



EARNED MEDIA COVERAGE

WHY IT PAYS **NOT** TO
PAY FOR COVERAGE

SMOKING
GUN

SUMMARY

In the ever shifting media and marketing landscape, for some businesses the art of capturing 'earned' media coverage - ie. securing editorial on the strength of your story, not a paid placement or ad - has slipped down the to-do list, its value seemingly diminished by the lack of accountability for what it delivers.

In an era of seemingly unstoppable digitisation and the transparency that digital marketing brings, £1 spent on paid search may realistically yield over £3 of revenue, so why bother wasting precious time on articles?

Having a healthy and balanced marketing plan that includes earned seems sensible, but more importantly your brand could be losing out on trust and further revenue in the post-truth era by not maximising this specialist field. And that's not to mention the SEO benefits that a strategic digital editorial approach brings to your armoury.

Don't be left in the cold, read on and keep your brand punching above its weight with some authoritative, trusted media hits.

So what is earned media coverage and why does it pay **not** to pay for placement?

Earned media coverage is that which has been garnered by anything other than advertising expenditure. Or, to put that another way, paid is basically when you pay the host magazine, newspaper, or website to place your brand, whereas earned means being included on merit, which can be much easier when there is already a strong relationship between the brand media team and journalist or editor.

Smoking Gun may be an interdisciplinary communications agency that now has its award-winning fingers in pies ranging from app build to content marketing, but its roots lie firmly in the home of earned media coverage - for many, the mainstay of public relations.

We are dab hands at liaising and opening up dialogue with journalists, editors, bloggers, and social media influencers, and giving them great ideas to run with, in turn producing quality original content that strategically positions clients, conveys their key messages and positively influences their stakeholders.

...earned means
being included
on merit...

**NOT CONVINCED
THE EARNED
APPROACH IS
FOR YOU?**

**HERE ARE A FEW
POINTS THAT
EXPLAIN IN MORE
DETAIL EXACTLY
HOW IT CAN HELP
YOUR ORGANISATION**



Build brand awareness

Increasing the familiarity of your brand name in the public's conscious isn't easy, but is incredibly effective. Giving your overall reach a huge boost- i.e. getting the company or product name seen by more and more pairs of eyes in the media- results in a greater likelihood you'll be the first word on their lips when it comes to purchasing decisions.

Offer exposure with longevity

Digital placement sticks around for a long time and potentially generates valuable 'follow' links, which can help drive web traffic to your site. Canonical mentions are also a boon to SEO performance, too; the more name drops Google can find the more people will find your company when searching for relevant products and services.

Kickstart wider campaigns

While magazines such as Design Exchange have been experimenting with the idea of Augmented Reality Adverts, for the most part advertising is about selling a fundamental idea or lifestyle. Placement in an article can communicate a far more complex idea. When that appears in a high profile title the impact is huge, immediately raising awareness and understanding which can then be supported with other marketing spend.

Build on credibility

The press is considered a trustworthy source of information. According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer— which looks at the public's level of trust in the media, government and business— faith in journalism has increased by 5 points in the last 12 months, but by comparison trust in platforms such as social networks has declined by two points. As such having your brand featured in a quality outlet - that its audience already trust - is a surefire way of boosting the credibility you already had; the public knows advertising is sold to the highest bidder, in comparison editorial goes to the rightful winner.





In a recent article, 'Fake News Is Good News for Communicators', James Staunton of InstinctifPartners cited his company's white paper which shows how respected news sources like New Yorker and Spectator magazines, Radio 4's Today, and LBC radio now boast record audience levels.

Perhaps most tellingly, according to Cision and Gorkana's UK Pulse data on media consumption, only 18% of respondents said Facebook was trustworthy as a source, with Twitter even lower at just 17%.

18%

THINK FACEBOOK IS A
TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE

17%

THINK TWITTER IS A
TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE



To quote the Edelman Trust Barometer again, 2017 saw the US experience its biggest 'collapse of confidence' in the study's history, citing a "staggering lack of faith in the government" as a key cause.

But there are some rays of hope piercing otherwise dark clouds. Trust in the Technology sector is highest, at 75%, followed by Education (70%). And CEO credibility is on the rise, up seven points to 44% of the American population. A key reason for this was high profile business leaders choosing to go public with opinion relating to current affairs stories, using mainstream media as a platform.

Offer real measurement

At Smoking Gun we have always obsessed over delivering the clearest form of evaluation, which can offer an easy-to-understand Return On Investment to clients.

Hence our status as a PRCA Approved Measurement Champion agency; a sign that we can not only gauge, but prove, the overall impact of your outlay.



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about intelligent
measurement of
your comms:

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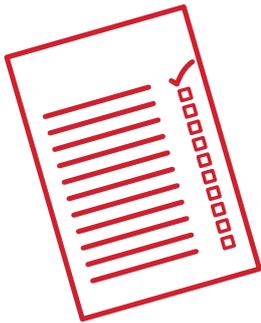
Need more evidence?

HERE'S A RECENT CASE STUDY FOR ONE OF OUR CLIENTS

It takes some real ingenuity to cause a countrywide rush on a product you've only been working with for a couple of weeks. But that's exactly what Smoking Gun did after taking on a new FMCG client, leading UK brand of toiletries aimed at young and sensitive skin.

Objectives

The specialist health and beauty brand, focussing on the infant market, wanted to introduce a new product to the UK. They knew that they had a great product and good organic engagement on social media but didn't know how to amplify this message to gain a real ROI from activity. They came to Smoking Gun as we are experts in driving a real ROI from PR activity.



In order to understand how we could amplify the message for the client, after winning the pitch we immediately began scouring the brand's social media advocates for statements and content with which to form the beginnings of a campaign.

We identified one post from a mum who had cured her daughter's eczema using the brand's moisturiser, which was driving unprecedented engagement. We then formed a clear plan as to how this miraculous discovery could win some major media points for the client whilst ensuring the client would have full visibility on the results to show a clear ROI from the PR activity.



Strategy & Plan

Firstly, we identified that the target market would be a great fit for strategic PR if the narrative was right. To do this we went back to the post which was creating great organic engagement and interviewed the mum to develop a compelling human interest story that would resonate with the target audiences across multiple channels.

To ensure we fully captured the impact of the product we gathered relevant assets including before and after photos, and soundbites praising the product and the brand. Once we had crafted an effective narrative we used our professional outreach to approach major press outlets which led to us securing a 24-hour exclusive with Mail Online, which we had identified as a key target channel for our mums audience. Once the initial spike in exposure was finished we ensured that the coverage continued by rolling the story out to other major national media outlets. This resulted in coverage being picked up beyond the UK's borders and across social channels.



Evaluation & Results

Smoking Gun always focuses on cutting through the waffle and giving clients a clear picture of ROI when running a PR campaign. This means the team goes deep when measuring and evaluating our campaigns.

For this campaign we utilised a combination of retailer EPOS data, Google analytics, social shares, media analysis, sentiment analysis & impact on client owned media channels. This mix of analysis allowed us to not only show what had been said but how PR had impacted sales and the wider brand image.

We achieved very big things for the brand as a result of our keen eye and lateral thinking, which can best be summarised as causing the moisturiser product to sell out across Britain.

Here's more conclusive evidence

- Major media hits in Mail Online, alongside The LadBible, The Sun, The Independent, The Mirror, Metro, and Hello!, to name but a handful
- 60,000 shares from Mail Online alone
- 40,000 visits to their website, 6,000 new Facebook likes... in five days
- Highest number of website visits of all time, coming from countries across the globe
- BMoisturiser sold out within days on brand website and in Boots stores nationwide
- 150% increase in supermarket sales

It goes to show that with a little bit of ingenuity paired with a strategic and analytical approach you can achieve a great ROI from PR and get the stats to prove it.



Graph to show increase in web sessions of client's website after a raft of PR coverage

FAKE NEWS

Our well-respected agency blog pages have looked at emerging problems in advertising a number of times recently.

The effect of fake news has been significant, with unreliable or completely fabricated stories being circulated on social networks, with some 'non-stories' coming from websites built to look like some of the biggest news agencies in the world, for example BBC.

Fake news has also, perhaps surprisingly, increased the public's faith in traditional, professional, and credible news sources, despite the fact you may have assumed this proliferation of false stories would damage the press as a whole.

Ogilvy's Media Influence's 2017 annual global survey of 250-plus reporters and producers found that in Europe 47% of respondents claimed 'traditional media' was king when it comes to trust.

This is followed by company websites and press releases (22%). The threat of deception has actually benefited the influence of familiar outlets.



Programmatic advertising— the model whereby commercials are placed next to media content automatically— has also caused huge problems, with brands finding their clips and banners appearing next to offensive, extremist, or simply falsified content.

Advertising woes don't end there, either. Smoking Gun's own blog post - [Advertising fear: Is it game over for the Madmen?](#) - referenced a startling statistic published by Mediatel back in June 2016.

7/10 Brits simply don't trust advertising at all.

So whilst a full page in a glossy magazine may appear to be prominent, and 30 seconds of airtime during The Great British Bake Off seems like money well spent, their persuasive capacity is actually becoming much more limited.

This is before we come to the rise in ad blockers. Although there has been some slowdown in the increased use of software that prevents pop ups and other online commercials appearing, as per the Internet Advertising Bureau's UK's Ad Blocking Report conducted by YouGov, over 1/5 of British adults now browse the web with blockers on, meaning they won't see the money brands spend.

Moreover, mobile ad blockers are growing in popularity at a rate of 30% year-on-year, a particularly worrying statistic when you consider mobile is the most rapidly growing means of accessing anything online.

A key benefit of partners with a core background in public relations is the overall knowledge of the media landscape.

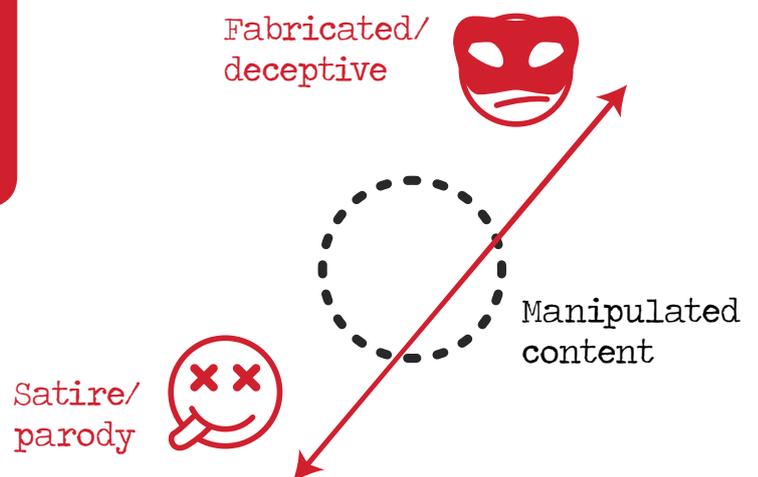
According to the Scale of Intent study, published by First Draft News, there are several varieties of fake news. The lowest in terms of threat is benign, satirical content that has no desire to mislead.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are reports designed to look real, but have been entirely made up.

Between the two you have manipulated content.

Experts view the middle ground as most damaging in the UK - partisan headlines that are stretching the facts out to within an inch of lies in a bid to pull readers.

These stories are particularly prevalent online, and can be identified as cases in which the original 'sell' does not actually relate to the crux of the story.



Affiliation and partnerships with any outlets responsible for fake news production, of any kind, can be incredibly damaging to brands - hence the likes of Kellogg's rejecting the notorious Breitbart News in a bid to save the company from significant reputation damage.

Without experts to guide a firm through the rapidly changing media sphere, advising on which outlets work in terms of demographics and - more importantly- which should be avoided due to their potential to do more harm than good, firms would be lost in an increasingly confusing media sphere.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it has never been more important to strive for genuine earned media coverage, here are 5 key reasons why:

- 1 Earned coverage is editorial, written by journalists, who remain trusted sources of information
- 2 Scoring big hits in the right titles delivers fully targeted reach because each readership can be analysed for age, gender, professional level, family size and income, matching these to your target market
- 3 Achieving great earned coverage online can help boost traffic to your site, especially if the article links back to your domain, with brand name mentions boosting visibility in organic Google search
- 4 An advert runs for a set amount of time before it is replaced, editorial content in the majority of major publications will stay online forever
- 5 Finally, 7/10 Britons do not believe what advertising tells them

Call or email us now for a free personalised Earned Media review of your brand.

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About the author

Martin Guttridge-Hewitt is Smoking Gun's Associate Copywriter who leads on in-house content, such as the agency's acclaimed blog and monthly newsletter. Specialising in media and communications, he is also an award-winning journalist and magazine editor.



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