



**ONLINE MASTER'S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS**

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY WASHINGTON DC

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## Organization is key to comms efficiency

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Integrating an increasingly complex array of PR activities, while supervising multiple agency relationships, can often be a challenge for corporate PR departments. However, it is something that can be more effectively managed with software. Still, such tools should enhance, not replace, solid PR practices.

In 2005, Michelin North America deployed a highly customized hosted suite of on-demand software from Vocus to optimize PR work.

Since then, the system has managed more than 75,000 activities for a PR operation spanning three countries (US, Canada, and Mexico), responsible for nine products lines and three brands, and accessed by 40 users (12 Michelin PR pros and representatives from 12 agencies).

The system enabled Michelin to toss its manual clipbooks. "We average between 20,000 and 24,000 news clips each year, so since the rollout we now have three and half years in our database, all electronic, all searchable, all coded," says Lynn Mann, director of PR for Michelin North America.

Externally, the system enabled Michelin to enhance interaction with agencies.

"With our firewalls, you had to be a Michelin employee on a Michelin server to access our proprietary systems, which excluded all agency partners," Mann says. "Because this is Internet based and hosted off-site, it allows us to collaborate... holistically with our agencies."

Analytics also enable more consistent agency evaluation.

"[It] allows a client to have... the results in a single format, freeing them from having to interpret individual agency styles and hold [them] to the same benchmarks," says Kye Strance, Vocus' director of product management.

As with any such implementation, Michelin had to first think through how it organized its PR operations and managed its agency relationships, before applying the technology.

"The functionality was there," Mann says, "But you have to first decide how you want to categorize everything... and really think and rethink how you do PR."

It is common to encounter opposition from PR practitioners that are set in their ways.

"Everyone has their habits, and there is a tendency to want to do it differently or not do it at all," Mann says. "With our agencies, we are very upfront in the RFP process. With our employees, we are very firm that this is not going away. We set and we track the metrics for success with this system. So, they know if it is not in the system, it won't count."

Meanwhile, Vocus' competitor Cision offers CisionPoint, an integrated media management software that enables multiple individuals and teams from geographically dispersed organizations to utilize a common database, common tools, and a common user interface.

Vanessa Bugasch, VP of product marketing at Cision, advises to not mistake integrated software as a way to automate the PR function.

"Selling PR-in-a-box without human intervention is a mistake some... vendors are making," she explains. "Rather, look at these integrated tools as a way to get the blocking and tackling done more easily so you have... time to focus and apply your human intelligence."

BurrellesLuce 2.0 is another option, an online portal to help PR pros efficiently manage planning, monitoring, and measuring.

"PR practitioners should make simplicity of use a priority," says Steve Shannon, EVP at BurrellesLuce. "Not so simple that the application adds little value, but simple enough that users can soon achieve the efficiencies that the application promises to produce."

Therefore, PR pros should avoid applications - even online offerings - that provide more than they truly need, Shannon advises.

"If the system is complicated," he says, "it will probably turn out to be cumbersome and users won't adopt it into their workflow."

### **Do**

Think and rethink PR operations before using a software system

Implement a phased rollout to slowly bring everyone on the system

Offer ongoing training for employees and agencies

### **Don't**

Look to your integrated software as a way to automate the PR function

Select features you realistically won't need

Allow workarounds. Insist that everyone must use the system