

Whitepaper.

HOW TO BE A BRAND JOURNALIST

This is the premier toolkit for communicators who want to engage their target audience in the new world of communications. *How to be a Brand Journalist*, authored by brand journalism innovator MediaSource, is the industry's complete guide to discovering and creating news content on behalf of a brand.



SUMMARY

The changing media environment and advancements in digital technology have transformed the communications industry, giving rise to brand journalism. This modern approach to marketing and public relations allows communicators to tell their story and engage their target audience like never before.

The brand journalism buzz has also caused communications executives to evaluate their team's skills to succeed in this new media environment. Many corporate communicators believe that employing a former journalist is the magic formula to practicing successful brand journalism.

The truth is that while having training in journalism helps, becoming a true brand journalist involves much more than the ability to tell a story in journalistic style. Successful brand journalists have the skills to meet marketing goals by using journalistic principles in a strategic way. I know what you're probably thinking -- marketing and journalism in the same sentence?

Marketing and journalism have traditionally been at opposite ends of the communications spectrum. Throughout history there's been a sense of underlying tension between journalists and marketers. In modern day communications, however, that relationship is changing.

The objective of this white paper is to provide an expert perspective on what it takes to become a successful brand journalist including:

- *What is brand journalism?*
- *What makes brand journalism different than journalism?*
- *How do I become a brand journalist?*
- *What are the best practices of a brand journalist?*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Brand Journalism
2. How to be a Brand Journalist
3. Today's Best Brand Journalists
4. Tips from a Brand Journalist
5. Brand Journalism Crashes a Website
6. Conclusion

1. BRAND JOURNALISM

Before we describe the characteristics of a brand journalist, let's first look at the definition of brand journalism.

- *Brand journalism isn't just news-style content -- the content should actually be newsworthy to your audience.*

Brand Journalism:

Discovering and creating news content on behalf of a brand.

- *Brand journalism focuses on your target audience's needs and interests instead of your brand's objectives.*
- *Brand journalism should not be highly branded. Save the heavy branding for your commercial or brochure.*
- *Brand journalism is telling your story without selling your brand. It pushes expertise over brand objectives through storytelling that is designed to give the audience the information they want.*

Corporate communications departments at forward-thinking brands often include content creators. Modern news organizations are staffed with journalists who are expert storytellers. However, it takes a special combination of these skills to succeed as a brand journalist.



Brand Journalism Content:

1. Newsworthy
2. Audience-focused
3. Not highly branded

2. HOW TO BE A BRAND JOURNALIST



Brand Journalist:

A strategic storyteller who discovers and creates news content on behalf of a brand.

1. Be a skilled storyteller

The foundation of brand journalism is built on the principles of good storytelling. First and foremost, a brand journalist must be a strategic storyteller with a full understanding of how to write and create compelling stories for a target audience using a variety of multimedia tools such as video, photos, words, tweets, etc.

2. Understand “news value” as applied to a brand

A brand journalist seamlessly combines journalistic principles with elements of strategic communications. They understand when a story is right for brand journalism and also recognize when a topic is too commercial. A skilled brand journalist can often transform a company initiative into a compelling story that has real news value to the target audience.

3. Know how to find stories

A brand journalist understands the tenacity and relationship-building efforts associated with uncovering compelling story topics within a brand.

4. Be strategic

A brand journalist uses research, timeliness and a focused awareness of the world around them to suggest strategy for brand journalism content and campaigns.

5. Report with integrity

A brand journalist creates stories that are factual, well-researched, timely and compelling.

6. Embrace transparency

A brand journalist recognizes the value of being a journalist embedded inside a brand and is transparent about their brand relationship.

7. Value engagement

A brand journalist encourages a two-way conversation around their stories on social media platforms.

3. TODAY'S BEST BRAND JOURNALISTS

The brand journalism approach to corporate communications can be executed in a variety of ways. Many companies have adopted different variations of brand journalism, which together or separately can include content delivered via websites, blogs, social media outlets or digital newsrooms. The brands that most effectively maximize their brand journalism efforts produce content that is also frequently picked up by traditional news media outlets through a strategic media relations strategy.

The following pages contain examples of three brands that are leading the way as the best brand journalists.



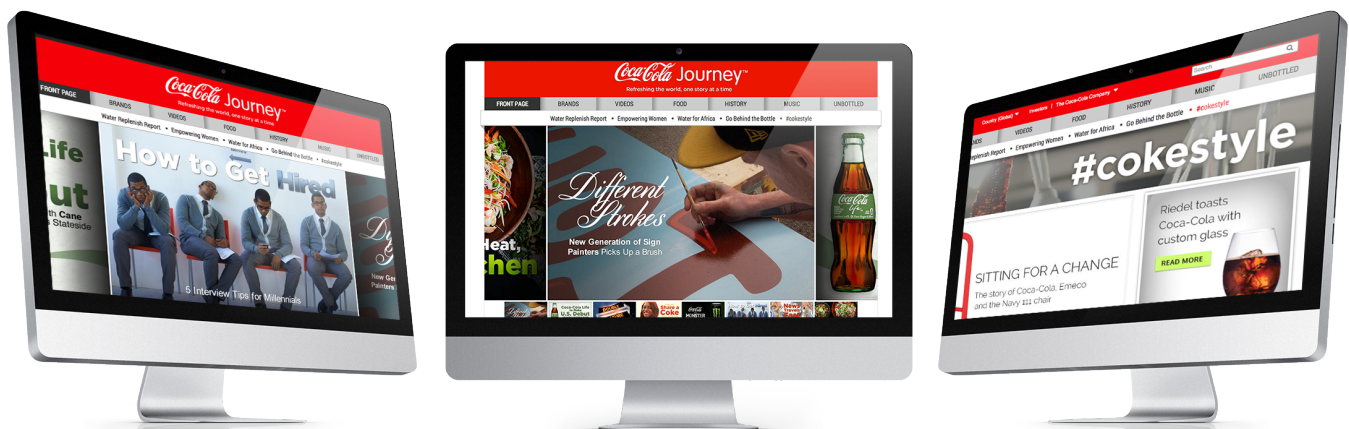
TODAY'S BEST BRAND JOURNALISTS



Coca-Cola was an early adopter of brand journalism as a marketing and PR approach. In fact, the company was one of the first to advocate for killing the press release, aiming to cut their press release volume to zero by 2015.¹ The company has replaced their press release efforts with what effectively serves as their own media outlet. They created a brand journalism focused website called Coca-Cola Journey that looks and feels like a news media website.

The Coca-Cola Journey website currently attracts more than one million visitors a month.²

The company's brand journalists create content on subjects like entertainment, the environment, health and sports mixed with subtle brand presence and messaging.



¹ Ragan Communications, November, 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em-6yR4QZ-I>

² <http://contently.com/strategist/2014/01/29/one-year-later-is-coca-cola-journey-a-success/>

TODAY'S BEST BRAND JOURNALISTS



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Communicators at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center have a two-tiered approach to brand journalism, focusing on delivering content via company-owned social media channels as well as earned media. Their team which includes brand journalists, media relations professionals, social media specialists and brand journalism partners, uncovers story ideas through a structured beat system. Brand journalists are assigned different areas of the hospital to mine for story topics. Once a story is accepted multimedia content is produced and delivered digitally on the hospital's Multimedia Newsroom.

The Wexner Medical Center's Multimedia Newsroom has been accessed by virtually every major national media outlet and many international news providers.

One recent brand journalism campaign drove more than a million downloads of content from the hospital's website, causing it to crash. Learn more about this brand journalism case study on page 12.



osuwmc.MultimediaNewsroom.TV

TODAY'S BEST BRAND JOURNALISTS



At the Rochester, Minnesota-based Mayo Clinic the communications team operates like an actual newsroom, holding daily meetings where their team of health care brand journalists pitch story topics from different areas of the organization and discuss trending news that may provide exposure opportunities. Like The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, the Mayo Clinic delivers brand journalism content digitally to journalists at media outlets via the Mayo Clinic News Network.

The Mayo Clinic News Network has more than 800 journalists and subscribers.³

The health, science and research content is produced by their hospital's brand journalists.

Media Only:
For exclusive journalist access to video, audio and high resolution images, become a member. Click here to register for free membership

Journalists
Videolink Studios are available at all Mayo Clinic campuses for LIVE or taped interviews.

For Media Inquiries
Please call 507-284 5005



³ <http://contently.com/strategist/2014/01/29/one-year-later-is-coca-cola-journey-a-success/>

4. TIPS FROM A BRAND JOURNALIST

The key to success as a brand journalist is a full understanding of how to use journalistic skills in a strategic way.

Clark Powell was an Emmy-award winning TV journalist for 15 years before co-founding MediaSource, where he serves as chief brand journalist and vice president. Today, after 16 years as a brand journalist for the country's top academic medical centers and national associations, he is one of the industry's leading brand journalists.

“First and foremost, I always strive to create content that is journalistically sound. However, as a brand journalist I approach the storytelling process differently compared to my TV reporting days. When I worked in TV news I customized my story to match the show format. For example, a different format and style was needed for the morning show compared to the 5 o'clock news,” Powell explains. “Now as a brand journalist, if I want traditional media to pick up my story I strategically create content that appeals to every newcast producer and every online editor. Sometimes that means the story is a little less highly produced than if it were created for one specific outlet. However, the more understated, newsy style typically results in greater media coverage, which always is the goal.”

Clark shares some of the storytelling techniques he uses as a brand journalist on the following page (11).



Clark Powell

Emmy-award winning TV journalist & chief brand journalist at MediaSource

TIPS FROM A BRAND JOURNALIST



Storytelling Secrets from a Top Brand Journalist



1. Aim for wide appeal

A journalist at a media outlet would likely create their story to match the outlet's needs and guidelines. However, as a brand journalist, shape your story so that any media outlet could easily publish your content. The more universal your content, the more likely that it will be used.



2. Strategically choose story structure

As a brand journalist you need to strategically decide how to structure your story. While a traditional journalist might rely on emotion to carry the story, a seasoned brand journalist balances emotion with the role of the brand included in a newsworthy way.



3. Position brand as thought leader

Featuring a brand as an expert or thought leader allows you to include the company in a manner that is not commercial.

5. CASE STUDY: BRAND JOURNALISM CRASHES A WEBSITE

Effective brand journalism executed by trained brand journalists can help companies achieve their goals. Communicators at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center learned the sheer power of brand journalism when a campaign generated so much traffic that it crashed their hospital's website.



Researchers at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center developed a self-administered test called the SAGE test that can help spot early symptoms of cognitive issues such as Alzheimer's disease.

The hospital's goal was to use brand journalism for earned media to drive consumers to company-owned media. The strategy was to start the buzz with high-quality and high-volume news media coverage that would drive consumers to the medical center's website to download the SAGE test.

A key tactic was to produce newsworthy content that could be used for a variety of media channels. These multimedia stories would help humanize this issue and more fully motivate customers to download the SAGE test.

BRAND JOURNALISM CRASHES A WEBSITE (continued from page 12)

Execution

Operating in a newsroom style environment, hospital brand journalists identified the key journalistic elements including a patient to feature in the story. Once the content was produced it was available to the news media to digitally download on a Multimedia Newsroom. Company-owned media elements were prepared for the hospital's social media channels. The company's web team designed an area on the hospital's website to host the downloadable SAGE test which is where all news media and company-owned media would push consumers. The media relations team targeted key news outlets and pitched the story to journalists.

Results

The hospital's multimedia story was featured by top tier media outlets across the world.

As of this writing, the earned media coverage had reached a total audience of over 529 million viewers, readers and listeners, with an advertising value of more than 1.6 million dollars. It gained 52 airings in the Top 25 media markets and national television airings including Yahoo! News, Huffington Post, NBC News Online, CNET.com, FoxNews.com and Forbes Online.

The coverage successfully resulted in more than one million downloads of the SAGE test on The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center website.

The widespread media coverage and social media buzz resulted in a remarkable chain of events that allowed the brand journalism team to exceed the hospital's expectations. In fact, there were so many downloads at once that it caused the hospital's website to crash for a short time! By driving more than a million health care consumers to take action, this campaign is one of the most successful brand journalism initiatives in the health care industry.



Huff/Post50 @huffpost50 · Jan 19
Grab a pencil and paper. This 15-minute test can detect Alzheimer's symptoms
huff.to/1cWqnyw
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LiveScience @LiveScience · Jan 21
Self-Administered Test Helps Spot Early Alzheimer's (Op-Ed) divr.it/4INKtH
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BRAND JOURNALISM CRASHES A WEBSITE (continued from page 13)

How Did They Do It?

The team at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, working as partners with MediaSource, have a proven brand journalism process in place. Brand journalism works best when executed as part of a comprehensive editorial strategy designed to meet the brand's marketing and public relations goals. The process is executed in five steps.

5 Steps to Brand Journalism

1. Brand journalism editorial strategy:

First, determine what you are hoping to achieve with brand journalism. Have a goal and editorial process for vetting story ideas based on the topics that your audience cares about. Once you identify your best stories always ask, WWJD -- "What Would a Journalist Do?" when determining how to approach your content.

2. Content production:

First, make the outline of your story. Then determine the types of multimedia elements that are appropriate to include. Be sure to identify your ideal iconic images before you go on location to capture the content.

3. Targeted media outreach:

Incorporating an earned (news) media strategy into your brand journalism efforts can dramatically increase the number of people you reach with your message. If your story is appropriate for the news media have a process for media outreach. We recommend identifying your key media targets, customizing story pitches for each type of journalist and then executing strategic media pitching and follow up. This process takes a lot of time and effort but if executed properly it can amplify your brand journalism results.

4. Distribution (earned and owned media):

In today's digital world it's important to offer content in the formats and styles that appeal to your target. For company-owned media, make sure you have the proper content for each social media channel before distributing. For the news media, choose a content delivery system or multimedia newsroom that is easy for a journalist to access and use. The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center delivers their content at osuwmc. MultimediaNewsroom.tv, which is shown on page 8.

5. Tracking and results report:

When done correctly, brand journalism results in high ROI. Put the tracking mechanisms and services in place before you launch your campaign so that you can capture your results.

6. CONCLUSION

With brand journalism being integrated into more companies' overall public relations, marketing and communications strategies, the role of the brand journalist will continue to grow into a key part of every brand's communications team.

Communicators should learn the skills to become brand journalists with the goal of identifying and creating stories that appeal to their target audience and move the needle for their brand.

To learn more about Brand Journalism visit. www.MediaSourceTV.com

HOW TO BE A BRAND JOURNALIST

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MediaSource is a team of seasoned public relations professionals and cutting-edge brand journalists who strategically develop relevant content marketing while working together with a select group of client partners.

The MediaSource team combines their journalism training with PR experience to discover news stories and create news content on behalf of a brand.

For 16 years MediaSource has pioneered the PR practice of brand journalism, continually delivering amazing, measurable results that are record-breaking for their client partners.

MediaSource has been named the nation's Best Health Care PR/Marketing Agency by industry leader Ragan Communications for two consecutive years in 2013 and 2014.

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