

# PR is the Best Kept Secret in Effective Content Marketing

✘ *By Frank Strong, Author of the blog, [Sword and The Script](#)*

A reporter from *The Washington Post* took an interest on a story pitch about small businesses and the impact on economy.

At the time, my client had a product for a nascent Web economy that would fuel small businesses help them build a web presence. It was at the time, a novel product, and a good match for the story. Or at least it could have been.

We prepped the client for the interview making sure he understood the story the reporter was pursuing, her background, beat and provided clear guidance to keep his answers relevant to her interests for this story.

When we got on the call, it was a disaster. Our client was hard-selling from the get-go, completely oblivious to her story needs and solely focused on his needs to sell product.

Neither the client nor his product earned a mention in that story. Worse, that reporter never corresponded with me again. This must have happened 15 years ago or more, and I'm still embarrassed to this day.

## **Of Trust, Relationships and Long-Term Thinking**

Twice in about a week's time a reporter from a premier media publication has reached out to me regarding a story looking for a source. It's the opportunity for which public relations pros live and the sort of publication where if we earned a mention in a story, would echo throughout the entire organization.

Twice I've punted, opting instead to introduce the reporter to two contacts outside our organization – expert sources that I

felt could better serve this reporter's angle.

Sure I could have been able to find a way to get one of our executives on an interview, and perhaps a mention in the story, but it would have been forceful fit. The danger of eroding that trust is not a risk I'm willing to take.

Any PR pro worth their while knows relationships are built on trust. In the last year, this reporter has hit me up a half-dozen times, and each time I'm able to assist on a story, I earn another level of trust. My pitches to this reporter are read and usually met with one of three reactions:

\*Good pitch, but I'll pass

\*I'll save this maybe for something down the road

\*Yes, that's going to fit, can I speak too...

Reporters write for the benefit of their audience and effective PR people keep that in mind when engaged in media relations. It's why PR pros push back on self-serving press releases, a thinly veiled sales pitch packaged up with a dateline. This line of thinking that content marketers would do well to embrace.

As content marketing gains traction in the larger realm of marketing, there's increased pressure to ensure every piece of content has a call to action, a hard-sell and a means to tabulate last-action attribution. This is a sure-fire path to fail in content marketing, and a central theme of a recent analysis piece on avoiding the trough of disillusionment in content marketing:

1. They focus on campaigns, not conversations—where content marketing is executed with a beginning and an end explicitly to drive short-term results for the business.

2. They're more about the brand than the audience—where marketers focus on their value proposition more than their

values; where the brand—not the audience—is the hero in the story.

3. They're impatient for impact—where executives expect content marketing efforts to ring the cash register on a short horizon—and, when it doesn't, they deem it a failure.

4. They tell undifferentiated stories—where your content is lost in a cacophony of competing content—or, worse, when a brand's content sounds exactly like its competitors.

5. They target too many audiences—where brands fail to focus on a serve a niche, instead casting a wide net with content that's one size fits all—but, more likely, all sizes fit none.

By contrast, classic PR focuses is – markets are conversations. It's an inherent philosophy on being helpful, the soft and subtle pitch with a predilection for storytelling, and the patience to realize trust and by extension, relationships, take time to build.

That reporter working on a story for that top tier media outlet? There's a good chance we might wind up in the story anyway. But if we don't, I always know if I've got a good story pitch, that reporter will consider it and more importantly, will come back to me when looking for future stories. This is precisely the sort of engagement organizations should be seeking in building out a culture of content marketing.

*About the Author: Frank Strong is a communications director with more than 15 years of experience in the high-tech sector. He previously served as director of public relations for Vocus, which developed marketing, PR and media monitoring software. He has held multiple roles both in-house with corporations, ranging from startups to global organizations, and with PR firms including the top 10 global firm Hill & Knowlton.*

