



The growing importance – and the skills - of online PR

The online arena is a battleground for four groups to compete for clients' business: PR, advertising, search marketing and design. Companies in each of these areas claim to be perfectly placed to carry out online work.

Online PR can be split into four categories:

- **Listening:** using buzz monitoring tools to get a perspective on how a brand is perceived across blogs, forums, news media, social networks and video
- **Engaging:** having two-way conversations with people on the web to influence their perception of the brand.
- **Enhancing:** boosting a company's position on search engines and keeping adverse comments, news and so on out of sight.
- **Creating:** developing new content – video, viral games, blogs, Twitter feeds – to develop the personality of the brand and encourage further engagement.

Listening and engaging are areas where, in 'traditional' communications terms, PR agencies have proven skills. When it comes to enhancing, search marketing agencies should be able to offer more advanced search engine optimisation (SEO) services. However, PR specialists ought to be able to write better copy than SEO professionals.

Content creation is the traditional preserve of advertising and design agencies. However, while these agencies tend to want to work with large budgets, PR agencies tend to be able to create lower cost content that directly relates to the news agenda, which dominates the web.

All of this means that traditional PR skills – writing a press release or case study, briefing photographers and analysing press clippings – are being matched by such new skills as producing a social media release, or a video case study; briefing a game developer, and monitoring online buzz.

Blogger relations, social bookmarking, web analytics and moderating blog comments are now key PR skills to rank alongside writing and distributing press releases, dealing with media enquiries and analysing coverage. Moreover, today's trend is for the PR agency to create a blog or a microsite rather than produce a customer newsletter – and there's already more to online PR than YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.