

The Top 5 Professional Services PR Trends of 2020

It's finally past the time when PR, media and marketing professionals – and amateur soothsayers – have written and published their many blogs and articles about public relations and marketing trends for 2020. There is value in keeping tabs on trends, and taking stock in those that can help communicators target and reach their intended audiences more effectively – but so many articles, so little time.

I have taken a gander at these predictions so you don't have to. Many are great and insightful, but not all are necessarily relevant to service professionals and their firms, and only a few specifically focus on professional services PR. Here are my summaries of the most-pertinent 2020 public relations trends for professional services publicists.

Trend #1: To the Surprise of No One, Content Continues to Be Critical

Yes, past years' trends can still rule in 2020. Pretty much every communications professional now understands what we mean when we talk about "content" in the context of public relations. It's pretty clear that repurposing content will continue to have tremendous value in the coming year.

And it's not all about volume. Yes, consistently producing and delivering content to your audiences is important, but more vital is that the information provided be high-quality, highly relevant and educational. It also helps if the information is accessible – particularly to your less-sophisticated decision-makers – and even entertaining. After all, everyone likes [content that tells a story](#) rather than simply dictates facts and theories.

Still unsure about how to develop and distribute content that will elevate your firm's thought leadership? Consider some time-tested strategies and best practices. You can bet a robust content marketing strategy is sure to show up again on PR trends round-ups for 2021.

Trend #2: Op-Eds and Commentaries Are Gaining More Traction

Many PR pros foresee the number of commentary and op-ed articles from industry thought leaders being on the rise in 2020. Skilled professional service providers tend to be great writers and have valuable insights to share with their clients and stakeholders. However, one thing we hear all the time is that many of the smartest, most-successful professionals just don't have the time to write articles. It makes sense: Writing PR content leaves less time for servicing your clients.



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The truth is there are more opportunities and less competition for professionals to get articles published than to be quoted in stories in the press. This is because newspapers and business publications are still on the decline, while industry trade publications remain a relatively vibrant segment of the publishing industry. Many of these trade journals have limited or non-existent reporting staffs. They crave and need content from industry thought leaders to fill their pages with educational content in the form of analyses and commentary.

Publishing articles is a direct means to sharing thought leadership. It demonstrates that a service professional is a trusted authority in a particular practice or industry. It also helps to connect professionals with readers of a publication on a personal level and can influence or entice a potential client. Plus, any article can be repurposed for use through social media, a blog posting, an interview or even additional publishing opportunities.

But oh, wait – professionals still don't have time to write. The answer might be to think about co-authoring with other colleagues or use the services of a ghostwriter. The publishing opportunities are just too great to simply ignore in 2020.

Trend #3: Diversity and Inclusion Inspire Business and the Media

At the risk of discussing it in the context of a commodity, diversity continues to trend in the right direction. It has become more pervasive and commonplace in most industries, including the professional services sector. With more women and minorities making inroads and pressing to be seen and heard for their talents and contributions, the media also continue to place a premium on news that promotes diversity, equity and inclusion. As content creators and promoters for firms, we should continue to communicate our clients' messages and tell their stories through diverse points of view and voices.

The current business climate calls for spotlighting diverse leaders and professionals at all levels. This can and should involve raising the profiles of these diverse professionals through thought leadership vehicles and including their input in firm [PR and marketing strategy](#). To use law firms as an example, consider encouraging minority and women attorneys to partner with their colleagues in writing commentary articles for business and trade publications (which, by the way, could also help out those rainmaker attorneys who don't have much time to do a lot of writing on their own).

It is also worth noting that media, as a whole, are extremely eager to showcase diversity initiatives and professionals of color who excel in their profession. In my own unscientific analysis, I find that editors and media coverage gatekeepers – where news judgment is subjective and all other factors are equal – are more likely to cover an appointment or accolade about a minority professional.

Trend #4: Personal Relationships Matter More

The media will almost always cover significant firm announcements and high-profile news. It's the borderline news (e.g., newly hired junior professionals, firm accolades, firm events, etc.) that requires more-creative PR posturing and some good ol'-fashioned elbow

grease to get the job done. As the number of reporters and editors continues to shrink and the pool of professionals looking for media opportunities grows, media can be more selective about the sources they use. To tip the scales in your favor, get to know as many reporters and editors as possible on a personal level. Introduce yourself and your clients before you pitch for stories. Let reporters know you want to help them and not just take from them. [Meet beat reporters face to face](#) whenever possible – even if it's just once a year or once every couple of years. (This goes both for PR professionals as facilitators and service professionals as sources).

Reporters are busy, but many are willing to make time for brief background meetings and discussions. Communicate with them often, although not too aggressively. Try to have some substantive tip to offer or story suggestion each time you email. Follow what they are writing about, both specifically and generally, so they know you are invested in their reporting.

Trend #5: When Push Comes to Shove, Press Releases

Occasionally, I still read comments about the death of the press release. I'm here to tell you that it's just not true. I have lived and breathed press releases for well over 30 years from both sides of the table – as a reporter and editor, and as a publicist for lawyers, law firms and other service professions. The press release remains a principal document with which to deliver controlled messages and/or a story – it's a vehicle that journalists continue to view as useful and credible. It often is the first tactic for crafting messages to communicate to the media. And many mainstream reporters may raise an eyebrow if you can't deliver a press release to back up a story or announcement. It's just expected.

That being said, surveys have shown that reporters spend less than a minute on reading a press release. I'll take that stat with a grain of salt, but there is a point to be made for being smart about press releases. First, leave the writing to a professional. There is a formula and skill for [crafting an effective press release](#). In any case, it's always best to deliver all the key information in the first couple of paragraphs. Be content with the knowledge that anything after that may be ignored and possibly won't make it into print. The exception is those online news sites that publish press releases nearly or completely verbatim. We love those media outlets.

Are there other key PR trends you predict in the coming year? Or do you need some additional insights about how to put these trends into full execution? Email me, Randy Labuzinski, at rlabuzinski@jaffepr.com.