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Upside of a downturn: How to survive, thrive in the digital age

New media is booming. Marketing spending in online spaces, games, social media, and similar areas is growing in double digits annually, and even more is projected. Savvy PR firms can find opportunities to help clients navigate these relatively new and complex waters. A PR firm's role is fundamentally the same, as skills forged in "old media" are expanded to work in these new mediums. To that end, consider these ideas to create opportunities in new media.

■ **Be a landscape expert.** Many of your clients are traditional consumer companies that need education and training in new media. People understand TV and newspapers. Now, you can leverage your traditional-communication expert role to show the differences between Facebook, blogging, and in-game advertising.

■ **Be a monitoring expert.** The traditional media monitoring function of PR firms is magnified in the digital age. In the last century, a few people could read every important information source for each client. Editorial schedules were weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Now, stories jump from Twitter to blogs to *Wired* in hours. After you display your expertise, clients will be overwhelmed at the possibilities. The mass of information available and the speed at which it is exchanged is greater than ever. Beyond merely being a guide, you can help sort and rate the importance of this information. You can be a key adviser and sentry watching new media channels.

■ **Be a content expert.** Tastes in new media differ from traditional media. PR firms can be experts at tailoring the message for new media. You know a traditional press release might not make sense for new media. Your firms are increasingly becoming experts at feeding releases to the "right" blogs, creating video that can easily be embedded in the best online spaces, and creating Internet buzz using these new tools. You realize that many people operating in this space do not want to be fed stories, but would rather feel they are discovering stories.

In the final analysis, remember that these new opportunities do exist in an unregulated legal environment, akin to the "Wild Wild West" during the westward expansion in the 1800s. Commercial speech regulation still applies to new media much like it does in traditional media. PR firms should have a standard clearance process for the communications disseminated for clients, whether in old or new media. The above ideas should be carefully balanced with good judgment. Arguably, new media requires more care and planning because of how quickly and irrevocably news spreads in this space with the correlating greater potential liabilities. However, the upside of mastering this new space is also greater. ■

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