



# PR 2.0

## A Communicator's Manifesto

By Deirdre Breakenridge

I've always been an advocate of the PR profession and for years I've worked very hard along with my peers to educate and communicate to others that PR is one of the greatest means to build relationships and trust with the public when practiced properly. My hope, someday, is to have my profession recognized as a critical marketing function in which everyone from executives and the members of their organizations to the stakeholders in the market acknowledge the true value of PR. It would be an incredibly good feeling to say, "Finally, I think everyone appreciates and understands the meaning and importance of PR."

But, somehow, an industry that has the potential to soar to great heights, and the PR professionals who serve a critical function, have to fight very hard to remove an ongoing stigma—that of being viewed as nothing more than spin doctors, flacks and mere paper pushers. There have been times, I can admit, that I've felt the need to defend the PR industry and its damaged reputation. It took a lot of hard work to get where we are, and we can't stop now. A new change is upon us and with this change comes the opportunity to take back our industry's credibility and create the reputation that it deserves.

There's so much more work to be done in this profession that has the potential to use today's web technology and 2.0 platforms to foster the greatest communication of all time—and for all types of organizations and the markets they reach. So, just when we all thought that people were beginning to understand the importance of PR, the use and value of the credible third party endorsement, and the effort it takes to build a relationship, it's time for our industry to evolve again. For me, when I look at my life, my business, and of course my profession, I reflect that change is the constant and stability is only a variable.

Today, an immense change is happening to PR and it will affect communications professionals around the world from this point forward. The concept of PR 2.0 was born about 10 years ago (although not many people know this). **PR 2.0 places a whole new meaning and value on PR and marks the true convergence of PR and the Internet.** I believe that with PR 2.0, a new breed of Web savvy PR/marketing professionals has been born. As a result of PR 2.0, brands are able to have conversations directly with their customers in niche Web communities. They are invited to participate in dialogue in places where they have never been invited to participate before. PR 2.0 puts the “public” back in public relations with the ability to speak to more people. The concept is driven by technology (the Web 2.0 platform and social media applications) and 21st century consumer behavior.

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Technology is leading this new PR movement. Today, with increased bandwidth and innovative Web 2.0 applications, users are able to congregate, collaborate and share an unbelievable amount of content. Web 2.0 complements PR with a collaborative environment that supports strong conversations and enables people to find and enjoy useful information through social media tools. These tools include RSS, social networking, blogs, podcasting, and streaming video, just to name a few.

Consumer behavior is also a key consideration in this change. Consumers prefer to drive their own communication. They also want to gather, organize and share information to make informed decisions. As consumers learn that the Internet allows them to have meaningful conversations

with like-minded individuals, they increasingly demand to hear a voice from their brands. Therefore, it's important for the executives of companies, no matter how small or large the brand, to understand how a public voice shows the human side of a company. Consumers expect a lot from their favorite brands. They desire direct communication, to hear firsthand about products and services, to be able to ask questions and receive quick responses, to hear a person's voice and to learn the company's position on an issue in its industry, and to believe they can trust the people behind their favorite brands.

In order to facilitate what today's consumer wants, organizations have to give up command and control styles of communication. That's the only way to encourage dialogue and take a position on issues in the market. I follow the advice of a wise colleague, Mark Brooks, Founder of [Online Personals Watch](#) and a social networking consultant who I interviewed in my book, *PR 2.0*. He told me the advice he gives to his clients is "If you don't take a stance, then you don't stand for anything." Today, more so than ever, people expect to see the human side of company and, therefore, companies can no longer hide behind their monikers.

With the emergence of PR 2.0 and a new PR movement, there are many challenges faced by the PR profession. These challenges include:

- PR 2.0 facilitates direct to consumer conversations and changes how many view the third party credible endorsement.
- PR people feel they are knocked out of the communications process if brands can go direct to customers.
- Citizen journalists have a platform on the web, and the nature of the media and reporting is changing.
- Blogger relations have become a part of the new media relations and you need to build relationships with these influencers.
- Change in any profession causes intimidation and fear.

One of the most promising aspects of PR 2.0 is the fact that brands can hear what their customers have to say and answer their questions and respond to their needs. Through social media tools, brands have the ability to have a 24/7/365 focus panel on their website or in niche communities on the Web. Not only are brands having direct conversations, but they can also review what customers are saying to each other by monitoring the blogosphere.

In the PR person's eyes, this is a tremendous change to the traditional PR model. As a matter of fact, it flips the PR model on its head. PR 2.0 doesn't wait for the consumer to read about what a brand has to say or learn something useful about a product they enjoy from a magazine or newspaper. Today, the consumer can receive the information firsthand and PR people don't have to use a media relations outreach program to get credible information to audiences. Now, that's not to say that a media relations program goes away. On the contrary, media relations and journalist outreach is a strategy that is still a valuable part of the PR equation today.

However, if a brand is trying to reach wired customers, then they should be thinking about blogger relations and reaching those influential A-list people who sway the thinking of thousands of people in niche Web communities. And, remember, some of those new influential bloggers just may be your favorite journalists, as well as the new citizen journalists who have found a voice and a platform to discuss their thoughts and opinions. You could even say that these influential bloggers are also the new credible third party endorsers.

If the nature of the model changes, then how do PR people keep themselves from being knocked out of the process. This will only happen if you let it happen! PR people have this incredible opportunity to embrace and engage in PR 2.0 communication and to help their brands understand the value of meaningful conversations with customers. Sure, with the change in technology comes change to our function, but in this case it is for the better. I interviewed Brian Cross, who is head Director of Fleishman-Hillard's Digital Group in Saint Louis. He said "I think that there's going to be a whole lot more direct conversations with the consumer and I think the consumer is going to gain more and more control, but not control in a bad way, control in a way that they're going to ask for exactly what they want. This will definitely help the brand."

Cross discussed with me his thoughts about the PR professional's role in the new PR movement. For Cross, that doesn't mean that PR and advertising are going to go away because, all of a sudden, companies can bypass the communications professionals and just go direct to the consumer. He believes that when companies decide to go direct to consumer, they often have trouble figuring out which niches are right for them. It's harder today with so many different web communities. That's where PR is crucial. PR is going to basically come in and say "These are the right target audiences for you in these communities and we're going to now show you how to walk into that community and make yourself attractive enough that they are going to want to strike up a conversation with you." Cross's main point was that PR 2.0 and social media tools allow you to do this and do it successfully.

There's a tremendous role that PR has always played in the area of relationship building and PR 2.0 is no exception to this rule.

But, as Cross mentioned, you can't just walk into a community when you're not invited and expect to be received with open arms. And, in order for PR people to understand that there are guidelines or ways to go about blogger relations in social networking communities, they must first engage in social dialogue and become a part of the conversations. I can't stress enough the importance of using social media to become a member of a social networking community. It's not for us to preach about using social media tools, especially if we've never used these tools personally. I wouldn't be able to write this manifesto as a communicator involved in the new PR movement if I wasn't on Facebook, Plaxo, LinkedIn, Twitter, Dopplr, MyRagan, etc. It's critical that you don't just observe from the outside—you need to be on the inside. This is the only way to make recommendations and assist your brands with the best ways for them to engage in conversations with their customers.

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Once you engage, you will quickly see how communities work, and how blogger relations *is* the new media relations. You cannot simply reach out to bloggers and pitch them about something cool that you want them to write about if you haven't done your homework. That's not how it works. These influencers, similar to the traditional media, want to know that you understand who they are,

what they believe in, recognize their interests and be able to discuss information that's appropriate for their conversations. Brian Solis, founder and principle of FutureWorks wrote a post on his blog, PR 2.0 ([www.briansolis.com](http://www.briansolis.com)), about how he was recently pitched by someone who didn't really understand the nature of blogger relations. Solis provides his commentary in parentheses within the body of the letter that he received from an anonymous individual:

Dear Brain solis, (*Yes, notice the typo. I'm a smart guy, but I haven't flirted with changing my name yet.*)

XXXX provides holistic and synergistic blend of traditional online marketing and emerging social media based buzz marketing (*wait, is that one sentence? And, is this a new category, Emerging Social Media Based Buzz Marketing?!*), to help its clients derive maximum value from their marketing dollars.

For example, our understanding of the key words for any client will be useful not only in SEO and SEM but also in Social Media based marketing campaigns, as we can weave in same key words for better impact and enhanced SEO ranking.

Similarly XXXX's Buzz Tracker, can dig (*surprised it wasn't "DIGG"*) into various online conversations and provide a clear understanding of the available opportunities, any warning signs, key influencers and how the target audience perceives a client. The insights thus derived can help us design more effective buzz generation campaigns, resulting in enhanced brand image and revenue (*where or where do I sign up!?*).

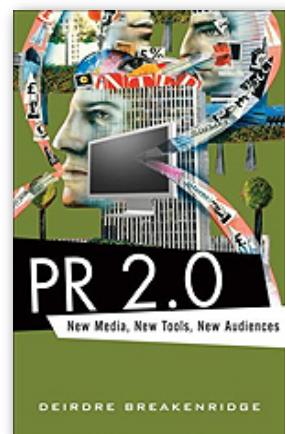
Hence XXXX is not only a one-stop-shop for all your online marketing needs, but it also offers you unmatched ROI.

Let me know if this interests you. (*Um, synergistic'ly, along with my Social Media Buzzin Holistic partners in crime, I don't think so. K Thx. Bai.*)

As you can tell from his comments, Solis clearly felt that this person pitched him without any knowledge whatsoever about his interests or what he covers on his PR 2.0 blog. From the misspelling of the name to the way the offering was introduced, this individual did not read Solis's blog and take the time to be a part the conversations that occur there daily. In order to survive, and not be blocked from participating in conversations, you have to learn how to build relationships. And, let's face it, in PR this is what we know how to do best.

The changes occurring in the PR profession are immense. They may be somewhat intimidating and feel unfamiliar to many who are used to practicing PR pre-Web 2.0 and prior to the socialization of media. However, with PR 2.0 blazing a path to great PR through meaningful conversations, right now is the greatest time for a PR movement to prove the profession's value and incredible worth. By nature, you may feel apprehensive about releasing communication in a different fashion, but if you've listened and absorbed the messages in this manifesto, you will walk away with a newfound strength in yourself and the PR industry. You will realize that, even with the changes and associated risks of PR 2.0, such as not having as much control over communication, there are still tremendous opportunities to interact and build relationships with journalists, bloggers, and customers. Your role as a communicator becomes even more significant as you and your brand(s) engage in the type of dialogue and information sharing that has never been experienced before. ☑

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## BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Breakenridge's [PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences.](#)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deirdre K. Breakenridge is President and Director of Communications at PFS Marketwyse, a marketing communications agency in New Jersey. A veteran in the PR industry, Deirdre leads a creative team of PR and marketing executives strategizing to gain brand awareness for their clients through creative and strategic PR campaigns. She is the author of *PR 2.0: New Media, New Tools, New Audiences*, *Cyberbranding: Brand Building in the Digital Economy* and *The New PR Toolkit: Strategies for Successful Media Relations*. Keep up with her online at [deirdrebreakenridge.com](http://deirdrebreakenridge.com).

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