

# DISTRIBUTION AND MEDIA MESSAGING

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PRESS RELEASES AND OTHER FORMS  
OF COMMUNICATION



# Summary

Through conversation with industry experts, case studies and other analysis, this white paper looks at the tools PR professionals use to distribute their communications and content.

Journalists continue to rely on the humble press release, and share their advice for getting it right. However, digital forms of distribution enable communicators to speak directly to their audience more than ever before and, with the aid of case studies from Barnardo's and Flora, this white paper also looks at how PRs put these modern tools into practice.

## Contents

• Introduction	02
• Contributors	03
• Strategic distribution	04
• Distribution methods	05
• Case study: Barnardo's #BelieveinMe	06
• The press release	08
• What journalists look for in press releases	09
• Case study: Flora lunchbox challenge	11
• Gorkana's top tips for effective distribution	13
• Distribution developments and the future	14
• Conclusion	15

# Introduction

Content distribution methods can change drastically over the course of a public relations professional's career. Many in the industry will remember when press releases were distributed in hard copy by post or by fax, practices that have since become almost obsolete.

In recent years, digital channels have been the primary catalyst for changes to PR content distribution. Whether communications specialists are communicating with the media, with stakeholders or with employees, digital plays a role in almost every distribution strategy.

A distribution strategy should take audience, message and intent into account, and can encompass methods as diverse as industry events, one-on-one conversations, digital publishing and social sharing. The type of method used should be informed by the specific campaign, its audience and the wider goals of the brand, but it appears that there are more options than ever before available to PR professionals looking to distribute their content.

Agencies and in-house teams continue to use innovative distribution means, yet the press release endures as a staple of the communications campaign. Though a press release on its own does not make a campaign, it remains an integral part of the majority of media relations strategies, and is a valuable tool for journalists despite complaints of inbox clutter.



# Contributors



**Deborah Villiers**  
director, brand  
MHP Communications

Deborah has 10 years of experience delivering high impact, big brand PR campaigns. She ran the American Express Sneak Peek campaign for the past four years, and heads up the GAME account, generating year-round coverage and presence for the retailer.



**Joe Friel**  
head of influencer relations  
Good Relations

Joe Friel heads up Good Influence, a specialist influencer marketing division within Good Relations designed to provide an end-to-end management service that enables clients to identify, deliver and measure successful influencer marketing strategies.



**Jamie Brader**  
director, wire products EMEA  
PR Newswire

Jamie, who has worked in the PR industry for nearly 20 years, started his career in the industry at NEWSdesk – an online news service delivering targeted technology news to its journalist members. He then moved on to TwoTen Communications – formally the commercial arm of the Press Association – where he initially cut his teeth on the “wire”.



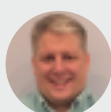
**Gareth Davies**  
head of digital and insight, EMEA  
WE Communications

With a background in technology PR, Gareth now works at Studio D UK, Waggener Edstrom (WE) Worldwide's specialist digital marketing division. He advises a wide range of technology and healthcare clients on their global digital and social media marketing strategies across paid, earned and owned platforms.



**Rhianon Thompson**  
director  
Remarkable Content

Rhianon specialises in strategy, campaign development and execution, Key Opinion Leader (KOL) engagement and influence, crisis and issues management, employee engagement, training and mentoring. Before joining Remarkable in 2016, She held a head of communications role at Consumer Finance Association, and has worked for Kavanagh Communications and Golley Slater.



**Glenn Frates**  
regional vice president  
PR Newswire

Glenn Frates has over 15 years of experience in large-scale operations management. His areas of expertise include content marketing strategy, media relations and improving the customer experience.

# Strategic distribution

A distribution strategy can vary greatly according to the message, the target audience and how best to reach and engage with them. Traditionally, campaigns are based around press releases and events such as press conferences and photo opportunities, but these days a distribution strategy will likely include digital elements, such as social media platforms and online video channels.



**Deborah Villiers**  
director, brand at MHP  
Communications

Gathering detailed **audience insight** and developing a solid **channel strategy** are essential building blocks of any campaign. Then you can begin to craft stories that are tailored to the influencers or outlets your audience engages with.

Once you've got the story it comes back to good **old fashioned PR** - knowing your target, what they like to cover and how and when they work. That is the key to getting your story to stick.



**Joe Friel**  
head of influencer relations at Good  
Relations

Working with **influencers** should be at the forefront of any strong distribution strategy today. Studies have shown the power of a strong influencer strategy for brands – 92% of consumers trust **recommendations** more than direct brand messages and influencer campaigns deliver 6.5 x ROI.



**Jamie Brader**  
director, wire products EMEA at PR  
Newswire

The scope of traditional PR has expanded – and along with it distribution strategies and the services they include. A good distribution strategy should cover traditional media outreach, but also **social and digital**.

My interest is focused on newswire distribution and the strategic solution '**the wire**' offers – but a strong distribution strategy will encompass social and online media, with purposed or reformatted content for all channels.



**Gareth Davies**  
head of digital and insight, EMEA at We  
Communications

You should think of a distribution strategy as a '**route map**'. You first need to define where you want your stakeholders to end up once they've engaged with whatever it is you are planning on distributing. From that 'end point' everything else should be considered a 'signpost' coaxing an individual along to the desired goal.

Once you've planned your route map you then need to consider the right combination of online, offline, **paid** and **earned** media placements in order to steer your customers and stakeholders to where you want them to be.



**Rhiannon Thompson**  
director at Remarkable Content

If **content** lives on your own website, content hub or LinkedIn but no-one sees it, then there is no point in its existence and certainly no point in investing time and money in creating it.

An **effective** content distribution strategy will not only put your content in front of your **target audience**, it'll also help build relationships, trust and eventually lead to your audience taking a desired action.



**Glenn Frates**  
regional vice president at PR Newswire

Prior to whatever distribution you want to take advantage of, you need to have an insightful **editorial calendar** to help manage content creation and to ensure the content you create is relevant at the time of distribution.

You need to have a full understanding of your target audience, and create content that doesn't just talk at them, but **engages** with them.

# Distribution methods

**The range of distribution methods available to communications professionals is perhaps wider than ever. But that doesn't mean that a campaign needs make use of every available method. A strong understanding of content and audience should deliver a few key methods that will most efficiently and effectively deliver the desired message. Here are just a few of the options available:**

## Wires



PR Newswire delivers content directly to the editorial systems and newsrooms of major media. It is a key tool for generating earned media. Gareth Davies, head of digital and insight, EMEA at WE Communications, said: "For some organisations, especially those listed on local stock exchanges, there are specific rules that need to be followed when distributing news and other content that can influence the views and perceptions of stakeholders and shareholders. Wires are key to ensuring that a company's announcements or content are distributed in a way that can help reach all the audiences they need to at the same time."

## Publishing on owned channels



Publishing to a brand's own site or other collateral is a very straightforward way of getting a message out into the world, but as a method of distribution it can be ineffectual unless the organisation uses other means to bring its audience to the content, or vice-versa.

## Face-to-face



Contacts and face-to-face meetings or phone calls remain some of the most important tools in a public relations professional's belt. However, as the media landscape changes, PRs may have to broaden the scale and scope of their little black books.

Some journalists with traditional roles on major titles have less clout than they used to, while online publishers and self-starters such as bloggers and vloggers can scoop vast audiences with strong levels of engagement. Public relations professionals need to build relationships with these relatively new publishers, as well as the broadsheet big names.

## Social platforms



There is such a wide variety of social media platforms available that it is problematic to group them all under one heading, yet some of the more popular channels used by brands include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn and YouTube. Content should be tailored to the individual platform, with the platform's unique audience demographic in mind, and should be distributed at the appropriate time/s and frequency.

## Email



The vast majority of press releases are distributed by email, and though it is viewed as a somewhat antiquated method, email is still a major source of content, particularly for media brands. PRs are very familiar with the press release and with email as a primary source of communication, and the majority of media relations campaigns will include an email element.

## Influencers



When liaising with influencers in the current landscape, PR professionals should bear in mind that they will need to work with bloggers and vloggers on an individual basis, since regulations and guidelines are yet to be finalised in this area, and different influencers will have different expectations and ways of working.

Working with influencers to create content is the best way of ensuring the message gains traction, and feels authentic to its target audience.

# Case study: Barnardo's #BelieveinMe

With its #BelieveinMe campaign, Barnardo's worked with Stand Agency to highlight the strength and potential of the vulnerable children and young people it supports. A combination of traditional media relations, teaser content on multiple social media channels and a social sharing campaign successfully brought Barnardo's message to the public.

## Campaign: #BelieveinMe

PR Team: Stand Agency

Client: Barnardo's

Timing: September 2016

### Objective

In its 150th year, and with unprecedented demand for its support and services for young people, children's charity Barnardo's launched an ambitious ten-year strategy and powerful new positioning that highlighted the potential in every child, rather than portraying them solely as victims.

Barnardo's built on its existing commitment to 'believe in children' with a video campaign.

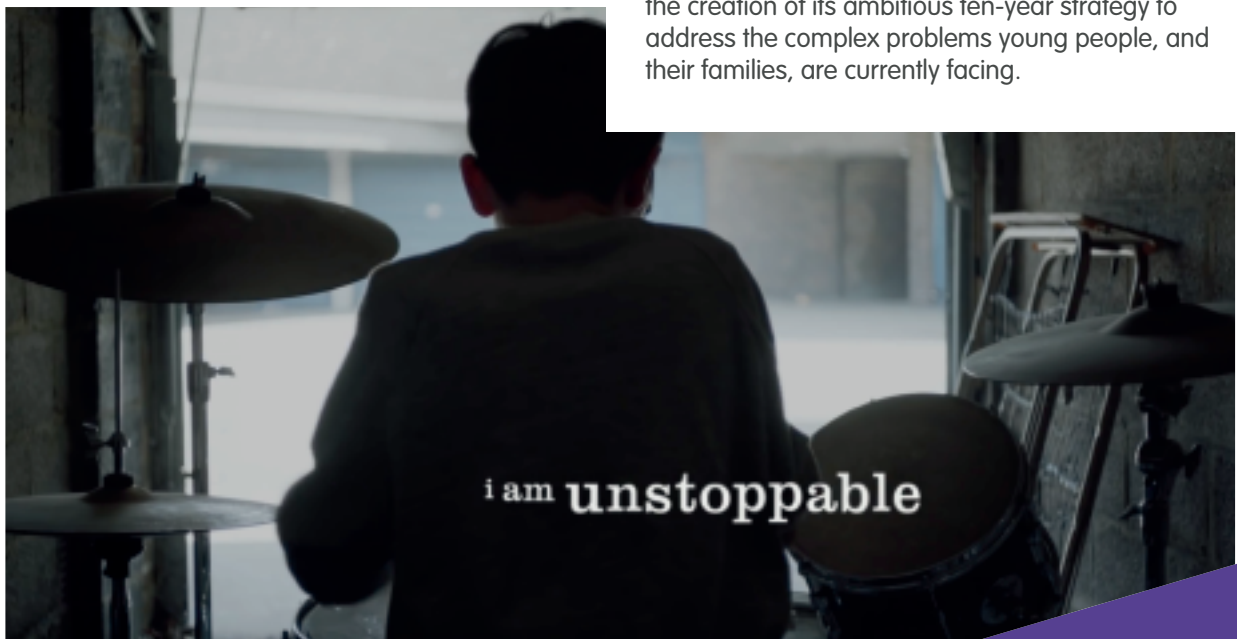
Stand Agency's brief was to translate the creative so that it would work across traditional and social media channels, and encourage public support for the charity.

### Distribution strategy

Activity was executed in four distinct phases, each relating to the wider Believe in Me campaign. Prior to launch, phases one and two focused on **executive profiling** for Barnardo's CEO, Javed Khan, in national **broadcast, print** and **online media**, to give him the opportunity to talk about the rationale for the campaign and the charity's ambitious ten-year strategy.

This was supported through **social media** 'teaser' content on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to trail the Believe in Me above-the-line campaign, and generate curiosity and excitement ahead of the main launch.

The aim of phase three was to generate widespread coverage in national and regional media around the campaign launch itself. Barnardo's commissioned a survey which examined the low levels of confidence and self-belief in young people, linking this directly to the growing demands for Barnardo's services and the creation of its ambitious ten-year strategy to address the complex problems young people, and their families, are currently facing.





## Results

Stand Agency successfully provided opportunities for Barnardo's CEO Javed Khan, who had interviews with BBC Radio 4, The Guardian, Sky News Radio and Islam Channel.

Media activity led to 152 pieces of coverage across national, regional and trade, with a mix of print, online and broadcast hits. Around 60% of the British public saw the television advert at least once, and a further million viewed it online.

Watch the television advertisement here: <http://bit.ly/2cZs55s>

i am strong

Believe in me

i am not  
his little secret

Believe in me



# The press release

A Forbes article published in April 2016 asked, 'Is The Press Release Dead Or Alive?' It is an argument that has raged in the industry for some years. But, with press releases still delivering the majority of content to much of the media, pessimistic predictions are yet to be realised.



**Deborah Villiers**  
director, brand at MHP  
Communications

It's funny isn't it. While the media landscape has transformed almost beyond recognition from 20 years ago, the humble press release has barely changed. Alas, they're no longer posted in an A5 envelope with a sheet of thumbnail images, but the format is largely the same. I think it's precisely that **formulaic nature** which means it's likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future. PRs know what to include, journalists know **what to expect** and client approvals are (usually) relatively straightforward.



**Joe Friel**  
head of influencer relations at Good  
Relations

Press releases are useful for **influencers** but they can't be the only thing you give to them. They are **not journalists**, they are not paid a salary or looking for content they can use as part of their job. Simply providing them with a press release and nothing more is one of the classic ways to ensure influencers ignore you.

The most important thing is to understand why and how you might want to work with them. This will lead to more interest from the influencer and set the foundations for a collaborative partnership.



**Jamie Brader**  
director, wire products EMEA at PR  
Newswire

The acquisition of PR Newswire by Cision, for upwards of \$840m, bluntly confirms that press release **distribution** remains one of the industry's key communication methods.

The press release is a **primary tool** for PR and communications professionals to tell brand narratives, to tell the story of a company, organisation, product or service and is a direct way of engaging journalists.



**Gareth Davies**  
head of digital and insight, EMEA at We  
Communications

My personal opinion is that press releases are almost the perfect medium for getting a **succinct** story across **quickly**. With media having to increase the amount of content they produce daily in order to feed the content appetites of their audiences, press releases help them write and post stories with speed.

However, I think that because they have been around for so long and do have a specific use, many organisations aren't willing to change the status quo. For those not legally required to announce company news more formally, who's to say that you can't just announce a new product or service via **social media**?



**Rhiannon Thompson**  
director at Remarkable Content

Press releases are a secondary means of communication with journalists. We focus on **relationships** and briefing journalists on a story in advance, with the press release acting as the content that delivers the detail.

A **press release** will always be a solid method of communication, and something that both PRs and media bods appreciate due to the simplistic nature of its format.

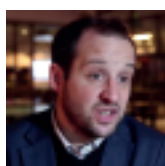


**Glenn Frates**  
regional vice president at PR Newswire

When crafted and distributed correctly, a press release should be an efficient, concise piece of content that journalists need in their **day-to-day** reporting. Whether the content is giving them important financial/market-moving news or a new idea on a future story – a press release is one of many items a journalist utilises when they put together a story.

# What journalists look for in press releases

The press release remains a major tool for journalists, but there are certain 'dos' and 'don'ts' which journos wish PRs would remember.



**Liam Fisher** - national radio controller - talkSPORT

"It's a sport station with an 80% male audience – your press release about National Menopause Awareness Day isn't going to be of interest."



**Robert Jobson** - royal editor - the London Evening Standard

"I think it is crucial with so much emphasis on digital media that journalists get out and meet people. Relationships forged over a glass of champagne when people are just being themselves are worth a thousand press releases."



**Kristine Brabson** - site director - GoodHousekeeping.com

"Press releases keep us informed, but they can be overwhelming. The PRs that stand out are the ones who truly keep tabs on what we've covered before, what has gotten engagement on our social channels and who consider that when pitching."



**Helen Nugent** - online money editor - The Spectator

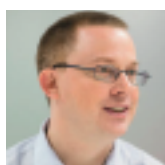
"If you are calling to repeat the contents of a press release I already have, there's not much point. I do get swamped by releases, but I am on top of my inbox. If the subject line is pithy and interesting, I will read the release. All in all, I prefer email as a way to contact me."



**Drew Cullen** - editor in chief - The Register and The Next Platform

"Pitching is not a box-ticking exercise; 'I mass emailed the press release and called to follow-up to see if they received it, job done'. So, call us – but do your homework first!

"Don't be scared; we are civil. We expect journalists to be inquisitive and ask questions every day, to not take a press release at face value. This does not mean we are hostile, it is called 'doing our job'."



**Daniel Coatsworth** - editor - Shares Magazine

"PRs are most useful when they understand what Shares does, aren't calling to ask if we've received their press release (yes, sadly this still happens – stop it now, please. We have eyes and can read emails) and – I would rate this the most important of all – when they understand what their client does and why their latest news is relevant to the types of articles we write."



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# Case study: Flora lunchbox challenge

Golin found that changes to children's school dinners didn't extend to packed lunches. During 'back to school' week, Flora offered mums helpful advice through parent bloggers and other influencers, empowering them to make healthier lunch choices.

## Campaign: Flora lunchbox challenge

**PR Team: Golin**

**Client: Flora**

**Timing: September 2016**

### Objective

Flora tasked Golin with bringing mass attention to the Flora brand as a healthy alternative to butter, and to create a wider awareness of spreads among the media and consumers.

### Distribution strategy

The mission was to make school lunchboxes healthier. Campaigning by Jamie Oliver vastly improved the nutritional balance of school dinners. However, the government's Childhood Obesity Strategy didn't take packed lunches into account. Flora and Golin's strategy was to raise awareness of

the unhealthy state of school lunchboxes and empower mums and their kids by providing them with the tools they needed to make healthier lunchbox choices.

Flora commissioned a study with the University of Leeds, which revealed that 98% of lunches packed by parents were unhealthy; a mere 0.5% improvement in 10 years. Flora took action, **distributing 631,000 lunchboxes** with a healthy meal planner and **updating its website** with lunchbox inspiration for parents.

Flora also joined with Sharon Hodgson, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on School Food, to campaign for better school lunchbox policy. The healthy message was delivered during 'back to school' week in 2016, and was shared by **parent bloggers**, who participated in a [#floralunchboxchallenge](#).



## Results

The campaign raised an important question with regards to the nutritional content of children's lunchboxes, and strategically used back to school week to deliver that message. The campaign also highlighted the important role that plant-based foods play in creating healthy lunchbox options, with Flora being a key ingredient.

Golin achieved more than 150 pieces of branded coverage in one day across top national, consumer and broadcast titles including BBC, Daily Mail, Guardian, Huffington Post, Closer, ITV News, Sky News, VICE and The Sun. These results had a reach of over 500m people. KPIs to date have been exceeded by more than 50%.



# Gorkana's top tips for effective distribution

- 01** Identify your audience, and find out where they can be reached
- 02** Create quality content that serves a purpose or meets a need
- 03** Tailor content iterations to suit all distribution platforms
- 04** Make the most of visual methods and multimedia, but don't be seduced by the latest tools or technology, traditional methods can work just as well
- 05** Peer advice holds more clout than ever before, create partnerships with influential people
- 06** Deliver your content at the appropriate times – be prepared to back up scheduled content with off-the-cuff responses
- 07** Measure the impact of your distributed content
- 08** Measure the outcome of your content
- 09** Identify which distribution method, or combination of methods, has been the most effective
- 10** Apply insight gained to improve future distribution strategies



# Distribution developments and the future

As the industry moves forward, personalisation and targeting will continue to inform and shape distribution strategies. This more considered outlook, as well as the evolution of tech and digital, will change the ways in which PR professionals distribute their content.



**Deborah Villiers**  
director, brand at MHP Communications

One size has not fitted all for quite some time and the days of flinging a story out to see what sticks are long gone.

We need to remember that media channels are **brands** in their own right, and have a certain image to uphold, and we'll need to be agile and adaptive in our approach, reworking stories to fit the place we want them to appear. As such, media strategies will become more and more **tailored**, and quality will continue to trump quantity as we get better at understanding how to reach and engage with our audiences.



**Joe Friel**  
head of influencer relations at Good Relations

I believe working with influencers will continue to become a bigger part of the overall marketing mix. However, to do this it needs to continue evolving, with the industry achieving **best practices**, from identification and activation to measurement.



**Jamie Brader**  
director, wire products EMEA at PR Newswire

At heart, PR is about driving impressions, engagement, conversations... and hopefully **conversions**. Proving those conversions would enable PR to demonstrate value in the boardroom. Communications professionals know that issuing **press releases** increases brand awareness and ultimately drives sales – we need to help them prove this specific value to senior management.

The range of tools and tactics available to support this already has and will continue to grow. Workflow

and measurement tools will support the value delivered by a strong distribution strategy.

The principle of distribution – telling a story to an audience – remains the same. Now and in the future, however, there will be many more ways to tell those stories, where impact can be attributed and valued.



**Gareth Davies**  
head of digital and insight, EMEA at We Communications

As more and more digital channels and platforms come to market, they will of course open up **new channels** for content distribution. What won't change is the need for brands to find the right mix of paid, earned and owned media distribution, but also how they target and set-up this distribution so that content, stories and messaging are landing in front of the right people, at the right time and through the right channels to maximise **targeting** and **relevancy**.



**Rhiannon Thompson**  
director at Remarkable Content

It seems there are daily advancements in **digital distribution** approaches, many of these are reworks of traditional platforms and some are more innovative. It is important not to be distracted by the shiny new options out there but rather approach with caution, making sure the **principles** of content distribution remain at the core.



**Glenn Frates**  
regional vice president at PR Newswire

In the past few years, we've seen improvements in being able to **consolidate** distribution efforts. We've also seen a tremendous improvement in utilizing **multimedia** assets of all sorts – which helps better engage with your audience.



# Conclusion

While there are more methods of content distribution available to PR professionals than ever before, certain principles remain unchanged. The audience and the message that the brand wants to deliver should come first, and the type of content and the way in which it is distributed informed by that.

A press release remains an effective and widely-accepted method of communication between a PR professional and a journalist, but there are many more options available. Personalisation, digital and tech will continue to have an impact in this field. Communications professionals and their clients should choose the most appropriate strategy for their brand and content.



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