

CommPRO Introduces Startup, News Direct to Agency Leaders



Wendy Glavin, Founder & CEO, [Wendy Glavin Agency](#)

CommPRO hosted an internal roundtable discussion with [PR](#) and Communications agency leaders about the future of communications. This event was sponsored by the new service, [News Direct](#), and moderated by its CEO and founder, [Gregg Castano](#), former president of Business Wire. At that time, the roundtable discussion included topics like Brexit, the impeachment hearings, the upcoming election cycle and the Super Bowl. These issues (except for the 2020 election) are behind us.

In December 2019, The World Health Organization's China office said it began receiving reports in late December of a

mysterious virus behind a number of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, a city in eastern China with a population of roughly 11 million people.

How to Manage and Build Brand Reputation

We've moved beyond the initial reports with the coronavirus dominating the news cycle hourly and in real-time. An example of a brand managing its brand reputation is Corona Beer. *"Since the emergence and spread of COVID-19, there has been a steady stream of memes tying the virus with Corona beer. Corona has avoided making any public comments or acknowledgment of the name similarities on social media. For the last 15 years, as social media has grown, brands have been told that they need to participate in the cultural conversation around their brands.*

Perhaps the most valuable asset that any marketer can have is earned media—coverage and brand promotion achieved via free coverage and conversation whose value far outstrips any official media investment. Corona has found itself the unintentional beneficiary of perhaps the worst kind of earned media a marketer could imagine. Saying nothing goes against just about every natural instinct of any marketer. In this case, the silence is as refreshing as a beer with a lime in it." – [Fast Company](#), March 2020.

The Importance of Messaging

Global, national and local issues highlight the need for brands, agencies, the C-Suite, and the public to stay ahead of current news, industry and business trends to ensure their messaging (or content) is targeted to the right people, in the right way at the right time.

Beyond IT, companies need to break down departmental silos and democratize data throughout organizations beyond for employees to understand new business models and offer training for

employees to be more agile and up-skill.



Gregg Castano, Chief Executive Officer
News Direct

[Gregg Castano](#), Founder and CEO of [News Direct](#) and former President of Business Wire moderated the event to understand:

1. How agencies use digital communications
2. How digital has changed our jobs and how we operate
3. What are the most effective tools to use?
4. How has public relations changed?

How Do Agencies Use Digital Communications

Attendees shared their various strategies, but all agreed that digital is “what we do” and that the lines have blurred between PR, advertising, marketing, social media and more. Traditional public relations was originally based on obtaining earned media in print and broadcast through press releases, media kits, direct mail and other collateral materials.

Now modern communicators use public relations which encompasses “paid media,” or advertising, “owned media,” such as, websites, blogs, company newsletters, videos, email marketing, social media, apps, and “earned media,” or editorial coverage.

With multichannel strategies, including, television, social media, direct mail, surveys, live chat, SEO, messaging, data analytics, CRM, multi-platforms, USG (user-generated content), podcasts, AI, machine learning, personalization, data privacy and more, the agency leaders agreed that focusing on the

customer is key.

Throughout the last five years, the advent of new and existing technologies have has placed more pressure on companies to manage their data. Many try to do so in-house but find it complex, costly and difficult to scale.

Since marketers are focused on personalization, transparency and understanding the meaning of the data, insights can't be derived from a single data point. Instead, marketing professionals use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); specific marketing metrics for companies to use, track and measure defined goals.

For example, are you measuring website visitors, operations, sales, customer retention, marketing-to-sales leads, conversion rates, customer lifetime value, cost per customer, online marketing ROI, organic search, social media reach, mobile traffic and more?

Often, individuals who are not tech-savvy find it difficult to determine the most effective measurements. Companies need to break down departmental silos across functions, communications, the board, the C-Suite and junior staff to ensure the data is understood throughout organizations. Successful digital transformations are achieved when company cultures are built to embrace change, adaptation and adoption.

What Are the Most Effective Channels?

Gregg asked attendees participants what channels do they use? The answers centered around understanding the customer and the audiences, before determining the tools, platforms and channels.

According to Gartner's Annual CMO Spend Survey 2019-2020, 76% of marketing leaders say they "use data and analytics to drive key decisions," but many still struggle to get this right. You need the right data to make smarter decisions. For example,

Gartner found a “bias for volume metrics over value metrics.”

Volume or vanity metrics include counting followers, engagement and shares. But, metrics don't offer actionable insights. Instead, brands need to analyze qualitative and quantitative data (value metrics) to obtain a deeper understanding of their customers behaviors, interests, needs and the impact of those metrics on the business as a whole.

Most clients want publicity, but public relations and strategic communications have morphed into a broader management function. PR is more of an art that includes storytelling, messaging, relationship-building, identifying compelling, original, educational, thought-provoking and/or entertaining content; the value of which comes from people rather than technology.

“Thirty-five years after Robert Waterman's observation in “ [In Search of Excellence](#) “ found that companies were “data rich and information poor,” little has changed. For sure companies are “data richer,” having exponentially more data at their disposal. But they are still information poor, even as leaders have implemented a wide array of programs aimed at exploiting data.

Most still struggle to build data into their business strategies and, conversely, to align their data efforts to the needs of the business. There are a host of reasons, from lack of talent to unreasonable expectations to culture. Solving these problems is essential for those that wish to unleash the power of data across their organizations.” – [Harvard Business Review](#), March 2020

“Owning” the Strategy and the Story to Shift Perceptions

Often, clients, particularly in tech, don't understand the differences between marketing, PR and social media so agencies

are taking on more of a consulting role. Also, are brands placing a disproportionate value on one type of media versus another?

Gregg asked how the use of press releases has changed?

Some say that press releases are dead. Others say, it's the distribution and content that's changed. Instead of writing a pitch and sending out an email blast, it's about custom-targeting journalists. To do so, PR professionals need to read and research what is of interest to editors, then find a way to pitch a newsworthy story, offer a CEO interview, background information for editors to use in the future, and more.

One attendee said PR is the crown jewel.. For example, if you see an ad for a car, you're likely to ignore it (unless it's coming from a large company or during a big event, like the Super Bowl). Most of us watch the Super Bowls ads to be entertained rather than choosing to purchase the products.

In comparison, if you read an article in Forbes about a company, product or service, this provides third-party credibility (earned media). As a 30-year marcomms professional, I know the value of obtaining earned media for global companies, SMBs and startups to raise brand awareness, build and strengthen relationships, obtain partnerships, grow and generate revenue.

Using social media, we build communities, learn about the trends, and broaden our reach. But, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. It takes time, experience, in-depth research and strategic analysis to identify the most effective marketing strategies for clients.

We need to guide our clients by telling them the truth about what's working and what isn't by going back to the basics: Who is the client? What are their values and mission? How do they differ from the competition? Who are the target audiences, including shareholders, employees, customers, prospects,

influencers and the media? And, how do we reach them?

In the end, it's all about the story and making an emotional connection.

How News Direct Can Help



[News Direct](#)'s custom-built news and content distribution platform was designed to meet the demands of today's strategic communicators, investor relations and corporate communications professionals.

The company is launching its service on May 1, 2020 with a pre-launch for "early adopters" and to obtain beta testers that is being called "Early Access". Any approved organization that enrolls between May 1 and June 30 will be able to distribute an unlimited amount of content, at no charge, for a 30 day period. In addition to bringing traditional news release distribution to the next level, News Direct will be introducing other ground-breaking features including:

- Distribution of standalone multimedia
- Automated workflow for increased efficiency and productivity
- A secure environment for seamless collaboration that enables users to share and review content with key stakeholders within the platform while maintaining total document control
- Flexibility to select distribution options that are segmented into distinct categories such as geographic

media, online news, disclosure, and trade media, without impacting cost

- Transparent rates with no length, geographic charges or surcharges
- Annual subscriptions calculated on a flat rate per asset basis and tied to the volume of assets purchased
- Live chat and 24/7 customer support
- Enhanced metrics including earned media pickup, stock performance data, social media activity and qualified traffic numbers for original content that auto-publish on wire feeds

News Direct founder Gregg Castano said, “Our team of industry veterans have decades of experience-based insight into content and news distribution. This provides our team us with a unique insights perspective on into the seismic challenges facing our business, and the inspiration and vision to solve overcome modern workflow and content distribution obstacles.

We’ve systematically reimaged every step of the process—content formats, the user experience, security, pricing, customer support and analytics.

During these uncertain times, more people are working virtually. As we all try to adapt to the current environment, use the time to learn about new resources that can help you stay ahead of the curve.



About the Author: Wendy Glavin is Founder and CEO of Wendy Glavin, a NYC full-service agency. Wendy is a 20-year veteran of corporate, agency, consulting and small business ownership. She specializes in B2B2C marketing communications, PR, social and digital media. Her website

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