-engine indexing.

- Attract links from high-profile websites. Distribution also allows for links in your news to be carried downstream, adding those links to prominent sites such as Yahoo! News, MSN Money and CNN Money, creating inbound links that boost your search engine visibility even higher, adding more credibility with search engines.
- Drive people to your website. When people click on the keywords and hyperlinks in your press release, search engines record each one of those clicks as a vote for your hyperlinks and websites.



And if you include graphics in your press release, a thumbnail image that shows up near the top of the search results will attract people within the first second, according to a recent study. For the organic optimizer, this offers a brand-new opportunity to gain visibility on the search results page.

These tactics add credibility to your site for search engines and consumers. You'll need to get familiar with search engine optimization so you can use and monitor the keywords and key phrases most important to your audiences when they come looking for your products and services. In addition to Marketwire's News Dashboard, mentioned above, following are helpful resources to help you fine-tune your search strategy and communications:

- Measure the effectiveness of the keywords in your press release: visit <http://www.pressreleasegrader.com>.

- Find out which keywords are used most often in searches: visit <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>
- Get a multitude of tips and tools to boost your online effectiveness: visit <http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-tools/seobook>

For a broad overview of how SEO can be your cost-saving ally in today's online communications, read the white paper [Gaining Market Share during a Recession Using Search Marketing](#).

STRATEGY #6 Employ Online Communities to Help You Do Your Job

Campaigns focusing on blogs and social media sites can be great low- or no-cost ways to spread your messages and engage people who are shaping public opinion. But many businesses shy away from these new forms of communication because they are concerned about lack of control. In addition, many people don't feel they can effectively measure ROI through social media sites and blogs. You can read more about measuring social networking ROI in Tip #7.

Many Companies are Taking the Leap

Regardless of the reticence of many companies to take the leap, corporations are getting into blogs at an increasing rate. An August 2008 Washington Post article, "[Marketing Moves to the Blogosphere](#)," discusses the growing prevalence of corporate blogs. It discusses a few companies that are shifting their business models online.

One example is Marriott International: Kathleen Matthews, who heads global communications at Marriott International, came up with the idea for chief executive Bill Marriott's blog. He saw it as a good way to communicate. "That's the importance of public relations, of advertising, of everything we do," Marriott said. "And this is just another channel." Marriott also likes how the blog shows that he's "a human just like everybody else." Marriott has thousands of employees around the world, who make up about one-fifth of the blog's readership and comment frequently. "It is the virtual substitute for Bill Marriott visiting every hotel," Matthews said.

Of the approximately 112.5 million blogs on the Web, almost 5,000 are corporate, according to blog indexer Technorati.

Large corporations with a blog presence include GE, Cisco Systems, Wells Fargo, UPS, Kaiser Permanente, Intel, The Home Depot, Graco and Wal-Mart.

What about others? Forrester Research Study results released in August 2008 revealed that two-thirds of 300 attendees at an interactive session say they use email and Webinars in their marketing mix today, while only 35% or fewer use blogs, online forums, video produced by marketing, podcasts, customer-contributed content, or other Web 2.0 tactics. Surprisingly, 42% said they are using social networks like Facebook — up from the 25% who said they did in Forrester's earlier 2008 research.

Adam Sarner, an analyst with market research firm Gartner, said that 75 percent of Fortune 1000 companies are eager to get involved in social-networking initiatives for marketing or customer relations

purposes, but he predicts 50 percent of those campaigns will be classified as failures. What are they doing wrong?

“(Businesses) will rush to the community and try to connect, but essentially they won’t have a mutual purpose, and they’ll fail,” Sarner said.

“What does he mean by a ‘mutual purpose’? Any social media campaign has to be an authentic involvement with a community. *A successful campaign will serve both the company putting out the campaign and the audience interacting with it, and finding that balance is not easy.*

“Some of the most successful viral campaigns had no business value, yet blatant marketing efforts in a community don’t go down too well. So where does that leave you? Is social media just a waste of time? Will social media activities fall prey to budget cuts in the current economic squeeze? No, says Sarner. Businesses will turn to the Web to stay in touch with consumers during a difficult financial climate. ‘This is going to be a lifeline,’ he said. ‘Your spirit of customers is probably the only thing you have.’”

Gartner’s research shows that by 2012 fully half of all purchases will have some online component. That could mean searching for product reviews, reading about a new product on a blog, or comparing prices even if the purchase is ultimately made in a store. But just getting people talking isn’t enough, says

More than six out of 10 (63%) of marketing executives surveyed said they had increased their digital marketing spending in 2008. [September 2008 study by Epsilon.](#)

Sarner. “You need a focused content strategy that plays to what your audience needs and wants. Once you have that you can pick your tools and methods of distribution of the content.”

Vancouver BC Tourism shared how they used a Facebook group to get in touch with the folks who participate in their Dine Around promotion. It was a low cost activity that attracted more than 1200 people. And now they know who they are and what they like and dislike, they can market to them in the future. It was a smart campaign with a mutual purpose: get access to this group of people, form a community and share ideas, events, reviews and images.

Want to transform your press release into a social media tool with the power to engage 200 million people online? Check out [Marketwire’s Social Media 2.0 press release.](#)

Change in Marketing Spending According to US Senior Marketing Executives, by Segment, 2008 (% of respondents)

	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease
Interactive/online marketing	63%	23%	14%
Traditional marketing	13%	29%	59%
Advertising	7%	27%	65%

Note: n=175; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Epsilon, "Epsilon CMO Survey"; eMarketer calculations, September 8, 2008

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www.eMarketer.com

Areas of Marketing Spending Growth in the Next 12 Months According to B2C Marketers, July 2008 (% change)

	B2C product marketers	B2C services marketers
Internet marketing spending	23.02%	16.50%
Traditional advertising spending	0.36%	3.80%
Marketing (nonsales) hires	4.67%	4.60%
Overall marketing spending	2.91%	6.40%

Source: Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, "The CMO Survey" commissioned by the American Marketing Association, September 12, 2008

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www.eMarketer.com

STRATEGY #7

Set Goals and Measure Your Results. It's All about Accountability

When times get tough, there's typically an increased focus on quantifying ROI. Marketers today need to justify every investment to the CFO and prove marketing ROI and accountability to the CEO. Only by demonstrating their impact on pipeline and revenue will marketing departments stop being treated as cost centers and become respected parts of companies' revenue processes.

A good place to start transforming your marketing department into a revenue center is by defining measurable goals. Here are three that you can use to measure the success of your PR activities:

- **Outputs:** What factors in your PR campaign can impact your target audiences, or cause your public to act or behave in some way?
- **Outtakes:** How have your audiences responded to your messages?
- **Outcomes:** What is the impact of your PR campaign? What quantifiable changes in awareness, knowledge, attitude, opinions and behaviors have occurred?

If your ultimate goal is to generate sales leads, your action could be to place product reviews, initiate speakers programs or conduct proactive blogger outreach. Keep in mind that PR objectives should support the goals of the company as a whole. An output metric might consist of the number of meetings, speaking, engagements, blog mentions, reviews, or news releases you sent, and/or the number of media contacts made. Outtakes metrics could consist of the percent of people aware of your brand, those considering your brand, and/or preferring your brand. Finally, the outcome answers the "so what" by measuring the number of requests for information you receive.

How to measure social media ROI

In his article in *BtoB – The Magazine for Marketing Strategists*, Paul Gillen says "Don't worry about the numbers. The paradox of this argument is that social media is the most measurable medium ever invented. In addition to the standard Web metrics, marketers can tap into an assortment of services that track online sentiment, segment audiences according to their interests and even pinpoint individual influencers. This is measurement heaven. You just have to choose what *you* want to measure."



Your social networking objectives may be qualitative, such as conversations, company reputation or customer relationships, or quantitative, utilizing metrics such as website traffic, sales or SEO ranking. A great tool for helping you crystallize your social media strategy and develop measurement tools that fit your business objectives can be found in the document "[Digital Media Measurement for PR: Measuring the ROI of Social Media](#)" by KD Paine and Partners.

Tools to help you quantify your social networking success include:

[AideRSS](#) allows you to enter a URL and view statistics about its posts, including the most popular based on how many times they are shared on a variety of social networking sites (e.g., Google, Digg, Del.icio.us).

[Google Analytics](#) and [Feedburner](#) are free tools to help you analyze your company's blog traffic, subscriber count, keyword optimization and additional trends.

[Xinu](#) is a handy website where you can type in a URL and receive useful statistics ranging from search engine optimization to social bookmarking and more.

The bottom line is, there are many ways to measure your social media success. It all boils down to what, specifically, you are seeking to accomplish. Without this benchmark it's impossible to measure your ROI. Find out more about measuring PR results in the white paper "[Using Public Relations Research to Drive Business Results.](#)"

Gillen goes on to say, "Before throwing in the towel because of uncertain metrics, consider these factors: Social media campaigns are cheap. Don't ignore the 'I' side of the ROI equation. Blogs, Facebook accounts, YouTube profiles and the like are basically free and come with plentiful built-in metrics.

"It doesn't matter what metrics other people use. The issue isn't choosing between page views and unique visitors; it's choosing the right metrics for your situation and applying them in a disciplined manner. Different measurements match different situations. In a lead-generation campaign, for example, you probably want to know which Web sites are sending you the most traffic. But for a branding push, unique visitors or time spent on site may interest you more. The point isn't to hew to a standard; it's to make choices that are meaningful to you."

BL Ochman of agency What's Next Online, who has run several successful blog-based campaigns, estimates three-month costs of a formal campaign as little as \$50,000, which is a trivial investment compared to the cost of a single 30-second TV spot.

A September 2008 interview with Paul Dunay of Buzz Marketing for Technology provides advice for B2B marketers striving toward marketing ROI: Dunay says "first you have to have a lead nurturing platform in place. One that allows you to segment lists, send specific messages, score activities and profile behavior of those that have expressed interest in your company. Then you can bolt on more search traffic, and then you can serve special ads to those in your database. You gotta know what's happening on your website if you ever hope to be able to calculate an ROI. Second, once you have that in place you can begin to layer on more types of media syndicated podcasts, third-party wikis, external blogs and see if your database is going there and interacting with these sites where you are placing your content."

Want another great way to monitor the impact of your marketing campaign? Marketwire's [News Dashboard Monitoring](#) solution monitors 370,000 blogs and 30,000 online news sources. You can search by keyword, geography, language, category and information type to easily find out what people are saying about you and your industry, and you can even gauge sentiment ranking.

STRATEGY #8

Get Creative to Keep Your Current Customers Happy and Coming Back

Acquisition versus retention – the old argument that always showed the greater value in keeping current customers – doesn't necessarily fly in today's new media landscape when search engine marketing and the growth of Google can bring you thousands of potential new customers looking for your products and services. Still, in most firms, 20 percent of the clients produce 80 percent of the revenue, and so developing strategies to retain clients is a critical component of a strategic marketing plan. Consumers don't disappear during tough economic times, but they do become more cautious and value-conscious.



They also engage in more product comparisons before purchasing. Bringing them fresh ideas can be one of your key retention strategies, because if you don't do this your competitors will.

Considering that only 4% of upset customers complain, with the other 96% simply leaving and never coming back, it pays to be proactive by instituting a customer retention program. CRMBuyer columnist Louis Columbus says that since Web 2.0 technologies have changed the way companies and their customers interact, companies should update the messages they deliver to their customers to take better advantage of this.

How can you be creative and think outside the traditional PR / marketing box? Here are some ideas from Louis Columbus' article "Generating Leads in a Web 2.0 World" (TechNews World, October 6, 2008):

- **Overbalance the scales with offers of knowledge, not sales hype.** Instead of blasting out PDFs that tell prospects how great your company is, think about setting up weekly webinars where you invite in an industry expert that freely shares their knowledge of what's working in the area your products, services or software deliver value. Before you dismiss this as just for the Fortune 1000 realize that industry experts need PR coverage too and often you can get them do these in exchange for promoting their practice.
- **Define a Web 2.0 strategy now for your company and start executing on it fast.** The two best bloggers in this area are Josh Bernoff and Charlene Li of Forrester who write Groundswell. These two authors, through their analysis of social networking and the Web 2.0 landscape, continually show how transparent and more connected previously isolated social networks, both in private and commercial areas, have become. What also emerges from their analysis is that when Web 2.0 technologies are used for connecting with customers, sales hype is dead. Informative, knowledgeable content that solves a complex question or problem for a customer is all that matters. Blogging to deliver solutions to customers in the form of knowledge generates real leads. It takes some companies a year or so to see any sales from this, yet it is hardly time wasted. These companies have changed how relevant they are to customers by delivering significant value without first asking for an order. Sales follow knowledge.
- **Consider your own YouTube University.** Getting a channel on YouTube to upload videos that can be inexpensively produced is another approach to gaining a reputation as a company willing to share knowledge with potential and present customers. The development of your own YouTube University

also needs to have periodic updates, fueling new traffic in the process. It's a fairly large resource commitment to make, yet getting your best product experts onto your own YouTube channel can increase your company's credibility across the industry and with prospects.

- **Work with any channel, technology or services providers to offer them participation in your trade shows and events, and vice versa.** This works well as many partnerships have overlapping customer bases, yet have their own unique market segments as well. Developing this type of partnership significantly reduces the costs of trade shows and increases face-time with prospects, a critical part of lead generation.
- **Understand that Google AdWords is only as effective as your landing pages, lead management process and continual managing of keywords.** Google has delivered some exceptional tools in this area during 2008, including the ability to optimize a landing page design by testing it iteratively before it's launched. This is the largest lead generation strategy for many companies.

Build and optimize landing pages. When times are tough, it's more important than ever to maximize the return on your advertising. Whether you are using Google AdWords, banners, sponsorships, or email campaigns, a dedicated landing page is the single most effective way to turn a click into a prospect. MarketingSherpa's Landing Page Handbook shows that a relevant landing page can easily double conversions versus sending clicks to the home page, and testing your pages can increase conversions by another 48% or more. Together, these tactics alone can result in 2.5X more leads for every dollar you spend, something that's sure to look good in tough times. However, Marketing Sherpa also reports that most companies are under-using this important technique: just 44% of clicks for B2B companies are directed to the home page, not a special landing page, and of B2B companies that use landing pages, 62% have six or fewer total pages. A recession is perhaps the best time to focus on some of these basics.

Lead generation cannot be reduced to a series of causal factors; it all begins with trust in your company. In a Web 2.0 world, earning and retaining trust is much more about offering insight and knowledge first.

STRATEGY #9 Appeal to News Media with New Tools and Ready-to-go Content

Despite the ability to reach your target audiences directly online, media coverage is still instrumental to your PR success; however, we all know that media cutbacks are rampant and exacerbated in an economic downturn, so journalists are being charged to do more with less.

How do you make it easy for journalists on deadline to cover your news?

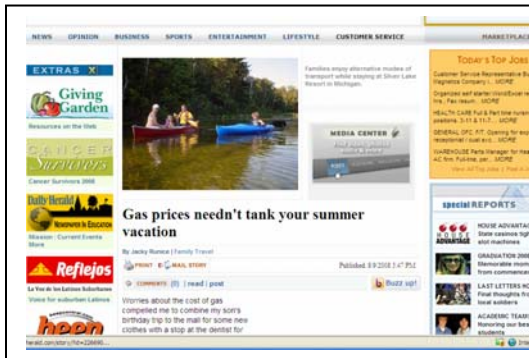
- Provide journalists your news via an RSS feed. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) allows a person's computer to receive and understand information, so that all of the news that person is interested in can be tracked and

- **98% of journalists use the web daily as part of their search for news**
- **81% of those journalists use search engines**

(Middleberg/Ross survey)

personalized for him or her. RSS allows journalists to configure news feeds that are automatically fed to them with the news occurs, so they can always stay up to date. Major newswires such as Marketwire offer RSS-enabled press releases to make it easy to share news with relevant social communities. And Marketwire's Social Media 2.0 press release includes 50 social media tags in the release itself.

- Fill news holes and be the “good news counterpart” to so much negative financial news with features releases. And feature editors are always looking for new content. Borrowing from Tip #8, a feature release presents a great opportunity to present your product or service in a different light. If you normally sell B2B, how can you reposition your message to appeal to consumers? A [feature release](#) is a great way to broaden your appeal to a new audience and stretch your marketing budget.



Feature story in the Daily Herald (third-largest daily in Illinois) about how families can enjoy vacationing during times of high gas prices. The third paragraph of the story identifies “hotels.com” offering a \$50 gas card with any 3-night stay (the photo is from Silver Lake Resort).

- Offer multimedia content, links to more information and an all-in-one source for news via a [social media press release](#). Photos, video clips and audio elements lend excitement to a story, attract attention, and appeal to overworked editors. Links to company newsrooms, expert sources and related topics streamline editors’ jobs.
- Use [Twitter](#). It’s easy to join and log onto. And it’s free and relevant for almost every type of business. Increasing numbers of journalists are relying on it to find sources and “tweet” about their upcoming projects to solicit input. You can use Twitter to help establish key people in your organization as go-to resources for your industry.

Journalists Use of Blogs

Marketwire recently sponsored two surveys querying journalists’ use of blogs. The first survey, “[Reporters Survey on Journalism, Social Media, and the Blogosphere](#),” explores journalists’ overall use of blogs. The second, “[Survey of Beat Reporters on Social Media, and the Blogosphere](#),” discusses which beat reporters follow which blogs.

STRATEGY #10 Monitor Your Competition; Boost the Inbound, Reduce What and Who May Be Tempted To Stray

“Know thy competition” is always a critical rule of thumb for marketers, but even more so during economic downturns. You need to find out what’s being said about your company, your industry, and by and about your competitors so you can monitor the equity of your brand and take action to preserve and even grow your brand equity.

A recent Millward Brown's BrandZ brand equity study revealed that on average, only 10 percent of consumers are exclusively motivated by price. So even if a promotion doubles during a recession, the

impact of these price-driven consumers will be relatively small and they will probably not be inclined to be brand loyal to begin with.

The following advice is for marketers from Millward Brown to help their brands thrive in the current uncertain market climate:

True brand-loyal consumers look for ways to continue getting their favorite brand. They may watch for opportunities to buy on deal, or buy a larger, more economical product. The key issue is perceived value.

Do your consumers believe that your brand offers better value than the competition? Provided that its price is in an acceptable range, people will be more inclined to buy a trusted brand than a low-priced one. Focus on reminding people why your brand is worth the price by focusing on the functional advantages. Monitor the equity of your brand.

If your brand is being sold increasingly on promotion, and your overall sales are holding up, it can be hard to assess if any long-term damage is being done. Research proves that the higher your share of voice compared to your actual market share, the more likely your brand is to grow its market share in the subsequent year. So, if you increase your marketing investment at a time when competitors are reducing theirs, you should substantially increase the saliency of your brand. This could help you establish an advantage that could be maintained for many years.

Brands that increase share during a recession stand to benefit from this multiplier once the economy rebounds.

A small amount of research can be invaluable when there is pressure on budgets to ensure that your ROI is maximized. Reduced noise provides opportunities. A new product launch may actually have greater impact during an economic downturn than at other times, for several reasons. A product that is unique or demonstrably better than others should be able to command a higher price, even among price-conscious shoppers.

Competitors who are running scared may be late in countering a new product with their me-too offerings.

Focus on the strength of your brand. Reinforce the attributes that differentiate your brand. Small or niche brands would do well to focus investment on the core brand offering rather than spread existing resources too thin. Larger brands may find more scope in category extension, particularly if the new category offers better growth prospects. You must consider the probable response of your key competitors.



A downturn can also create opportunity for the companies that are more efficient at turning marketing investments into revenue, since there will be less competition overall. In a [study of U.S. recessions](#), McGraw-Hill Research found that business-to-business firms that maintained or increased advertising expenditures during the 1981-1982 recession averaged significantly higher sales growth than those that eliminated or decreased advertising. In fact, by 1985 companies that were aggressive recession advertisers grew their revenue over 2.5X faster than those that reduced their advertising.

Discover New PR 2.0 Tools and Free Offers for Doing More with Less

Marketwire's PR- and IR-changing ideas and tools help make your life easier and messages more effective. We call it [Communicating 3.0](#). You'll find a host of solutions for sharpening your media database, building online buzz with a social media press release, skyrocketing your search engine ranking, developing an on-target feature release, and expanding your market intelligence.

If you are interested in a complimentary consultation on using PR 2.0 tools to economically and effectively boost your organization's ROI, please contact Marketwire at 800-774-9473 (US), 888-229-0338 (Canada), or 44-20-7562-6550 (international).

