

CRYSTAL BALL GAZING FOR FY2016 AND BEYOND



With 2016 now in full swing and we approach the end/beginning of financial years, it is time to look deeply into the public relations crystal ball to see what communications services clients will want and what services they should engage.

Marketing Communications

The shift to mobile is the story here. If you need to get your product or service in front of the younger demographic, or nearly all of us for that matter, you simply must think of advertising on mobile phone platforms. The numbers for under-25s are compelling. The only real decision here is - do you advertise on mobile sites or on mobile phone apps, or on both?

When someone searches for a product or service, linking their location to your location – provided it is within their easy reach – can be a very strong and successful move. Geo-location is still in early development but will grow rapidly.

If you haven't considered video to market your product, you could miss the customer, particularly the younger ones, as video downloads become preferred entertainment to keep them amused and entertained.

No matter how you approach it, content and storytelling are the clinchers for advertisers, and this is where the public relations profession really gets skin in the game. Marketing without public relations input is like having bacon without the eggs or gin without the tonic. Advertising agencies and PR agencies have never been more symbiotic in their relationship to the smart advertiser.

Media

The changes are speeding up. News Limited recently announced the end to another 55 editorial staff from their flagship papers. Newspapers as we used to know them will struggle to survive much past 2020.

My first prediction – daily newspapers will stop being daily. They will likely drop editions on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the first instance. They may as well, as the size of these two editions – for example in *The West Australian* – continues to fall with the lack of advertising support.

Television news is becoming more common than bush flies. Except for their flagship broadcasts, it is relatively easy to get stories on early to mid-morning and early afternoon editions. But if you don't provide talent for them to interview, you will still struggle.

Flagship broadcasts will continue to rationalise and centralise. National newsrooms will produce a blancmange product capturing only big events and WA news will suffer most. Channel Seven (Perth) will hold out longer than the others, but the reality of international and national news will swamp local stories. These will be relegated to the lesser and longer editions.

And recently, ABC announced additional cuts in jobs and programs if funding is not increased dramatically. [<http://www.smh.com.au/business/media-and-marketing/jobs-will-go-outgoing-abc-boss-mark-scotts-dire-warning-to-malcolm-turnbull-20160328-gnsnqn.html>]

You will need angles and stories that resonate to get the exposure you used to think of as a given and the role of PR is paramount in making this happen.

The fascination here is the subscription services such as Foxtel or the very successful Sky News. If you have national or major state-based news to trumpet, these avenues must be considered. They are taking audience share from free-to-air at a steady rate although international coverage on free-to-air, BBC, Al Jazeera, etc is popular. But Sky News in particular is a powerful driver of public affairs.

As I have already said, print media is the changer. But not all print media. Weekly suburban titles are going gangbusters and as long as people are buying and selling property, they will continue to do so. Even with the enormity of online sites to sell houses, the weekly suburbans are killing this space and this is where local news content is growing as the available news space continues to grow. You only have to look at the Post newspapers in Perth to see how well they are doing and how well they are respected.

My prediction on newspapers above will be on shaky ground if the current push by the anti-everything brigade, but particularly those opposed to alcohol, continues to remain unchallenged. Take alcohol advertising out of newspapers and The West Australian could be closed within months.

I don't see much change for radio during the coming financial year. While revenues are dropping, they do so at a slower pace than print or even television. If you want to get a story into the print media, then get it discussed on talk-back radio first; that should just about guarantee it will be picked up.

Trade journals are going, going, almost gone. Some with loyal followings and specific audiences will last, but you only have to look at the resources industry in Australia over the last three years to appreciate how many have pulled the shutters on print and gone online.

Internet news sites will continue to be one of the news breakers. They are more flexible than any other medium except radio and social media. But you can search the internet, while you can't search the radio. Miss the radio news and you have to wait until the next bulletin unless it is a masher of a story. There is real competition afoot now that The Guardian and the Huffington Post have local editions online and free.

But, the switch to mobile platforms will impact the length and format of the news story. You will need to take that into account if you want headlines.

Social Media

Facebook news, this is the other elephant in the room. Television and print are both using Facebook sites as their news breaker and television in particular is trying to direct people onto their medium to watch breaking events as they unfold. News on commercial channels continues its primary role to attract viewers ready for the next program and delivering “views” to advertising as justification of that advertising spend.

Competition among social media platforms is rising and while Facebook is still king, a long-term strategy should not discount others such as Pinterest or Instagram whose use among 18–29s is rising exponentially.

The biggest growth area for Facebook is the +65s and women and these are vitally important market segments.

Facebook is gradually losing its allure among the younger types and the consequences for sharing on Facebook are now better understood. Snapchat is the big winner here and don't be surprised if it or other mobile friendly platforms make Facebook much less prevalent in coming years.

My favourite research site, the Pew Research Centre, provides some timely and insightful facts about trends in the US, but I suspect they are not far from Australian figures. Take a look at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/demographics-of-key-social-networking-platforms-2/> or <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>

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