

Onclusive

**THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
EARNED MEDIA STRATEGY &
MEASUREMENT**

STRATEGY AND MEASUREMENT ARE KEY TO SUCCESS WITH EARNED MEDIA.

We can all agree that earned media content is king when it comes to building brand reputation—your biggest brand asset. Followed closely by owned media, earned media continues to be the most trusted form of advertising compared to paid media.

While in the past there have always been clearer metrics around paid and owned media than earned media, that's changed with the industry shift from print to digital formats, which has resulted in a wealth of digital data. The technology to measure the business impact of communications on a company's bottom line is now readily available, providing communicators with ample opportunities to develop data-driven PR strategies.

78%

Overall, 78% of PR pros measure their communications effectiveness. And communicators are also more satisfied with their measurement efforts—41% say they are satisfied with their efforts this year, compared to 28% in 2020.

Source: Ragan Communications, Communications Benchmark Report 2021

Communications and PR professionals own earned and, oftentimes, owned media. While historically, communicators have been focused on storytelling, media relations, crisis communications and other obvious aspects of the PR craft, today they must also embrace data and measurement to develop effective strategies and transform the perception of communications from a cost center into a revenue-generating function.

PRNEWS + PUBLIC RELAY

The State of Data-Driven Communications in 2020

Digital media measurement has become foundational for leading corporate communicators.

To support you in this challenging and exciting endeavor, we'd like to offer the ultimate guide to developing an effective earned media strategy and measuring success of your earned media activities in a way that showcases business impact and ROI.

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Set The Right Earned Media Objectives For Your Brand

It's no secret that data analysis and insights are not only commonplace, but pretty much required in today's business world. This can be a daunting task for communications and PR pros, who don't typically have data and analytics backgrounds and, more often than not, are juggling limited staff and budgets.

The reality is that if you want a bigger budget, a larger team or more recognition for your efforts, tangible measurement of communications performance is the only way to gain the attention of your C-suite. And while earned media strategies and their effectiveness can be measured in a number of different ways, at the end of the day both strategy and measurement need to be based on your specific objectives—and also tied to organizational goals.

Fully **84.5%** of communicators reported having, or preparing, to defend strategic PR decisions to the C-suite with data. This emphasis on data-driven logic from company leaders means PR analysis has never been more crucial.



Source: PRNews + Public Relay, The State of Data-Driven Communications in 2020

Start by asking what your overall business goals are, and how earned media objectives for your brand align with them. They will not always be an exact match, but they should connect to and support organizational success in some way.

What has your company set out to accomplish? Is your brand a startup that needs to establish itself in the marketplace or is it focused on growing its market share in a mature market? Is there a new product launch that needs exposure, a new story that needs to be told, or new messages that you'd like to introduce to your key audiences? The answers to these questions will guide your earned media objectives.

Take a look at your business goals for this year and any forward-looking strategies to have a full picture of where your brand is going and why. For more tips on setting your communications objectives around your corporate goals, you can also review [The Executive's Guide to Building and Leading an Impactful Communications Team](#).

Here are some examples of the types of communications objectives:

- **Broad:** creating a new category in your industry, growing overall brand awareness
- **Specific:** dominating stories on a particular topic, trending on social media, targeting specific authors or media outlets based on their impact on your brand, maximizing message resonance

It is also important to be clear in how you define your objectives and key results. For example, if one of your organizational goals is to be “first in the market”, how do you actually define it? Are there specific parts of the market that you’re focusing on? How do you know when you’ve achieved success? And how will you be tracking performance on your way there? A clear and measurable definition of success is critical during goal-setting.

MADISON HODGES

Brand Manager, Metromile

With Onclusive I can pinpoint exactly how many people are getting quotes and buying policies based on owned, earned, and newswire coverage. I can even go a step further with earned and newswire coverage and track these conversion events back to specific publications and in some cases even individual authors.

Once you’ve drafted your communications objectives, it’s always a good idea to validate them with the key stakeholders—your executives, customers, partners, investors—anyone who will be interested in seeing your success metrics and performance reports.

Finally, we’d like to share some of the learnings we have compiled while working with companies and brands of different shapes and sizes—specifically, what to look out for in your objective-setting.

Here are some common objective-setting pitfalls:



Observation: We sometimes see that growing organizations or small businesses compare themselves to category leaders and end up setting unrealistic goals. While it's good to challenge yourself, you want to make sure that your objectives are achievable. For example, a boutique hotel would want to focus on the local market instead of striving to achieve global coverage.



Recommendation: Set the objectives that are right for your organization.



Observation: We have observed that in some cases, companies set the same objectives across multiple brands or categories, which leads to missing the mark in one area—or across the board. Your objectives must make sense at the brand level, e.g. luxury vs. value brands have different aspirations that require different strategies.



Recommendation: If you have more than one brand, set specific objectives for each brand.



Observation: Not making your objectives specific to a geographical region is another common mistake. For example, the reach of a US website will be higher than the reach of a European website, so setting the same objectives for both would result in comparing apples to oranges.



Recommendation: If you're operating in more than one global region, set specific objectives for each region.



Observation: Not keeping competitors in mind when setting communications objectives can also happen. However, framing goals against competition correctly is necessary in today's hyper connected and dynamic marketplace. It is also important for tracking results such as shifts in the share of voice, Power of Voice™, and other benchmarks of your success against your industry peers.



Recommendation: Set proper benchmarks and track against your competitors.

As part of Onclusive's customer success efforts, our dedicated account strategists can help you craft communications objectives that align with your business goals and are right for you.

ELIZABETH BARRETT

VP Research, Gartner

Great content lies at the heart of everything communications does, including employee and leadership communications and PR. But leaders need to deliberately prioritize, plan, produce and publish effective content or the audience will simply be overwhelmed and confused.

Develop Your Content Strategy With Thought Leadership In Mind

One of the primary functions of communications and PR is producing impactful content that resonates with their brand's key audiences. Creating this type of content requires a sound strategy—a roadmap for making sure your communication efforts are efficient and effective—rooted in business and communications goals that you've set above.

For instance, if your objective is to provide maximum exposure for an upcoming product launch, you might implement a content strategy focused on creating materials that cover the product benefits, how it works, its applications and trial customer testimonials or success stories.

Of course, there are often multiple objectives and unplanned events (think your most recent crisis). How do you prioritize? The best way is to determine whether there is a significant business upside if the communications are successful and significant downside if they are not. The most successful communications teams always evaluate the project's value to the business and their unique ability to add value to the situation. This mindset will ultimately help you win no matter what, even in times of crisis and uncertainty.

20%

In response to the question “What changes do you expect to see in the communications industry in the next three to five years?,” one of the most common answers, provided by 20% of the respondents, was more thought leadership.

Source: Ragan Communications, Communications Benchmark Report 2021

Here are the key questions to ask as you're developing your content strategy.

Who is your audience?

To create your content strategy, you must start with your audience. Knowing your key audiences, their pain and passion points, what they need along their buyer journey and how you can add value will determine the rest of your strategic plan—the most effective channels, the right messaging, and the best distribution approach.

You can find the step-by-step guide to understanding your audience, defining your channels, setting your messaging and identifying the right authors and outlets in the [PR Campaign Planning: Why Analytics is Key to Success](#) [whitepaper](#).

What type of content are they interested in, and what worked in the past?

This is where earned, owned and social media monitoring comes in. To really know your audience, you must also understand what type of content they find most useful and compelling. While you can find this out directly from them via interviews and surveys, it is also very important to let the past behavior data inform your strategy (what they say they will do is different from what they have actually done in the past).

Whether you've been using earned, owned and social media monitoring technology for a while or just a few months, you can extract insights that reveal which specific content, messages and formats have been resonating, which haven't, and most importantly, which content has been resulting in desired actions you want your audiences to take.

AI-powered technology that exists today is capable of quickly sifting through massive volumes of data and offering you the exact insights you're looking for. With solutions like Onclusive's [Media Monitoring](#), [Social Listening](#), [Message Optimization](#) and [PR™ Attribution](#), you'll be able to understand not only which content was picked up by the media and gained traction with your audiences, but also which specific publications, authors, articles and messages drove social engagement, visits to your website and actions like brochure downloads, information inquiries, free trial requests, and even revenue generated.

SARA EBERLE

Senior Director of Global Public Relations, Sophos

Onclusive is an invaluable tool to help you become a better PR person. It's great for strategy setting and industry analysis, as you can quickly and easily review what's happening beyond your own company. Onclusive gives us the ability to see what journalists are covering and track editorial patterns both regionally and globally.

How can you be a credible resource for your audience, stakeholders and the media by consistently sharing objective information and advice?

Now that you know what your audience needs and what has worked in the past, you can start creating the content that is likely to perform well going forward. The next question is: what assets do you have that could position your brand as a trusted authority for the media? Having clarity on this is especially important at this stage.

- 1. Do you have experts and spokespeople who can provide information or opinions no one else can?** Even establishing just 1-2 key spokespeople who are each a clear expert on a specific topic, have garnered visibility in your industry and enjoy being active on social media can go a long way. Remember that not every executive is well-suited to be a spokesperson—play to the strengths of your company and the people involved.

One Onclusive customer that does this really well is Edmunds, who uses their in-house team of automotive experts as a credible resource to the media by consistently sharing objective car-shopping information and advice.

- 2. Do you have proprietary data or unique insights that would be really valuable for your audience to access?** When brands can curate their own data and conduct their own research, communicators can use this data to tell a great story.

A good example of implementing this tactic is Monster, who conducts surveys amongst job seekers and employers and then tells its stories using data and insights from these surveys. Monster has recently successfully pivoted from focusing on job seeking to the perks of being employed, as the job market bounced back. Another excellent example is Sophos, who consistently provides information on current hacking issues and some of their peers being the targets of cyberattacks.

3. **What other content might you have that can provide objective information and advice to those who need it the most?** There might be content that already exists and can be repackaged and promoted through new or additional internal and external channels. For example, a product launch article could be rewritten from the customer perspective.

Another effective strategy is localizing your content. For example, Onclusive's customers Equinix and Norton Lifelock have both conducted global surveys and then broken the data down by region to make sure it's relevant to each geography and market.

The final idea we would suggest is tracking what your competitors are doing and where they are being mentioned. This strategy can inform how to differentiate your messaging, as well as reveal "zero mindshare"—industry content, publications and authors that mention your competitors' brands but not your brand. Mimecast is a great example of strategically using Onclusive's competitive media monitoring and PR analytics to uncover these types of hidden opportunities for additional coverage.

Keep in mind the ultimate outcome of your content strategy—positioning your brand as the key thought leader, subject matter expert or reliable source of information in the eyes of the media and your stakeholders.

Implement A Comprehensive Content Distribution Plan

After deciding on your content strategy, you'll want to develop and implement a content distribution plan that uses every opportunity to showcase your stories in front of your key audiences. Being strategic and proactive with your content distribution will generate multiple ways to be seen and build stronger relationships with the media and influencers.

Which channels and formats are best for delivering my content to my audiences?

Beyond research that your marketing team may have already conducted to determine the best mix of platforms for delivering your content, using actual past data to inform your future strategy also comes in handy during this stage. Tools like Onclusive's [PR Analytics](#) can help by automatically tracking all of your worldwide media coverage, including digital, newswire, print, broadcast and radio, and analyzing which channels drove the most impact for your brand.

Onclusive's customers who've had the most success with their content distribution use the entire spectrum of options at their disposal, including newswire, owned channels and reaching out to the media. These brands typically maintain a robust newsroom, leverage their social media assets to the fullest and optimize their strategy by tapping into attribution insights.

Given the breadth of this approach, the best communications teams are also exceptionally good at establishing mutually beneficial relationships with other teams, including the social media team, which is sometimes separate from PR, as well as marketing and analytics teams. This is a cross-functional effort that requires skillful integration and collaboration with other internal and external groups that touch public-facing content.

Best practices for using specific content distribution channels

- **Website and landing pages**

Your website and landing pages serve as the home base for your communications and PR activity. All of your prospective customers and other stakeholders will visit your website at some point after reading an article about you on a third-party website. The content provided on your web assets must tell your brand and product stories clearly and concisely. Your web pages also need to be properly optimized to be easily found online, and to efficiently convert views and clicks to actions and revenue. Essentially, your website is your key hub for all of your digital conversions so it must be set up to make it as easy as possible for your customers to take the actions you desire them to take.

- **Blogs**

In our experience, a brand's blog can become an excellent website traffic and conversion driver as a result of improved SEO. Many of our customers have found that their blog played a #1 or #2 role in their campaigns when they set out to measure their top 5-10 traffic sources. Therefore, we recommend that you include your blog as part of your content distribution strategy with the goal of improving your conversions. As an example, Onclusive often posts [news announcements](#) and [highlights its content that appeared in other publications or on other websites](#). If you review our blog history, you will also notice that we publish several blog articles in conjunction with each whitepaper and webinar that we run.

- **Social media**

Social media provides a great opportunity to amplify your earned media content, as well as share someone else's content that may be useful to your audiences. Many brands successfully use social media for ongoing conversations with their customers and listening to what their audiences really care about. Capturing market feedback in this way is not only extremely cost-efficient, but it is also unstructured and, therefore, more genuine and comprehensive. That said, don't expect your social media channels to be the biggest driver of conversions for you. Our recommendation is to use metrics such as amplification and audience engagement to measure the success of your social media.

- **News wire**

News wire distribution is as important to your plan as ever, because it supports SEO and continues to result in significant website activity. Don't miss out on this traditional PR channel that has gone fully digital and can provide an additional source of traffic and conversions for you.

- **Earned media**

Finally, earned media is one of the core pillars for content distribution among communications and PR professionals. Now we know that earned media, just like paid media, can drive not only readership and engagement, but also conversions and sales. We have learned that earned media can be effective at generating impact across all stages of the buyer's journey—from increasing awareness and reader engagement to influencing consideration and actual product purchases. Earned media by its nature is also the most trusted form of content, so it must be included in every content distribution plan.

Build relationships by proactively reaching out to journalists and key influencers with valuable content

If you have valuable content to share, such as unique insights, opinions or anything else you've identified above in the content strategy section, it is a good idea to be proactive about showcasing it to the right journalists and influencers in a timely fashion.

For example, if you've recently conducted a survey and have fascinating results that can be really helpful to your audience, that's a great reason to reach out to your media contact list. You can also create an editorial schedule where you plan to release periodic industry trends (e.g. monthly or quarterly) and inform your media contacts so that they can expect to receive this new information when it arrives.

Of course, you need a comprehensive, reliable and intelligent media database to make this possible. In today's dynamic environment, it is critical to have up-to-date media contact information that you can use for your pitches and be able to act on it by reaching out to journalists quickly and efficiently. It is also important to be able to access real-time data on the effectiveness of your outreach efforts and understand which of the millions of authors have had an impact for your brand. Onclusive's [Author Intelligence](#) is a one-stop shop that serves this purpose.

JAKE MAZANKE

Communications Manager, Livongo

As a newly public company, with a platform and business model different from anything else on the market today, it is more important than ever to inform people about what we do, and why our solution is special. Through strong media relations, we were able to successfully tell our story to a variety of audiences including our clients, members, reporters, and investors.

Finally, developing a strategic content syndication partnership might be an option for you. One of Onclusive's clients, Edmunds, has done this very successfully with Associated Press and as a result, has been able to generate millions more eyeballs for its content.

Earned Media Strategy & Measurement Success Stories



Edmunds owes its extraordinary PR success to its proven thought leadership strategy, which positions the brand as the authoritative source of automotive industry insights, and its robust distribution engine. The company publishes 20 vehicle-related content pieces weekly, proactively distributes its automotive industry trends to journalists and promotes all of this content on its owned media. In addition, through its unique content partnership with the Associated Press, Edmunds syndicates out thousands of expert editorials to the AP network across the country, including hundreds of local and national print and online publications—from The New York Times to the O.C. Register.

In response to the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, Edmunds leveraged all of these unique strengths to quickly pivot and launch the “COVID-19 Response” campaign addressing the most pressing customer needs. The campaign provided highly relevant content and advice to consumers in a way that felt like talking to an expert car shopping friend—covering topics such as financial payment relief and car price fluctuations during the pandemic. Edmunds’ PR and communication teams worked with Onclusive to measure how their “COVID-19 Response” strategy achieved their key objectives, focusing on a combination of press coverage quality and performance against competition.

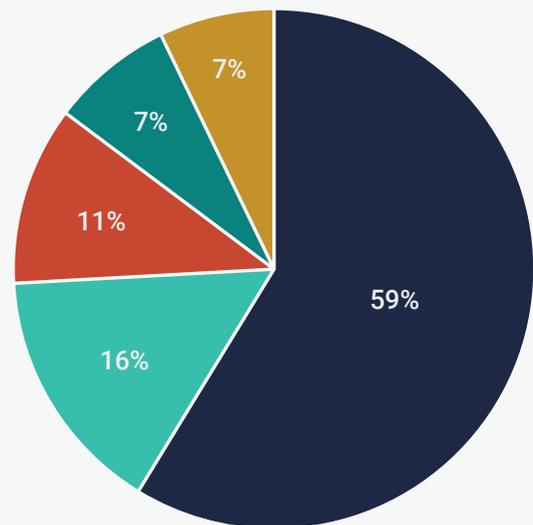
The Results

Based on the data and insights from Onclusive, Edmunds:

- Demonstrated its dominance of the media with the highest quality coverage (57% share of voice, 59% Power of Voice™)
- Blew out the competition with the 68% Share of Social Amplification
- Captured the largest competitive share (43%) with its target media placements

[Read The Full Case Study](#)

COVID-19 Response: Power of Voice™



● Edmunds ● Autotrader ● Cars.com
● Kelley Blue Book ● TrueCar

SOPHOS

Sophos, a worldwide leader in next-generation cybersecurity, was looking for a media monitoring and analytics partner that could understand their business and help them with the transition into using more data insights about their earned media coverage for their global PR strategy development.

Onclusive's media analytics platform gave the Sophos team advanced data about their global media coverage, along with additional social media amplification data, Power of Voice™ competitive intelligence measurement, and PR Attribution™ analytics. Coupled with dedicated support for custom insights, Sophos used the Onclusive platform to inform media relations strategies with competitive and industry data about what's resonating in earned media.

The Results

Data from Onclusive showed that through fiscal year '21 (April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021), Sophos earned media results results included:

- 21% increase in Comprehensive Earned Media Coverage
- Up to 45% increase in the inclusion of messaging
- Up to 32% increase in quarterly content-driven visitors to the Sophos website



Measure KPIs That Matter & Optimize Your Strategy

Based on a recent survey conducted by PR News and Public Relay, communications departments are spending more resources on media measurement and analysis:

Clearly, communications departments are spending more resources collecting and creating media analysis, even if it isn't always the favorite internal task. Once the data is created, however, how is it used?

The majority of respondents (57.8%) reported using the data to demonstrate how their efforts contributed to the company's broader business goals. This was followed by proving their department's worth (48.3%), and detailing where the department is meeting goals and where it needs to improve (45%).

An increased focus on tying PR work to business outcomes dovetails neatly with defending strategic decisions with data. In both cases, communicators are taking advantage of the availability of PR data to win an equal seat in strategic discussions alongside marketing, sales, and other data-driven disciplines.

5 How do you use analysis from your media measurement program? (multiple response)

| | | % change from last year |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Show how our efforts are contributing to broader business goals | 57.8% | ↓ -7% |
| Prove my department's worth - show what we've done | 48.3% | ↓ -8% |
| Detail where we meet goals & where we need to improve | 45.0% | ↑ 2% |
| Quantify our brand reputation over time | 35.6% | ↓ -7% |
| Justify additional budget to do more/better in the future | 33.3% | ↓ -3% |
| Provide insight that will assist us in crafting better pitches | 31.7% | ↓ -4% |
| We do not have a formal measurement program | 20.6% | ↓ 5% |
| Understand our SOV against competitors on key messages | 17.2% | ↓ -8% |
| Share hard data to calm executives about negative mentions | 15.6% | — 0% |

Source: PRNews + Public Relay, The State of Data-Driven Communications in 2020

While impressions, Share Of Voice (SOV) and reach continue to be the standard measures of communications effectiveness, we recommend that communicators get more qualitative than that and dig deeper. Even drilling down one extra layer and specifying a target media list that's important to your brand makes your measurement significantly more meaningful and rich when it comes to demonstrating actionable impact on your business.

Using metrics like the quality of your content, social media amplification, sentiment and target media placements can help you uncover powerful and often unexpected insights about the publications, authors, stories and messages that actually move the needle for your brand. For example, one feature article in a target publication is worth much more than ten articles with passing brand mentions in non-relevant publications. Based on these data-driven insights, you can further optimize your earned media strategy—and this cycle continues on as you learn and perfect your performance.

Onclusive offers a number of innovative metrics that can help you optimize your strategies and showcase your results to your C-suite:

- **Power of Voice™**, Onclusive's proprietary content quality metric, enables the discovery of the most impactful outlets, authors and content.
- **Social amplification trends** allow you to quickly understand which articles are being amplified and engaged with on social media, which is a great measure of how much your content resonates and how many more eyeballs it receives beyond the original publication.
- **Reader Engagement** finally answers the question whether your earned media is actually being consumed, and if so, by who and for how long.
- **Brand Impact** helps you understand which stories are likely to influence your audience to take desired actions.
- Last but not least, **PR Attribution™**, invented and perfected by Onclusive, empowers you to demonstrate the bottom line of your PR efforts by connecting your content to actual business outcomes, including revenue.

TALIA JAMES-ARMAND

Associate Director of PR and Communications, Edmunds

With the Onclusive platform, we are able to track the metrics that matter. Our communications metrics are integrated into our overall marketing performance measurement framework, and we can show our C-suite executives how earned media KPIs like Power of Voice™ tie into the company's business objectives.

One of the benefits of using these more qualitative metrics is providing your C-suite with the information they haven't seen before and can easily relate to. Demonstrating impact in terms of website sign-ups driven by specific stories or publications resonates with executives quite well.

On the flipside, one of the challenges we see for adoption of these new metrics is that some of them are narrower in scope—for example, website traffic and website actions from your content, measured by PR Attribution™, will certainly result in less significant numbers than, say, article views, readership and reach. What's the answer? Use percentage change basis instead of absolute numbers to showcase your success.

At the end of the day, none of the metrics are right or wrong. The important part is measuring what is meaningful to you, understanding why you're measuring it, and how you will use these data and insights to improve the performance of your communications strategies. Start with your corporate goals, develop your content to align with these goals, distribute it strategically and proactively, and learn and adjust based on objectively measuring your results.

Don't use metrics simply as your report card—use these data and insights to optimize and shift your earned media and overall communications strategy.

Onclusive

Onclusive empowers communications teams with media monitoring and PR analytics software and services. The inventors of **PR Attribution™** and **Power of Voice™**, Onclusive's product suite is built upon a proprietary global newscrawler which analyzes millions of earned, owned and newswire content pieces daily in over 100 languages.

Leading global brands and agencies including Airbnb, 23andMe, H&R Block, Experian, Monster, Edmunds, Sophos, Omnicom Public Relations Group and MSLGROUP partner with Onclusive to improve their communications. For more information, visit onclusive.com, email info@onclusive.com and follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

T: (415) 545-8247 E: info@onclusive.com

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