

## TIP SHEET

# Storytelling in an increasingly pay-to-play PR world

Great stories invite audiences in and immerse them in possibility. They inspire both imagination and action. But telling impactful stories and reaching audiences has become harder for today's tech brands.

## BACKGROUND

From distracted consumers to highly-competitive markets to a surge in AI-produced content - tech companies have to be more aggressive in order to maintain always-on communications programs. And this task is even more challenging due to today's increasingly pay-to-play PR landscape.

Since the decline of printed news in the early 2000's, publishers' monetization strategies have steadily changed. First came digital subscriptions, paywalls and display advertising. This was followed by major newsroom contractions. Then came multi-channel advertising packages and new platforms (like sponsored podcasts). As news publishers raced to optimize profits, so did social media platforms with advertising, verified listings and more. Below are a few stats that illuminate how it's harder than ever for B2B brands to reach consumers via earned media alone:

- 1 In 2023's State of Earned Media Report, the #1 difficulty PR practitioners said they face in obtaining earned media coverage is the shrinking pool of reporters. Fewer journalists means reporters have less time to attend press events/trade shows, build relationships with sources, and cover stories.
- 2 While contributed articles used to be plentiful and free, [Alloy's](#) PR consultants estimate that about a third of outlets have transitioned to fee-based bylines while others limit the volume of content a company can contribute.
- 3 From Facebook and Instagram to LinkedIn and X, organic social media reach has dropped across all platforms. For example, the average Facebook post will only reach 5% of your followers, but a Facebook ad has a 9.21% conversion rate.

## **While B2B earned media is still very much alive, brands must deploy a new set of strategies in order to maximize it.**

Here are three must-have elements of a tech public relations program today:

### **Use bold narratives and thought-provoking media activations**

With fewer journalists and more competition for headlines, your PR program must be rooted in out-of-the-box narratives that cut through reporters' inboxes. For example, data reports are typically welcomed by journalists because most newsrooms can no longer afford in-house data or polling teams. However, the original research that your company publishes must be unique, non-promotional and stand apart from all the other data that journalists receive. Similarly, futuristic predictions and provocative outlooks on trending topics make for great headlines. Remember, today's publishing revenue models incentivize reporters to write articles that will receive a high volume of clicks and full-page reads.

### **Integrate direct buys**

It's sad but true - publishers tend to give earned coverage to the brands that also give them advertising dollars. CMOs, be sure to include a direct buy line item in your annual marketing budget so that your comms team can place contributed articles, sponsor podcast episodes and more. When negotiating the direct buy, ask the publisher to commit to covering your brand in editorial coverage 2-3 times per year, as well. At Alloy, we often encourage clients to coordinate a direct buy around the timing of a large activation (see tip #1).

### **Elevate thought leaders across channels**

While much of B2B marketing has changed over the past 50 years, one thing hasn't - people still trust people over brands. For example, statistically, if an executive at your brand posts the exact same LinkedIn post that your company page does, the executive will get more views and engagement. In addition, your brand is more likely to receive press coverage on an announcement if a thought leader is available to add his/her/their industry perspective to the news. Therefore, today B2B brands should have a well-strategized thought leadership program so that every brand marketing campaign is humanized and evangelized by at least one spokesperson.

**See how Alloy leveraged all 3 strategies to boost a FinTech client's share of voice by 197% and its website referral traffic by 20%.**