

People buy newspapers and magazines for news stories, not advertising



By [Nicolas Pompigne-Mognard](#)

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Over the years, advertising has lost its psychological influence and subliminal power. These days, consumers and the public in general value the information they find in respectable media sources. Featuring in the news section costs significantly less than running an advertisement.



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In today's competitive business climate, getting more bang for your buck is critical in marketing, especially with consumers insisting on more insight into what they are buying. For marketers who have been struggling to determine just how and where to use their budget to best influence the decisions of their selective consumers, shifting the focus from advertising to public relations has played an essential part in their marketing strategy. A recent study conducted by Nielsen found that content marketing is 88 percent less effective than public relations ([Download the study](#)).

While communication has never been easier or scarier, now that social media is a major part of almost everybody's lives, selling still provides a company's main source of revenue. Today, consumers receive triple the amount of incentive messages (to buy or believe in a product) and have become less loyal to specific brands. They also recognise that advertising is a psychological manipulation tool, and with that recognition comes mistrust. With this in mind, companies are now using public relations to introduce their brands sensibly, consolidating their reputation through word of mouth and engaging with their market through media stories delivered via trusted sources.

Most of these stories start with a factual press release that attracts the interest of journalists to generate a front-page story, allowing the company to assume an authentic, credible image. In a recent interview with *Forbes*, "*Guerrilla P.R.*" author Michael Levine said that a well-written article scores much higher on the believability scale than an advertisement and that "an article [...] is between 10 times and 100 times more valuable than an advertisement."

Craig Atherford, Head of Financial Services at H+K Strategies, in Johannesburg, says, "The rise in business to human communications (B2H) has changed the way we are working with many of our clients at H+K Strategies. Trends across blurred audiences (the lines between our professional and personal lives), audience investigators (anyone with access to the internet) and changing influence (everyone is an influencer) means that we have been developing new communications

strategies for our clients. This is driving the need to align your communications and to connect with all your audiences to tell your real story, your real purpose and the reason that your company exists in the world beyond delivering shareholder value. It no longer makes sense to have different communications strategies for multiple stakeholders. We need strategies that align corporate, CSR, internal and consumer communications, one that humanises the brand. These trends connect with multiple audiences and place the companies 'purpose' at their heart. Our B2H communication strategies balance human and cultural truths with insights brand and category insights and deliver a consistent message across all channels. No matter what the sector the most effective communications have creativity, innovation and insight at the core."

Content for a media savvy market

With the increasing popularity of social media, the power of the internet and the likes of Google, content has become more important than ever. In Africa, where people use social media to communicate on everything from product reviews to political uprisings, PR firms have had to shake off their "one size fits all" approach and adapt content to meet the trend influencers as well as the cultural landscapes of these markets. The expertise of local PR practitioners varies across the continent but many have yet to find the perfect recipe for creating valuable content and attracting the full power of the media across borders. Content from editorial sources carries far more weight than marketing content simply because it is an editor's role to uncover the truth.

Richard Uku, Head of Corporate Communications at the Lome-based Ecobank Group, is a firm believer in the power of public relations. He says: "Strategic public relations entails direct and often interactive engagement with one's target audience. Such engagement, whether through the vast reaches of social media or by simply reaching out and cultivating relationships with stakeholders, is a much surer way of raising awareness around an issue and ultimately changing behaviour than commercial marketing. The power of a well written article is far more poignant than an advert that merely plays on the consumers' intelligence."

For a product, a personality or an issue to make the news, you need a good story, one that journalists will pick up and run with, becoming a trusted emissary for your message. This is why PR firms must play a proactive role in changing mindsets in order to redirect the budget towards public relations. Advertising costs are excessive and short lived, where their success is only dependent on who else is represented next to them in the magazine, newspaper, radio spot or web portal.

Sparking trending conversations not only requires social media audiences to retain light-fingered attention spans but also a multi-faceted relationship with news makers to simultaneously expand the trend; it is undeniable that nowadays we are bombarded with news of all sorts - hence the term 'trending on twitter' is now necessary to highlight your story. This is the natural habitat of the PR animal and the reason why having an effective PR team is crucial to any communications strategy - there is only one chance to make a first impression.

It was with this in mind that I founded APO (African Press Organization) and Africa Wire®, the newswire service for press release distribution and monitoring in Africa. Based in Dakar, APO helps public relations professionals transform "communications" - press releases - into valuable "information" via articles published in reputable media. "In so many ways, PR outperforms advertising for reaching targeted audiences, building brands and making the most of marketing dollars.

Advertising is a necessary evil, but if you could not afford it, would it be so terrible?".

ABOUT NICOLAS POMPIGNE-MOIGNARD

Nicolas Pompiagne-Moignard is the Founder and Chairman of APO Group (African Press Organization) (www.apo-opa.com), the leading Pan-African communications consultancy and press release distribution service. More information: www.Pompiagne-Moignard.com

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