



**EVOLVING PR STRATEGIES AND TACTICS  
FOR PRODUCT LAUNCH SUCCESS**

*Public and Private Relations*

Here's a brief comparison of the old way (**OW**) and the new way (**NW**) some small and medium-sized companies are benefiting from evolving social media strategies and tactics to develop and launch new products in the technology space for better Public Relations and Private Relations results. Private Relations is our term for making contact and having conversations with target audiences directly rather than passing everything to and through the trade and mainstream media.

**OW:** R&D is done in secret internally. The idea is corporate engineers know what the customer wants, or the customer is going to get whatever is developed whether they like it or not. Traditionally this was driven by the fear that if competitors learned of your plans they would steal your ideas.

**NW:** Customers, prospects and suspects are invited to join a closed community for the purpose of discussing next generation products; users get to define what they want and need. For people who believe in the wisdom of crowds this is a significant insurance policy against afflictions like tunnel vision, the not-invented-here (NIH) syndrome or just plain bad vision. This approach also tends to build a ready audience of would be buyers once the product is done. Since they had a hand in shaping the product, and presumably helped define a product they can use, they will buy it. This significantly shortens the period of time between product launch and initial product sales.

**OW:** Other than some alpha tests, which don't always happen, nothing is said or otherwise revealed outside the company until the product is ready to ship. Since no one in the outside real world knows the new product is coming, target prospects for the new product will have to go through multiple phases of awareness – well documented in psychological research – to reach acceptance and adoption of the new idea, new product, etc.

**NW:** Conversations happen. Market preconditioning begins early for several reasons: smart companies don't want their prospects buying Brand X if their own Brand Y is coming. Preconditioning minimizes the slope on the sales ramp. Preconditioning buys a company time to advocate for the need they are about to fill so that when the product is finally done there's a ready market of buyers.

**OW:** A press release for the mainstream media is prepared for launch day. It is posted to the website where it resides in almost total obscurity. It is usually sent over a national wire service, at great expense and not much media indifference. However, board members get to see it – so they're happy.

**NW:** The same news release is prepared. It's posted on the website, sent over the wire and the board is still happy. But what they don't always know is that since the website also offers a blog and perhaps some other new media options, more visitors –and more of the right kinds of visitors, as in people who care – are coming for more of the right reasons, staying longer, and actually getting engaged in the discussion. In addition, a customer and prospect email is sent way in advance with a release preview. This audience loves the sense of being treated as insiders. A series of blog posts leading up to the launch are prepared. These posts feature trackbacks to competitive product sites so that readers can know they now have a new product option coming their way. Bloggers covering the product space or relevant technology issues are alerted in advance in case they have an interest in the new product.

**OW:** Sometimes, for important products, senior executives go on a media tour and sometimes they also see some industry analysts. Of course, among industry analysts which aren't on the Company's payroll, these sessions often produce very little and a sales pitch must be endured. Plus, if you're a small to medium-sized or start-up company, you can't help but notice that in most cases the biggest companies with the biggest PR and analyst budgets generally get a whole lot more coverage, which makes some sense, and the coverage is usually more favorable, which doesn't always make much sense.

**NW:** This still happens. But these days the media and analysts want to hear from customers and users. Using Old Way methods there rarely were many, if any, customer references. Using New Way methods, dozens, if not hundreds, of people have been involved in the co-development of the product. Since in the end, new product sales are the ultimate objective and massive sales will ultimately lead to more analyst and media interest by default, companies achieving a bigger, faster sales ramp thanks to social media methods can start to think these days about skipping the grueling media and industry analyst tours.

**OW:** Everyone waits around to see if the mainstream media news release gets traction.

**NW:** Everyone waits around to see if the news release gets traction but in the meantime, the conversation heats up on the company's various social media sites, including blogs and podcasts. Users, customers, prospects and others start to review the solution, criticize it, laud it, compare it, buy it...

**OW:** Sometimes the launch is timed to coincide with a trade show event.

**NW:** Trade events still matter. But smart companies don't let their product development schedules be dictated by trade event dates or venues. The New Way acknowledges that products are never really done anyway... they evolve. In any event, unless you use NW methods that alert people in advance to your coming product availability, many of the people you want to reach will attend and leave the trade event without ever knowing you have something new to offer.

## SUMMARY:

If social media is changing anything, it is, one, redefining the timetables of new product 'launches.' The timetables are ongoing. Companies want and need rolling thunder, not IEDs (Insignificant Event Driven Splurges). And two, the whole process is astonishingly more inclusionary than exclusionary; more transparent than secret; and more realistic because to assume a new product can be developed in secret by a few people and achieve first-generation market perfection is delusional. Turns out, users know this... they don't expect perfection. But when that's what they are promised by way of glossy news releases and other promotions and then they learn firsthand or from others about various flaws, a significant level of market trust is squandered.

The NW also vastly minimizes the time, money and energy spent on dealing with mainstream middlemen traditionally relied upon to vet your message and bless it for publication. Companies today have their own 'publications,' and their own circulations and subscribers. Companies today send and receive messages direct from their all-important audiences without having to beg for media and industry analyst translation. And, the all-important third-party validation the media used to have a monopoly on is now at least a shared asset: peers influence fellow peers as compellingly, if not more so, than the media.

*Cautionary Note:* Adoption of NW methods requires a more or less wholesale change in corporate attitude. Someone the other day put it this way: you have to turn over the car keys... I'd add that sometimes you have to sit in the back seat, you have to stop talking and start letting others speak while you listen, you have to let go of the fear and anxiety of letting others know what you're up to, and you need to develop a skin that is thick enough to hear some things that are hard to hear. But in the end, if you do hear it, and you hear it first, and it is said directly to you, and you respond appropriately in kind you will initiate a process that delivers more traction faster among the people who matter most: users, prospects, partners, employees, investors, and others.