

## **Tactics for creating the digital press release**

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Media relations continues to be an important part of public relations practice, but the growth of digital communications has changed how we pitch our stories. This guide is intended to help teachers and practitioners of public relations adapt to the working in the digital space.

Before we highlight differences, remember that the basics are the same. You still must have a compelling story. It must be eloquently told. And having relationships with key gatekeepers still matters.

But there are some key differences to be aware of. The following exercises were created to stretch your knowledge of media relations to improve your performance in the digital space:

### **Exercise 1: Create lists of keywords**

Perhaps the biggest change in writing for the digital age is that you must write for two distinct audiences. We have always written for humans, and this should still be our most important audience. But today we're also writing for computers. Specifically, we must consider how search engines work as we develop our content. This is a part of the larger field of search engine optimization. As we write, we must consider the broad category of relevance – i.e. how our content is relevant to what people are searching for.

To a human, there isn't much difference between the word "bicycle" and "bike." Each word paints the same picture in our minds. But to a search engine, one of these words is superior, because it is used in more searches.

This doesn't seem like a big deal, but consider that for many sites, 40-50 percent of all visits come from a search engine. Your job as writer is to knock down the barriers between targeted searchers and your message. One tool is to use the right keywords.

Google provides a handy keyword tool as part of its AdWords paid search program. Visit the tool:

<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

You can use the tool to choose the best keywords from a list of alternatives. The best keywords have high search volumes and low competition.

It's important to consider phrases as keywords, since that's how people search. It can be difficult to "own" a broad keyword, such as "bicycle," but it's relatively easy to own a narrow one, such as "bicycle trailer," or "Brooks saddle."

Use the tool to choose the superior keyword from each of the following pairs:

**Keyword (note search volume next to each keyword):**

Bike	bicycle
Makeup	cosmetics
Laptop computer	notebook computer
Smart phone	smartphone
Candy bar	chocolate bar
Fishing rod	fishing pole
Airplane	Jet plane
Fender Telecaster	Fender Stratocaster
Powerbook	Macbook
Honda Civic	Toyota Corolla

For discussion: what surprised you about the Google results? When should you choose the lesser-performing keyword?

**Exercise 2: the words people are searching for on your site.**

Obtain access to your client's web analytics (this example uses Google Analytics for the website SUCarbs.com, a company that rebuilds carburetors for vintage sports cars). Under traffic sources, look at the keywords report. Adjust the window so it displays the top 100 results (or more). Here is an example report:

Visits		Pages/Visit		Avg. Time on Site		% New Visits		Bounce Rate	
<b>2,728</b>		<b>2.84</b>		<b>00:02:18</b>		<b>67.38%</b>		<b>48.28%</b>	
% of Site Total: 75.71%		Site Avg: 2.96 (-4.09%)		Site Avg: 00:02:28 (-6.67%)		Site Avg: 67.22% (0.23%)		Site Avg: 50.18% (-3.79%)	
Keyword	None	Visits ↓	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate			
1.	su carburetor	184	2.86	00:02:26	72.28%	41.85%			
2.	su carbs	117	3.21	00:02:44	54.70%	43.59%			
3.	su carburetors	105	2.63	00:01:53	77.14%	51.43%			
4.	su carburetor rebuild	75	3.03	00:03:26	28.00%	30.67%			
5.	sucarbs.com	74	3.51	00:03:24	47.30%	39.19%			
6.	stromberg carburetor	57	2.21	00:01:09	78.95%	63.16%			
7.	su carb	46	2.72	00:02:02	69.57%	47.83%			
8.	new su carbs	36	3.22	00:03:08	8.33%	55.56%			
9.	su carburetor parts	31	3.13	00:04:28	64.52%	41.94%			
10.	su carb rebuild	26	1.92	00:00:52	65.38%	65.38%			
11.	stromberg carburetors	20	2.60	00:01:23	85.00%	50.00%			
12.	s u carburetor	19	2.00	00:01:57	78.95%	63.16%			
13.	mgb su carburetors	17	4.53	00:04:06	47.06%	11.76%			
14.	su carb parts	17	2.71	00:01:17	88.24%	41.18%			
15.	sucarbs	16	3.56	00:02:24	43.75%	56.25%			
16.	stromberg carbs	15	2.07	00:00:52	73.33%	46.67%			
17.	zenith stromberg	13	1.92	00:01:09	38.46%	61.54%			
18.	stromberg carburetor rebuild	12	5.25	00:03:38	66.67%	41.67%			

Look at these keywords carefully. There is often a disconnect between the words your visitors use and the words a business owner might use to describe the same thing. Note the most popular words, variations on the keywords, popular misspellings. Are people searching for “phone book” information or are they looking for deeper content? Note any insights.

In this example, SU carburetors get more searches than Stromberg carburetors. The most popular car that uses these carburetors in these results is the MGB (other vehicles lower on the list are Triumph Spitfire (#28), Jaguar (#41) and MGA (#42). “Carb” is a common substitute for “carburetor.”

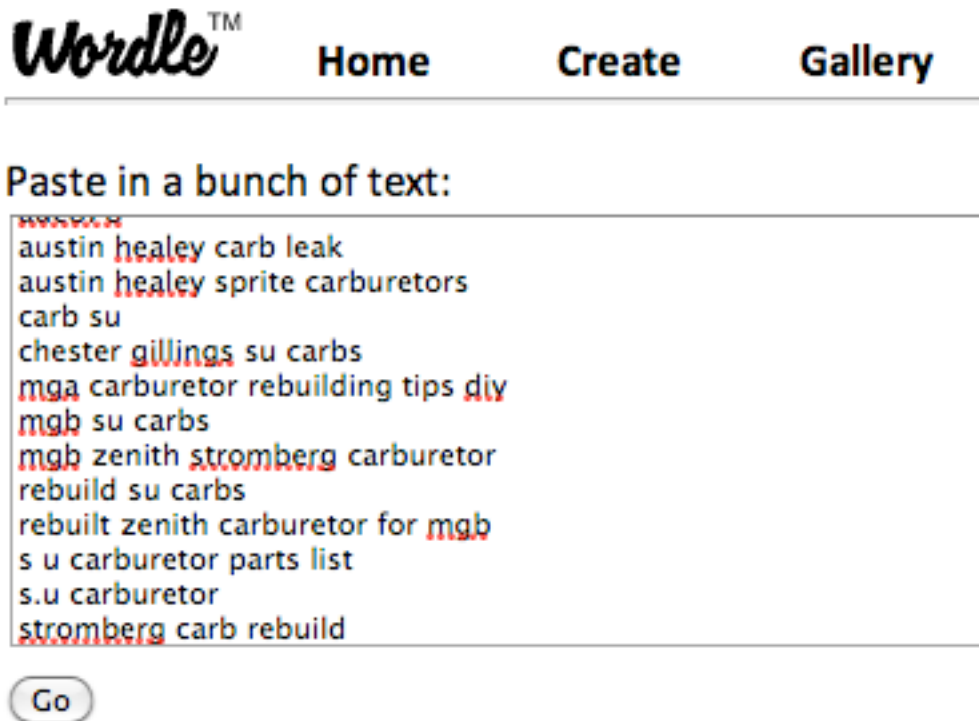
So, while this business rebuilds several different carburetors for many different vehicles, the view from a search engine is that this business primarily rebuilds SU carburetors for MGBs. A press release that features these keywords will attract more clicks than one that features say, an Austin-Healey and Stromberg carburetors.

### Exercise 3: Create a word cloud of your best keywords

This exercise comes from Avinash Kaushik, author of the book *Web Analytics 2.0* and the blog *Occam's Razor*.

Using the same report as above, export (top of page) as a CSV for Excel. Open your spreadsheet, highlight your keywords with your cursor, and copy to the clipboard.

Next, visit the website [Wordle.net](http://Wordle.net), a free web tool that creates word clouds. Click on "Create" and paste your text into the window:



Wordle will create a word cloud, a visual representation of your most popular keywords. You may want to play with the formatting tools to make it more legible. I suggest mostly or all horizontal layout. Here is a resulting word cloud from the 100 top keywords at [SUCarbs.com](http://SUCarbs.com):



**Page title** (60-70 characters; write for SEO and humans). Note: this is your most important SEO field. (Poor page title: Home)

**Meta-description** for the page (write for humans, try to keep it under 155 characters). This appears below the page title in your search results. If you don't provide a meta description, the search engine will select text from the relevant page.

**Meta-keywords** Google now ignores these; no need to write them.

**H1 headline** (write for humans and SEO; up to 65 characters)

**Load the first paragraph**, especially the first sentence, with keywords

**Anchor text** This is the text that conveys the link and conveys SEO value if used well. (poor anchor text: "Click here.")

**URL** when possible. A URL that describes the page is better than one that uses arbitrary numbers and letters.

**Alt tags** (optimize for the photo; up to 80 characters)

**Image file names** should also be descriptive (poor example: IMG203.jpg)

Other elements that may convey SEO information: H2, H3 titles, special text treatments like bold, italics, underlines

### **Exercise 5: build your release**

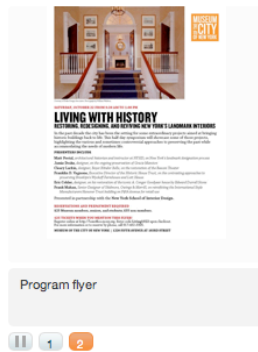
This exercise may be done with a popular content management system like WordPress or Blogger, but I recommend PitchEngine.com, a click-and-build tool for creating social media press releases. PitchEngine offers a free option so it's easy to use in class.

Important note: when you publish your pitch, it will go live to the Internet. If you need to avoid this (for example, if you have a pretend client or a made-up client), have your student preview the pitch and create a PDF of that screen.

Your pitch should be appealing to a wide range of publishers, so you should use a social media approach as pioneered by Todd Defren at Shift Communications. Using this structure, you provide a traditional press release, plus a wide range of digital assets. This may include links, images, videos, illustrations, anything that can help tell your story. Here is a pitch page from PitchEngine:



Download Logo



### Living With History: Restoring, Redesigning, and Reviving New York's Landmark Interiors

This half-day symposium will showcase some of New York City's extraordinary projects aimed at bringing historic buildings back to life.

10.05.2011 – Saturday, October 22 from 9:30 am to 1:00 pm

Living With History: Restoring, Redesigning, and Reviving New York's Landmark Interiors

In the past decade the city has been the setting for some extraordinary projects aimed at bringing historic buildings back to life. This half-day symposium will showcase some of those projects, highlighting the various and sometimes controversial approaches to preserving the past while accommodating the needs of modern life.

Presenters include:

- Matt Postal, architectural historian, on New York's landmark designation process
- Jamie Drake, designer, on the ongoing preservation of Gracie Mansion
- Cleary Larkin, Beyer Blinder Belle, on the restoration of the Beacon Theater

#### Twitter Pitch

Living With History: Restoring, Redesigning, & Reviving New York's Landmark Interiors @MuseumofCityNY 10/22, 9:30AM



#### News Facts

- ▶ To reserve: <http://boxoffice.mcny.org/public/loader.c?target=show.asp?shcode=255>
- ▶ Living With History: Restoring, Redesigning, and Reviving New York's Landmark Interiors
- ▶ Matt Postal, Jamie Drake, Cleary

#### Keyword Search

Explore more socialized PR content



#### Share this Social Media Release

Share via:



Short URL:

<http://pitch.pe/178616>



This structure reflects the varying needs of different publishers, who may need high- or low-resolution images, a short or long story, or support from different kinds of assets.

I call this the “onion” strategy. Just as some cooks only want a little onion and others may want a great deal, the pitch will accommodate a wide range of interests.

### Exercise 6: Locate your influencers

With traditional media, this step is relatively straightforward. You likely know who you want to pitch your story to. If you don't, there are directories or online services like CisionPoint to help you find your way.

Online, there are many more publishers, and some of the influencers who matter most may not even be professional publishers. You can discover influencers by using standard or specialized search engines (see Specialized Search for the Social Web, attached).

Assignment: Pick an online influence area (for this example, British car enthusiasts (who are likely customers for SUCarbs.com)). Identify five top influencers. Record each influencer in a spreadsheet and offer evidence for why this person/site is an influencer.

The following approach is a rough guide. For more ideas, please see the articles linked at the end of this article.

1. Google search. See what results pop to the top. Click through and assess for relative influence. Consider both mainstream and “hidden” influencers.
2. Google blog search or Technorati. Identify popular blogs. How can you tell if a blog reaches a large audience? Assess the quality of the content and how often it is updated. See how many comments the posts generate. Check inbound links using the Yahoo Site Explorer. Obtain audience size estimates from free services including Compete.com, Alexa.com and Quantcast.com. Note: these services are estimating traffic and are rough estimates only.
3. Twitter search. Use advanced Twitter search (search.twitter.com) to identify conversations in your content area. Sift results, considering things like number of followers, frequency of tweeting or retweets. Tweetmeme can show you recent tweets with the most retweets. Use a directory like Twellow or WeFollow to look for influencers. In doubt? Look up a Twitter user on Klout.com, which ranks individuals on their network influence.
4. Use Facebook search to identify influencers on Facebook. Do advanced searches on Google (British sports cars site:facebook.com) to identify public posts on your topic of interest. Found an influencer? Check that person’s Klout score. Note that much of Facebook is unsearchable due to privacy settings on personal accounts.
5. Search YouTube, looking for content creators in your area. Look at views, the number of videos uploaded, comment streams and the overall quality and relevance of the videos.
6. Think broadly about finding influence. Don’t neglect places like review sites (such as amazon.com or yelp.com), discussion boards or anyplace else targeted influencers may hang out online.
7. A few general principles: go where the people are. Try to build enough Internet literacy that you can assess a wide range of sites. Try to transcend your personal Internet use to more broadly consider where influence may lie.

See also:

<http://www.interactiveinsightsgroup.com/blog1/superlist-how-to-find-connect-with-influence-people-via-social-media/>

<http://www.movements.org/how-to/entry/how-to-identify-online-influencers-in-your-issue-area/>

*(download this guide at davidkamerer.com)*