LINKING PRESS RELEASE OUTPUT TO OUTCOMES

The humble press release has been frequently declared dead in recent years, only to reappear alive and well as a useful PR tool again and again. In 2011-2012, Business Wire and SEO-PR conducted a series of tests using press releases for the Rutgers Center for Management and Development to address three questions: What's the best day to send a press release? What is the return on marketing investment (ROMI) for a given set of press releases? And does a press release campaign have a measurable effect on site traffic? Greg Jarboe of SEO-PR explains the methodology and results of those tests in this white paper.

A Business Wire White Paper

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Summary

In July and August 2011, SEO-PR distributed five press releases over Business Wire announcing new Online Mini-MBA Programs at the Rutgers Center for Management Development (CMD). The initial research objective was to identify the best day of the week to distribute a release by distributing five similar ones on different weekdays.

To track results, SEO-PR used Business Wire's NewsTrak reports, the Google Analytics URL Builder to tag links in the releases, and Rutgers CMD's Google Analytics account. NewsTrak measured how many times each release was viewed and the number of clicks on links in it. The tagged links enabled the agency to measure the number of visits to Rutgers CMD's website from each release, as well as its goal conversion rate—the percentage of visits that resulted in one of three types of registration interest.

The ability to measure outcomes as well as output led Rutgers CMD to add five more releases to the campaign and create a second research objective: Measure the return on marketing investment (ROMI) for a three-month PR campaign of 10 releases. Laura Sturaitis of Business Wire and Greg Jarboe of SEO-PR presented these initial results at the PRSA 2011 International Conference in October.

Rutgers CMD distributed only one release in the fourth quarter of 2011. This led SEO-PR to propose a third research objective: Compare traffic to the Rutgers CMD website in a quarter with a PR campaign to traffic in a quarter without one. This demonstrates the indirect as well as the direct impact of press releases on business outcomes.

First Research Program: What is the Best Day to Distribute a Press Release?

On June 21, 2011, Greg Jarboe, the president and co-founder of SEO-PR, sent an email to Eric Greenberg, the managing director of executive education of the Rutgers CMD, and Laura Sturaitis, executive vice president of media services and product strategy at Business Wire. The email's subject line read: "This is a test. This is only a test."

Jarboe wrote, "We have a series of press releases coming up for Rutgers that could be used for an interesting test." Rutgers CMD was planning to announce five new Online Mini-MBA Programs:

- Conversion Optimization,
- Pay-per-Click (PPC) Advertising,
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO),
- Social Media Marketing, and
- Web Analytics.

He added: "Here's what I'm thinking of testing: Write similar press releases about each program (some of the content of each one will be different, but some of the content will be the same—and the format of all five press releases will be the same). Then, issue the first press release on a Monday morning at 10 a.m., the second press release eight days later on a Tuesday morning at 10 a.m., the third press release eight days later on a Wednesday morning at 10 a.m., the fourth press release eight days later on a Thursday morning at 10 a.m., and the fifth press release eight days later on a Friday morning at 10 a.m."

He concluded, "Then, we would track all five press releases two ways: Using Business Wire's NewsTrak Reports and using Google Analytics (with conversion tracking). Then, we will attempt to answer the question: What is the best day to distribute a press release?"

Both Greenberg and Sturaitis liked the plan. Greenberg thought the new research could be included in the Online PR course that Jarboe taught in the Rutgers Mini-MBA: Digital Marketing Program. Sturaitis thought the test would "make a compelling case study" for the presentation that she and Jarboe were scheduled to give in October at the PRSA 2011 International Conference.

Because of the Independence Day holiday, the plan was adjusted and the first release was distributed on Wednesday, July 6, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University Online Mini-MBA Program Offers Conversion Optimization Course." According to Business Wire's NewsTrak Report, the release was viewed 1,718 times, and there were 66 clicks on links in the release as of Sept. 30, 2011.

The second release was distributed on Thursday, July 14, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University Online Mini-MBA Program Offers Social Media Marketing Course." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 5,635 times, and there were 94 clicks on links in the release.

The third release was distributed on Friday, July 22, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University Online Mini-MBA Program Offers Search Engine Optimization Course." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 2,825 times, and there were 73 clicks on links in the release.

The fourth release was distributed on Monday, Aug. 1, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University Online Mini-MBA Program Offers Pay Per Click Course." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 2,493 times, and there were 50 clicks on links in the release.

The fifth release was distributed on Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University Online Mini-MBA Program Offers Web Analytics Course." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 2,697 times, and there were 80 clicks on links in the release.

The different content at the end of each headline could explain some of the difference in views for each release, but using the same content for the first seven words of the headline made them as comparable as possible without distributing the same press release five times.

SEO-PR also used the Google Analytics URL Builder tool to tag three links in each of the releases, enabling the agency to measure the number of visits to landing pages for each of the five courses on Rutgers CMD's website using Rutgers CMD's Google Analytics account. Tagging links also enabled the agency to track the goal conversion rate—the percentage of visits from each release that generated one of three types of registration interest (a PDF, online, or email lead).

Marketers and PR people can use the URL Builder tool to create URLs for custom PR campaigns. Google Analytics automatically tracks all of the referrals and search queries that send traffic to a website. For example, each time someone is referred to a site from Google search results, Analytics automatically captures the keyword, the source (*Google*), and the medium (*organic* for unpaid search).

In addition to getting information from referrals and queries that are tracked automatically, any site link in a press release can be customized, and the same information gotten from those links. Links are customized by adding tags to the end of each URL; the tags are variable-value pairs that contain campaign-identifying information.

To use the tool, go to http://support.google.com/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1033867, fill in the fields for Campaign Source, Campaign Medium, and Campaign Name, and click the Generate URL button. Then, use this tagged link in the address field for the text to display when you insert a hyperlink in your press release.

Because some websites like MarketWatch pick up the full text of a press release without the hyperlinks, one link to the "Contact Us" page on Rutgers CMD's website at the end of the boilerplate in each release was not tagged. Displaying the actual URL gives readers of MarketWatch and other websites something they can copy and paste into a browser.

The first press release, which was tagged "conversionoptimization," generated 40 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 5.00% (two leads).

The second release, which was tagged "socialmediamktg," generated 137 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 5.84% (eight leads).

The third release, which was tagged "SEO," generated 43 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 9.30% (four leads).

The fourth release, which was tagged "PPC," generated 24 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 4.17% (one lead).

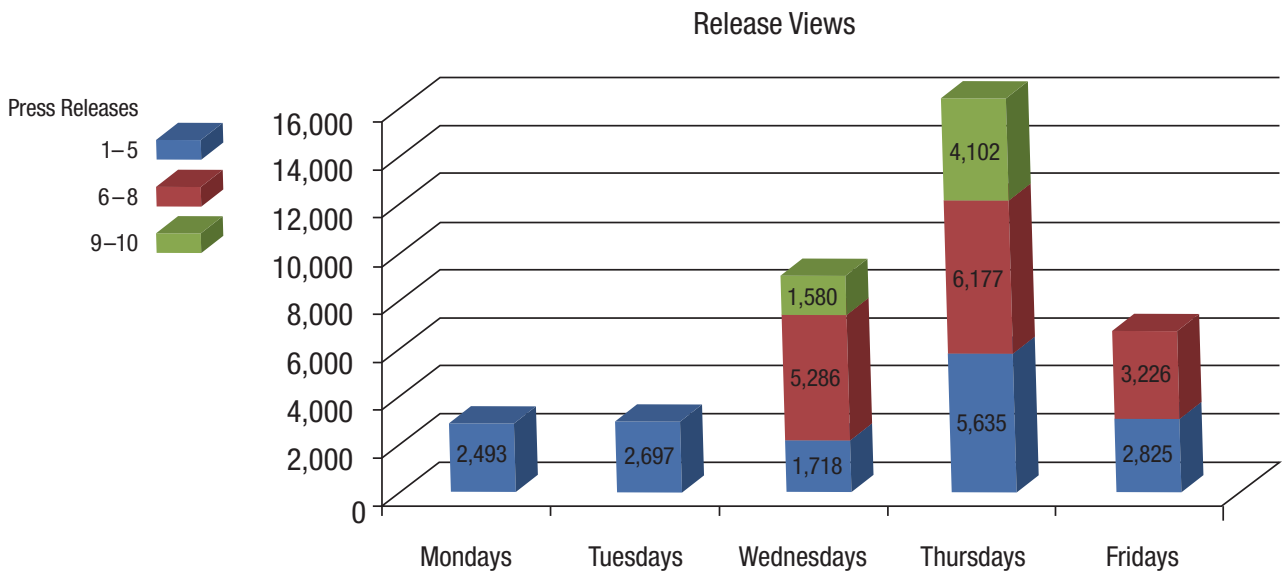
The fifth press release, which was tagged "webanalytics," generated 199 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 9.05% (18 leads).

Although there were 363 clicks on links in the five releases, there were 443 visits to landing pages from tagged links. This can be explained by websites like *Analytics* magazine, which ran a story that included one of the anchor text links. NewsTrak doesn't measure the number of clicks on links in these stories, but Google Analytics does.

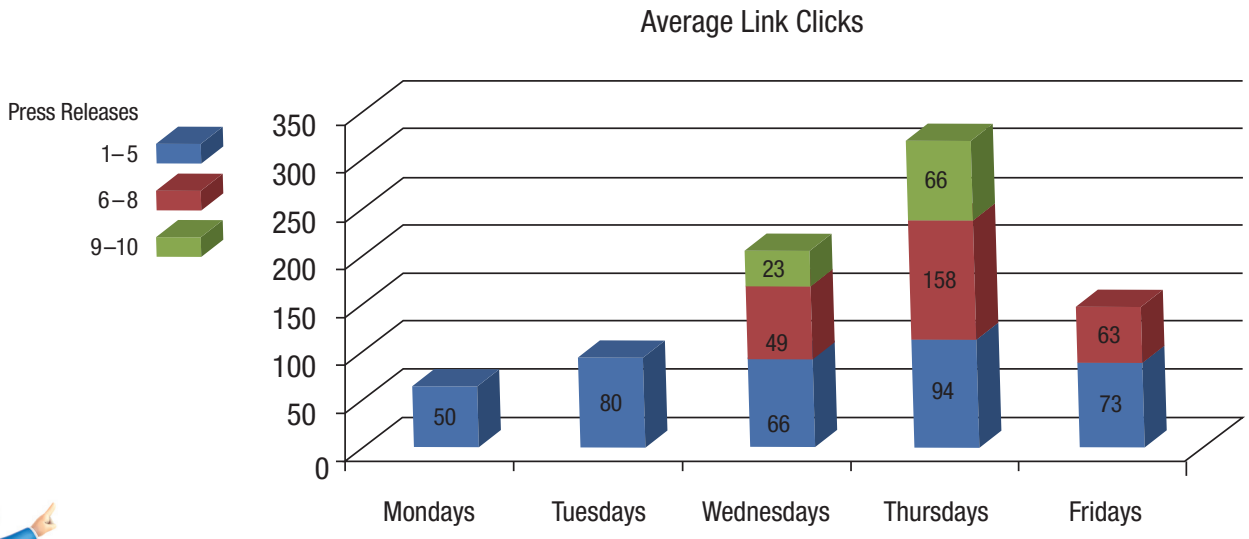
The best day to distribute a press release depends on which metric is used.

So, the best day to distribute a press release depends on which metric is used. If you look at the number of times a release is viewed and the number of clicks on links in the release, then it's Thursday. If you look at the number of visits and number of leads, although this is a small sample, then it's Tuesday.

Distributing on Thursdays generated biggest share of 35,739 release views



Distributing on Thursdays generated largest share of 722 clicks on links



Second Research Program: Measure the ROMI for a PR Campaign

The ability to measure business outcomes like visits and leads as well as PR outputs like views and clicks on links led Greenberg to add five more press releases to the campaign and create a second research objective: Measure the ROMI for a three-month campaign of 10 releases.

Since the five extra releases were about four different programs, they were distributed as soon as they were ready instead of waiting for different days of the week.

The sixth release was distributed on Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University Offers Short Courses in Mobile Marketing, Social Media Marketing and Web Analytics." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 5,286 times, and there were 49 clicks on the four links in the release (one was untagged). The three links in the release tagged "short_courses" generated 24 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 20.83% (five leads) as of Sept. 30, 2011.

The seventh release was distributed on Thursday, Aug. 18, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University and Business Wire Collaborate on New Digital Public Relations Course Featuring David Meerman Scott." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 6,177 times, and there were 158 clicks on the seven links in the release (four links in Scott's and Business Wire's boilerplates were untagged). The three links in the release tagged "DMS" generated 75 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 8.00% (six leads).

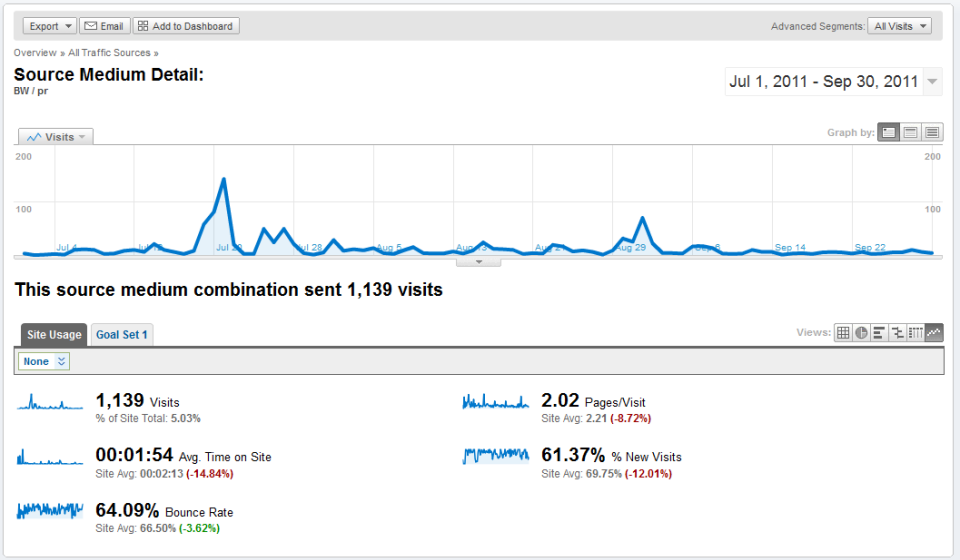
The eighth release was distributed on Friday, Aug. 26, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University and Business Wire Digital PR Course to Feature Katie Paine as Instructor." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 3,226 times, and there were 63 clicks on the seven links in the release (four links in Paine's and Business Wire's boilerplates were untagged). The three links in the release tagged "KP" generated four visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.00% (zero leads).

The ninth release was distributed on Thursday, Sept. 1, 2011, two days before the Labor Day weekend. The headline read: "Rutgers University Integrates Apple iPad 2 Into Digital Mini-MBA Program." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 4,102 times, and there were 66 clicks on the three links in the release. These links in the release tagged "iPad" generated 16 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.00% (zero leads).

The 10th release was distributed on Wednesday, Sept. 28, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers Center for Management Development Offers Sports Management Program in $400 Billion Sports Marketplace." According to NewsTrak, the release was viewed 1,580 times, and there were 23 clicks on the four links in the release. These links in the release tagged "sports_mgmt" generated eight visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.00% (zero leads) as of Sept. 30, 2011.

Although the 10 press releases in the campaign had generated a total of 570 visits and 44 leads, Google Analytics reported that tagged links had generated 1,139 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 6.76% (77 leads). Two sources had generated an additional 569 visits and 33 leads.

Tagged links show 1,139 PR visits to Rutgers CMD website vs. 492 BW clicks



The first source was a joint PR effort by Rutgers CMD and Business Wire. Business Wire distributed a press release on Wednesday, July 20, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers University and Business Wire Launch Mini-MBA Program in Online PR for Public Relations in the Digital Age." Three of the seven links in the release were to landing pages on Rutgers CMD's website and were tagged "BW_Rutgers_training" (four links in Business Wire's boilerplate were untagged). The launch was also mentioned in Issue 15 of Business Wire's WiredIn Newsletter, which was distributed on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2011. The headline of the second story in the email newsletter read: "David Meerman Scott to Teach at BW/Rutgers Mini-MBA Program." The link in the newsletter story was also tagged "BW_Rutgers_training." Together, Business Wire's press release and email newsletter generated 382 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 1.57% (six leads).

The second source was eight older press releases, which generated 187 visits and 27 leads from July 1 to Sept. 30, 2011. For example, SEO-PR had distributed a release on Monday, Nov. 8, 2010. The headline read: "Social Media Marketing Course in Rutgers Mini-MBA Program Provides Students with New Career Skills and Apple iPads." It included links tagged "social," which continued to generate 48 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 18.75% (nine leads) eight to 10 months later.

In addition, the third-quarter PR campaign indirectly generated visits and leads that were not measured by the tagged links.

Referral Traffic

Looking at the referral traffic in Rutgers CMD's Google Analytics, it was relatively easy to identify some news sites and blogs that had written stories about one of the announcements and included links to the Rutgers CMD website. For example, the *Analytics* magazine article mentioned above, "Rutgers University offers Online Mini-MBA Web Analytics Program," ran on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2011. It included a tagged link from the press release and an untagged link to Rutgers CMD's "Contact Us" page. These links generated 21 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 9.52% (two leads).

Other referrals were harder to attribute to the PR campaign. For example, untagged links in releases distributed via Business Wire's Enhanced Online News (EON) generated 75 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 1.33% (one lead). And untagged links in releases distributed via Business Wire generated another 14 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 21.43% (three leads). Because the links were untagged, it's hard to tell which came from one of the 10 press releases in the PR campaign and which might have come from one of the eight older releases.

Social media referrals were almost impossible to pin down. For example, Facebook generated 225 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.89% (two leads), while LinkedIn generated 114 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 6.14% (seven leads), and Twitter generated 33 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.00% (zero leads). What percentage of these visits and leads was generated by the PR campaign?

In order to estimate the increase in referral traffic generated in the third quarter of 2011, SEO-PR used data from the second quarter, when four releases were distributed, to establish a baseline of 2,340 visits to Rutgers CMD's website from referring sites. There were 2,876 visits from referring sites in the third quarter, when 11 releases were distributed (including the joint release with tagged links), representing an increase of 536 visits, or 22.9%, over the previous quarter. Rutgers CMD's referral traffic had a goal conversion rate of 5.11%, which indicates that the PR campaign generated about 27 incremental leads from this source.

Organic Search Traffic

SEO-PR encountered a similar challenge with organic search traffic. Many of the search terms used by visitors to Rutgers CMD's website were included in the headlines of the 10 press releases. These included "Rutgers Mini-MBA," "Mini-MBA," "Rutgers Center for Management Development," and "sports management." But what percentage of these visits had been generated by the PR campaign?

In order to estimate the increase in organic search traffic generated by the PR campaign in the third quarter of 2011, the agency used data from the second quarter to establish a baseline of 4,784 nonpaid visits from search. There were 6,243 nonpaid visits from search in the third quarter, representing an increase of 1,459 visits, or 30.5%, over the previous quarter. Rutgers CMD's organic search traffic had a goal conversion rate of 7.00%, which indicates that the PR campaign generated about 102 incremental leads from this source.

Direct Traffic

Finally, SEO-PR encountered a similar challenge with direct traffic. Many of the landing pages were ones featured in the 10 press releases. They included:

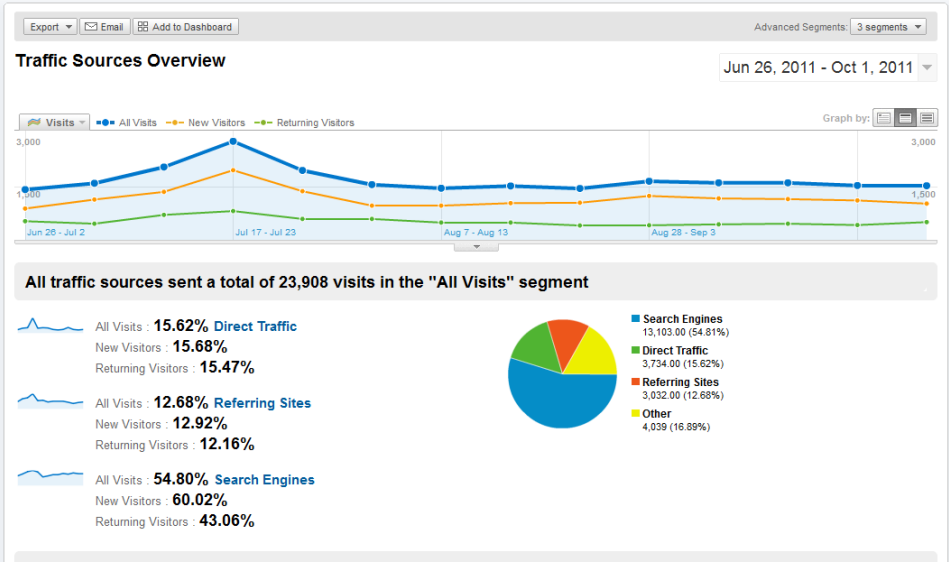
- http://cmd.rutgers.edu/online-mini-mba-social-media-marketing.html
- http://cmd.rutgers.edu/mini-mba-going-digital-the-new-rules-of-pr.html
- http://cmd.rutgers.edu/mini-mba-sports-management-in-the-digital-age.html
- http://cmd.rutgers.edu/online-mini-mba-web-analytics.html

What percentage of these visits was generated by the PR campaign?

In order to estimate the increase in direct traffic generated by the PR campaign in the third quarter of 2011, SEO-PR used data from the second quarter to establish a baseline of 2,659 direct visits. There were 3,587 direct visits in the third quarter, representing an increase of 928 visits, or 34.9% over the previous quarter. Rutgers CMD's direct traffic had a goal conversion rate of 6.47%, which indicates that the PR campaign generated about 60 incremental leads from this source.

Greenberg reviewed these estimates before Sturaitis and Jarboe presented them at the PRSA 2011 International Conference in October. Greenberg also told Jarboe that he could disclose that 15–25% of the leads generated by the PR campaign had become registrations in one of Rutgers CMD's $3,500 online courses, $595 short courses, or $4,995 classroom programs.

What was PR's impact on direct traffic, referring sites, and search engines?



Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI)

This enabled Jarboe to calculate the ROMI from the three-month-long PR campaign. The ROMI concept first appeared in Gary Lilien and Philip Kotler's book *Marketing Models* (1992). Since Jarboe was evaluating a three-month PR campaign, he used short-term ROMI, which is a simple index measuring the dollars of revenue for every dollar of marketing spend.

The value of short-term ROMI is in its simplicity. In most cases, a simple determination of revenue per dollar spent for each marketing activity can be sufficient to help make important decisions to improve the entire marketing mix.

Jarboe estimated that Rutgers CMD had spent a total of $23,230 on 10 press releases, $10,500 for SEO-PR's copywriting services and $12,730 for Business Wire's distribution services. Since a portion of these services had been donated to the test, this estimate was more than Rutgers CMD had actually spent. But it illustrated the amount of PR spending that would typically take place in a quarter.

Jarboe also estimated that 1,139 visits from tagged links in press releases had generated 77 leads. He further estimated that an average of 20% of the leads generated by the PR campaign had become registrations in one of Rutgers CMD's programs: seven in $3,500 online courses, two in $595 short courses, and six in $4,995 classroom programs. This was a total of $55,660 in revenue. Since Rutgers CMD's actual registration system couldn't track the conversion of individual leads, this was also an estimation of the incremental sales attributable to the PR campaign.

Nevertheless, it demonstrated the methodology for measuring the ROMI of a PR campaign.

Rutgers CMD received a ROMI of at least 2.4X from its three-month PR campaign.

Jarboe used these estimates to calculate that Rutgers CMD had received an ROMI of at least 2.4X from its three-month PR campaign. If Rutgers CMD had spent $23,230 on 10 press releases and those releases delivered $55,600 in incremental revenue, then the ROMI factor would be 2.4. He added that Nielsen Analytic Consulting had found that the average ROMI in the first 90 days is 1.1X.

However, this initial calculation ignores the 22.9% increase in referral traffic, 30.5% increase in organic search traffic, and 34.9% increase in direct traffic to Rutgers CMD's website in the third quarter of 2011.

If the PR campaign generated an increase of 536 visits from referring sites in the third quarter, which in turn generated about 27 incremental leads, then it may have generated about five additional registrations from referral traffic.

If the PR campaign generated an increase of 1,459 visits from organic search, which in turn generated about 102 incremental leads, then it may have generated about 20 additional registrations from organic search traffic.

If the PR campaign generated an increase of 928 visits direct to landing pages, which in turn generated about 60 incremental leads from this source, then it may have generated about 12 additional registrations from direct traffic.

Combining 15 registrations from tagged links in press releases with five additional registrations from referral traffic, 20 additional registrations for organic search traffic, and 12 additional registrations from direct traffic results in a total of 52 registrations. This means the $23,230 PR campaign may have generated $198,870 in incremental revenue.

At the PRSA 2011 International Conference, Sturaitis and Jarboe asked the question: "Did Rutgers CMD actually get an 8.6X return on its marketing investment?" At that point in time, they didn't have a definitive answer.

Third Research Program: Compare Traffic in a Quarter with a PR Campaign to a Quarter without One

In the fourth quarter, Rutgers CMD distributed only one release, on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2011. The headline read: "Rutgers Center for Management Development Offers Digital Marketing Executive Education Program." This led Jarboe to propose a third research objective: Compare traffic to the Rutgers CMD website in a quarter with a PR campaign to a quarter without one.

Peter Methot, the program manager for Rutgers CMD, approved the proposal.

In the third quarter of 2011, tagged links in releases had generated 1,139 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 6.76% (77 leads). Referral traffic had generated 2,876 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 5.11% (147 leads). Organic search traffic had generated 6,243 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 7.00% (437 leads). Direct traffic had generated 3,587 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 6.47% (232 leads).

In the fourth quarter of 2011, tagged links in releases generated 220 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 9.09% (20 leads). Referral traffic generated 1,970 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 6.14% (120 leads). Organic search traffic generated 5,939 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 5.71% (339 leads). Direct traffic generated 2,182 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 5.13% (112 leads).

In other words, visits from tagged links dropped 80.7%, and leads from this source dropped 74.0% from the third to the fourth quarter. Visits from referral traffic dropped 31.5%, and leads from this source dropped 18.4%. Visits from organic search traffic dropped 4.9%, and leads from this source dropped 22.4%. And visits from direct traffic dropped 39.2%, and leads from this source dropped 51.7%.

Since the fourth quarter included the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, seasonality may have played a role, although the third quarter included the Independence Day and Labor Day holidays. And one of the older press releases, which included links tagged "social," had been distributed in November 2010 and was still generating visits and leads a year later.

SEO-PR also double-checked to see if Rutgers CMD's competitors for open enrollment or online programs had been more active in the fourth quarter than in the third quarter of 2011. They hadn't.

Rutgers CMD saw a drop in traffic of 25.5% from the quarter with a PR campaign to the quarter without one.

Nevertheless, Rutgers CMD saw a drop of 25.5% from 13,845 visits in the quarter with a PR campaign to 10,311 visits in the quarter without one. Rutgers CMD also saw a drop of 33.8% from 893 leads in the quarter with a PR campaign to 591 leads in the quarter without one.

If 20% of the leads generated in the fourth quarter continued to convert to registrations, then it's possible to calculate the impact of the loss of 302 leads or 60 registrations. It's $222,640. That is 9.6 times what Rutgers CMD spent in the third quarter on its PR campaign.

This demonstrates the indirect as well as the direct impact of press releases on business outcomes. It also indicates that the ROMI estimate presented by Sturaitis and Jarboe at the PRSA 2011 International Conference may have been too conservative.

Research Methods

This public relations measurement program had three clear and well-defined research objectives:

- Identify the best day of the week to distribute a press release by distributing five similar ones on different weekdays.
- Measure the ROMI for a three-month PR campaign of 10 releases.
- Compare traffic to the Rutgers CMD website in a quarter with a PR campaign to a quarter without one.

The fact that the first objective quickly generated the second objective, which subsequently generated the third objective, demonstrates the benefit of research that creates an actionable strategy, solves challenges such as measuring public relations campaigns, and achieves optimal success by leveraging experimentation.

This program meets the highest standards of research methods. The goal of the research process is to produce new knowledge or deepen understanding of a topic or issue. This process takes three main forms:

- Exploratory research, which helps to identify and define a problem or question
- Constructive research, which tests theories and proposes solutions to a problem or question
- Empirical research, which tests the feasibility of a solution using empirical evidence

This public relations measurement program used rigorous research design. For example, it compared the number of clicks on links in a press release to the number of visits to Rutgers CMD's website from tagged links. This enabled SEO-PR to identify discrepancies in the data and identify possible explanations.

This program shows innovation in research design. Although using data from the second quarter to establish a baseline of visits to the Rutgers CMD website in the third quarter is a fairly standard research design, using data from the fourth quarter to compare traffic to Rutgers CMD's website in the third quarter is an innovation.

Having demonstrated that a PR campaign had increased referral traffic, organic search traffic, and direct traffic, who would have thought to see if the lack of a PR campaign might decrease traffic from these sources?

This public relations measurement program establishes the reliability of research results. At the PRSA 2011 International Conference, Sturaitis and Jarboe didn't have a definitive answer to the question: What's the ROMI for a three-month PR campaign of 10 releases? So they presented their findings at that point in time and asked the question: "Did Rutgers CMD actually get an 8.6X return on its marketing investment?"

Finally, this program provides detailed supporting documentation. This includes actual data from Business Wire's NewsTrak reports, which provide quality press release measurement, and Rutgers CMD's Google Analytics account, which not only gave SEO-PR fresh insights into how visitors arrived on Rutgers CMD's site but also let the agency measure sales and conversions.

Contribution to the Practice of Public Relations

The three research programs conducted by SEO-PR for Rutgers CMD contribute to the body of knowledge of the public relations profession. On a tactical level, the research shows PR professionals how to use the Google Analytics URL Builder tool. On a strategic level, it shows PR professionals how to calculate ROMI.

This advances the profession of public relations, which is often seen as a cost center—a department of a company that has expenses but is not directly producing revenues. Being able to measure the number of visits and leads generated by a three-month PR campaign demonstrates that spending was justified because the ROMI was positive.

The three research programs demonstrate the effectiveness of press releases. This brings back to life a traditional public relations activity that some mistakenly thought was dead.

On Sept. 13, 2010, Simon Dumenco, the "Media Guy" columnist for *Advertising Age*, wrote a column titled "RIP, the Press Release (1906–2010)—and Long Live the Tweet." He said, "The long-suffering, much-maligned press release, I'd argue, finally died this summer, thanks particularly to JetBlue and BP, with a little moral support from Kanye West and just about every other celebrity with thumbs. (Of course, press releases will probably continue to stumble along, zombie-like, for years to come, because too many PR folks are still heavily invested in grinding them out.)"

In the tests by SEO-PR for Rutgers CMD, tagged links in press releases were the No.5 source of visits to Rutgers CMD's website from July 1 to Dec. 31, 2010. They generated a total of 1,359 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 7.14% (97 leads). By comparison, Twitter was the No.52 source of visits during that six-month period. It generated a total of 33 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.00% (zero leads). Press releases generated 1,326 more visits and 97 more leads than Twitter.

So the press release is not dead. It's alive and kicking.

This research is applicable to a broad range of public relations activities beyond writing, distributing, and measuring press releases. This includes identifying the journalists, bloggers, and influencers who matter the most to your business. It also includes measuring the results of media relations, blogger outreach, or social media campaigns, whether your goal is to increase awareness, generate leads, improve loyalty, or drive revenue.

For example, the *Analytics* magazine article "Rutgers University offers Online Mini-MBA Web Analytics Program" included a tagged link from the press release and an untagged link to Rutgers CMD's "Contact Us" page. These links generated 21 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 9.52% (two leads).

In contrast, USNewsUniversityDirectory.com posted a story by Catherine Groux on Sept. 9, 2011: "Mini-MBA Program Uses Technology to Give Students Necessary Skills." Her story didn't include any links to Rutgers CMD's website or its press release, even though it declared: "Rutgers University's Center for Management Development recently announced in a press release that it will use iPad 2 tablet devices in a new mini-MBA program."

Which online news source would you add to your A list? Which of these clips would you forward to your client or boss?

SEO-PR and Rutgers CMD reported that Facebook generated 225 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.89% (two leads), while LinkedIn generated 114 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 6.14% (seven leads) and Twitter generated 33 visits and had a goal conversion rate of 0.00% (zero leads). If Rutgers CMD and SEO-PR planned to launch a social media campaign, should they focus on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter?

If your answer depends on your goal, then Google Analytics enables you to tailor your goals to measure different business objectives for your website. Goals correspond to a measurable action performed by your website's visitors—for example, a visit to a "thank-you" page. Here are some common examples of business objectives, visitor actions, and success measures that PR professionals might use:

Business Objectives	Visitor Actions	Success Measures
Increase awareness	Download white paper	download_redirect.html
Generate leads	Complete contact form	thankyou.html
Improve loyalty	Sign up for newsletter	subscription_confirmed.html
Drive revenue	Complete a purchase	thankyou.html

If your client or company runs an e-commerce site, Google Analytics has additional features to help you track purchases.

This case study is publishable and should provide valuable examples of research used to support the public relations practice. Other SEO-PR case studies have won awards.

In 2005, SEO-PR and Southwest Airlines won the Golden Ruler Award for Excellence in Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation from the Institute for Public Relations and *PR News*. Over 14 months, SEO-PR and Southwest Airlines linked $2.5 million in ticket sales to a series of optimized press releases.

In 2009, SEO-PR and *Parents* magazine won a Commendation of Excellence in the Influencer Relations Category from the Society for New Communications Research. SEO-PR helped *Parents* magazine generate 129,155 entries into its cover photo contest, according to a case study presented at SES San Jose 2009.

In 2010, SEO-PR and Rutgers CMD were named to the Econsultancy Innovation Awards shortlist in the Innovation in Online PR category. SEO-PR established a benchmark using an unoptimized press release and traditional media relations for Rutgers CMD, and then compared the results generated by an optimized press release and blogger/social media outreach.

This case study not only identified the best day of the week to distribute a press release, it also measured the ROMI for a three-month PR campaign of 10 releases. In addition, SEO-PR and Rutgers CMD are the first to compare traffic in a quarter with a PR campaign to a quarter without one.

This case study encourages the increased use of measurement and evaluation. In fact, Jarboe, Greenberg, and Sturaitis have already discussed testing whether including a photo or video with a press release increases the number of visits to Rutgers CMD's website and goal conversion rate.

Business Wire has already found that adding multimedia to a press release tends to increase the number of online release views. When Sandy Malloy, senior information specialist at Business Wire, looked at a list of the most-viewed releases of the second half of 2011 to see how many were multimedia-enriched, she found some pretty startling numbers.

Of the top 500 English-language releases, about 75% had one or more photos or videos. Out of all the English-language releases that Business Wire distributes, only 5% include multimedia. In other words, 5% of all its English language releases accounted for 75% of the 500 most-viewed releases in the last six months of last year.

Business Wire can't really say that your release is 75% more likely to be viewed if you include photos or videos, or that it will receive 75% more views. Nevertheless, it seems pretty clear that adding multimedia should help drive release views. It is an assumption that is well worth testing.

Consider the types of releases on Business Wire's most-popular list that ran without multimedia:

- Announcements from several huge pharmaceutical companies on the results of clinical trials or strategic initiatives
- Major acquisitions and joint ventures involving public and/or well-known companies (e.g., Google to acquire Motorola Mobility)
- One of the major video game manufacturers announcing a price drop

That the Google announcement was hugely popular was no surprise. News from very large public companies is of inherent interest to the media and markets. Acquisitions are almost always big news because of investor interest and because they can affect an entire industry. Video game news, with or without multimedia, tends to be noticed.

Meanwhile, the variety of photos and videos that ran with the Top 500 releases was wide-ranging. Some examples:

- A river cleanup
- A photo of sauces and condiments
- Photos of existing DRAM technology and an innovative variation
- Photos of the principals of two merging companies
- A benchmarking study (graphic)
- Pictures and/or video of contest winners
- Ringing of the opening bell at the NYSE

What is clear from this list is that the potential for finding visuals to accompany—or to tell—a story is vast. A release can be very technical, but its equally technical audience will still appreciate a photo illustration.

Charts and graphs can be compelling. Finally, some stories seem to beg for photos or videos. Among these are any releases announcing eye-catching new products; corporate social responsibility releases (show the river that's being cleaned up, the electric car charging stations, the participants in the 10K run); and releases announcing corporate milestones.

Besides the benefits of attracting attention to your release, there is at least one other benefit to using multimedia: Your news can live longer. We have seen many instances of photos being used months or even years after they originally ran. Any test of adding multimedia to press releases should evaluate not only the short-term advantage this gives to stories, but also whether it provides long-term appeal, or "legs," to the story.

Quality and Substance of Findings

This series of research programs links public relations output to outcomes—directly and indirectly.

SEO-PR used the Google Analytics URL Builder to tag links in Rutgers CMD's series of 10 press releases, and Rutgers CMD's Google Analytics account enabled the agency to directly link the number of visits to Rutgers CMD's website from each release and their goal conversion rate—the percentage of visits that resulted in a type of registration interest.

In the third quarter of 2010, tagged links directly generated 1,139 visits, or 5.0% of the 22,659 visits to Rutgers CMD's website. The goal conversion rate from tagged links was 6.76%, which was higher than the site average of 5.93%. So tagged links directly generated 77 leads, or 5.7% of the 1,344 total leads generated by all sources.

Referral traffic increased from 2,340 visits in the second quarter to 2,876 in the third quarter. Referral traffic fell from 2,876 visits in the third quarter to 1,970 in the fourth quarter. So the PR campaign indirectly added 536 to 906 visits. That's a delta of 30 to 50 leads.

Organic search traffic increased from 4,784 visits in the second quarter to 6,243 in the third quarter. Organic search traffic fell from 6,243 visits in the third quarter to 5,939 in the fourth quarter. So the PR campaign indirectly added 304 to 1,459 visits. That's a delta of 19 to 93 leads.

Direct traffic increased from 2,659 visits in the second quarter to 3,587 in the third quarter. Direct traffic fell from 3,587 visits in the third quarter to 2,182 in the fourth quarter. So the PR campaign indirectly added 928 to 1,405 visits. That's a delta of 55 to 84 leads.

This research demonstrates the impact of the program on the target audience. When you combine the direct and indirect impacts of the PR campaign, it generated between 2,907 and 4,909 visits (1,139 + 536 + 304 + 928 = 2,907 or 1,139 + 906 + 1,459 + 1,405 = 4,909). This is between 12.8% and 21.7% of the total traffic in the third quarter. By comparison, paid search traffic sent 6,200 visits to Rutgers CMD's website in the third quarter, or 27.4% of the total traffic.

This research also demonstrates the impact on business outcomes. When you combine the direct and indirect impacts of the PR campaign, it generated between 181 and 304 leads (77 + 30 + 19 + 55 = 181 or 77 + 50 + 93 + 84 = 304). This is between 13.5% and 22.6% of the 1,344 total leads generated in the third quarter. By comparison, paid search traffic generated 242 leads in the third quarter, or 18.0% of the total leads.

This research also aids in the development of better communications programs. SEO-PR and Rutgers CMD both know which topics are more likely to generate better results. They also know which days of the week are better to distribute press releases.

Finally, the research proves that PR is cost-effective. It also proves that the lack of PR can be even more expensive.

Appendix 1

PowerPoint Presentation by Laura Sturaitis of Business Wire and Greg Jarboe of SEO-PR at the PRSA 2011 International Conference.

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