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Going beyond press release distribution

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Newswires are continually diversifying their services these days, with an ever-evolving range of measurement and monitoring tools to help PR practitioners demonstrate true ROI.

PR Newswire sells such standalone, subscription-based products as eWatch for online monitoring; MediaSense, to measure client and competitor mentions; and Media-Sense Blog Measurement.

PR Newswire includes services such as US1 Media Monitoring (distribution of premium releases), ReleaseWatch (links to mentions on 300-plus sites), Complimentary Monitoring (mentions on PR Newswire, AP Financial News, Dow Jones, and Reuters), Access Reports (for the number of accesses on prnewswire.com, Thomson First Call, and PR Newswire for Journalists), and more.

"The changes we have seen in monitoring and measurement over the past few years fall into two categories: what media is monitored and measured, and the reasons for monitoring and measuring," says Ted Skinner, VP of PR products at PR Newswire.

PR Newswire is now expanding current services, adding new ones beyond traditional media, and tracking new social media.

Skinner notes, "eWatch traditionally monitored print and online publications, but now also monitors thousands of highly respected blogs."

Earlier this year, PR Newswire partnered with Technorati to place a 'Technorati' button on all releases on www.prnewswire.com, linking readers to Technorati search results that include blog mentions. A Google Blog Search button is offered as well.

Tracy Maurer, PR Newswire's director of customer reporting, advises using well crafted keywords to avoid floods of content.

"Use a free search engine to understand the volume of articles your keywords will match," Maurer point out. "Whatever metrics the tool you are using is reporting on, make sure the numbers have context. Do not use a percentage that doesn't also reference the total number behind it."

Maurer expects more content sources will be added, such as broadcast or scanned library content, while customers are allowed to add their own content (i.e., corporate memos, documentation).

For its part, Business Wire has steadily enhanced its NewsTrak suite of services.

In its complimentary services, the NewsTrak Posting report has evolved from a small sampling of sites where a release has appeared, to a more extensive list with links from the report to the client's full-text press release as it appears on each site. NewsTrak Access now provides clients with information on views/downloads of their releases and media assets from Business Wire's Web site and a range of referring Web sites. News-Trak Reach provides media lists and media-mix data, based on distribution.

In the for-pay category, NewsTrak Clips, a comprehensive Web-based clipping service, enables tracking of traditional and consumer-generated media coverage, from press clippings to blog posts.

Business Wire DataSearch offers access to an in-house team for custom measurement and research projects.

Sandy Malloy, senior information specialist at Business Wire, expects to see the tools that track where releases go become more sophisticated and easier to use, aided by technologies such as XHTML, which sends formatting along with the release.

"Tie results to outcomes," Malloy says. "As great as it is to see a report with your release posted all over the Web or to see how many hundreds or thousands of hits it received, was there any [change] in your unit sales or other key metrics?"

Malloy suggests that, when distributing a release, you set up a Web landing page for that product to track public interest.

Marketwire plans to launch its new monitoring and measurement product, News Dashboard 3.0, in early 2008.

"Don't take a shotgun approach," says Thom Brodeur, SVP of global strategy and development for Marketwire. "Throwing [releases] on the wall doesn't always result in [their] sticking and generating coverage.

"There's no holy grail when it comes to monitoring and measurement," he adds. "Make sure [your] solution addresses a majority of your needs. You're not likely to find one that meets all of them."

Technique Tips

Do

Realize every solution has its limitations

Tie results to actual business outcomes

Use a free search engine query to help narrow search terms

Don't

Expect to find a one-size-fits-all solution

Use vague or overly broad keywords. You'll be flooded by results

Fail to include blogs in your strategy