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Traditional Versus Digital PR: Is There A Need For Both?

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The last two decades have been a whirlwind of change. Email, social media, instant messaging -- there are now more ways to communicate with each other than ever before, and unsurprisingly, this revolution is changing the way that people consume information and media.

This year, digital ad spending is projected to reach an all-time high of [\\$232.48 billion](#) (subscription required) in North America. In a world where a tweet has the potential to reach more people than a million-dollar ad campaign, does traditional public relations (PR) run the risk of becoming obsolete?

Before we can answer that question, let's first discuss the difference between traditional PR and digital PR

Traditional PR

When you think of traditional PR, think about the forms of communication that do not require the internet, like radio, television and print. Traditional types of public relations involve reaching out to these brick-and-mortar establishments and building relationships. It requires things like press releases, reputation management and attending trade shows. Basically, if it was done before 1990, it will usually fall under the realm of traditional PR.

Using traditional PR can be a great way to boost your credibility since these avenues are easily identifiable. Just because you love cooking doesn't mean that you know what the No. 1 cooking blog is, but almost every cooking aficionado at least knows what the Food Network is.

One of the biggest challenges of traditional PR is that results are difficult to measure. You can't really tell how many people read your announcement in the newspaper. Traditional PR is harder to track. But when it works, I've seen that the rewards can be significantly greater than paid advertising and new media avenues.

Digital PR

In many ways, digital PR is similar to traditional forms of PR but very different in some key areas. Digital PR still relies on things like building relationships and distributing press releases. The difference, however, is that most of this networking and communication is done online and through social media.

One key component of digital PR involves building relationships with prominent bloggers and influencers. Influencers are prominent social media users with vast networks of followers, reaching tens of thousands to millions of people. By building relationships with these individuals, digital PR reps can help create brand awareness and boost their client's reputation and SEO rankings.

While success in the traditional PR realm is difficult to quantify, success in digital PR is easily tracked. Depending on the platform, digital PR reps can follow things like engagement, cost per click, cost per sale and almost any other kind of metric you can think of. The flipside of all of this is that you need to be a little more tech savvy than your average consumer, and for some, this can be difficult.

Digital Versus Traditional

So, which is better: digital or traditional PR? The answer is not straightforward.

To start with, there is a reason why traditional PR is, well, the tradition. The world might be becoming more digital, but there is still something to be said about good old-fashioned networking and relationship building. Furthermore, the public at large still depends on traditional media sources like radio, television and print. Even those in the digital space often still get their news and entertainment from what we consider "traditional" media sources, so it would be foolish to go for an entirely digital strategy and ignore what's worked for so long.

Likewise, there is a reason why digital PR is building up so much momentum. Digital PR enables businesses and entrepreneurs to cost-effectively reach millions of potential customers. Why waste time and money reaching out to newspapers or going to trade shows when you can instantly reach millions of people with the click of a button?

In the end, neither digital or traditional PR is superior to the other. Businesses should execute a combination of both traditional and digital PR for maximum exposure. Like so many things in life, one must balance the old with the new, and it is the challenge of every public relations expert to find where that balance lies.