

Helping reporters help themselves with content management systems

By David Clarke

How do you reach the media when you have a targeted announcement?

One way is to find all of the reporters who cover your industry and blast an announcement to them through e-mail. However, I'm sure you know how fond the media are of receiving spam.

You could put the announcement out on a newswire. This is quite effective for big news, but may not make the same impact for a targeted distribution.

You could always post it to your Web site. Those reporters that follow your every move may eventually find the announcement, but it might not be as quickly as you'd like.

But what if you could guarantee that the editors who are interested in your news would receive the announcement in a blast e-mail and would be happy to receive it? What if you could also post the announcement to your Web site at the same time?

Welcome to the wonderful world of content management systems.

Media-friendly blast e-mails

Content management systems have begun to penetrate the corporate online newsroom because they allow in-house PR staffs to distribute news in a more customized and effective manner.

You can upload announcements, spec sheets, photos, bios, and other material as quickly and easily as saving a Word document.

But the hidden jewel within this system is a feature called the e-News Alert. This innovation allows you to have your reporters choose the news they wish to receive from your company. For example, a huge company like Sony Electronics introduces thousands of new products each year. These products fall

under dozens of consumer and professional product categories. This doesn't even include corporate and service-based announcements.

E-News Alerts allow reporters to specify which announcements they want to receive out of the many types of communication a company can generate. It's also a benefit for eager consumers looking to learn more about your products or services.

"The e-News Alert function is vital in making sure key reporters receive our news as soon as we make it public," says Marcy Cohen, PR strategist for Sony Electronics. "It is a proactive yet unobtrusive way of communicating with our key constituents who are constantly bombarded by PR people. We've also found that many consumers subscribe to this resource, which, ultimately, is a great way to educate them about our products and technology."

The alert function conveniently shifts the power of controlling the constant flow of e-mailed information back to the user, in this case, the news media.

"I like to be able to control what I'm getting," says Bill Howard, contributing editor at *PC Magazine*. "I like to have releases e-mailed to me, but only when I ask for them. I like to choose which releases I want to receive, and from which companies. If the announcement is unsolicited, chances are I'm not going to take a close look at it."

It's a self-serve world

The e-News Alert feature is something that journalists sign up for themselves. The sign-up feature usually comes in the form of a visible link on your online newsroom home page that brings reporters to a page with your products and/or services broken down into specific categories. They simply click on the

categories they want and begin receiving their customized news alerts from your company. In-house PR staff can keep track of which reporters have signed up for the feature, and possibly market the tool to the reporters that have not enlisted yet.

Content management systems allow in-house PR staff to easily and quickly upload their corporate announcements. They place the communication into one of the product or service categories and then pick when they want the announcement to go live.

Once the document is transmitted, an automatic e-mail is sent to the journalists who have signed up for that category, giving them the headline and lead of the announcement, and a link back to the full statement and supporting materials (photos, spec sheets, etc.) in the online newsroom.

The average journalist gets 250 to 500 press releases per day via e-mail, mail and wire services. These journalists trash 80 percent of these press releases immediately, skim and trash 18 percent, and maybe contact 2 percent of senders to write a story. If the journalists you are working with have proactively asked for the news release, chances are they're going to keep it, even if it is not the best day for them to receive the news.

"Getting these announcements automatically is a convenience," says Jonathan Weil, staff reporter with the *Wall Street Journal*. "Even if I'm not going to write a story on an event, I still like to know what's going on."

Other benefits

Besides individual releases, it's also helpful for busy journalists at a large industry convention, for instance, not to have to carry 100 different press kits as they travel from one press conference to the next. This is especially useful when

they're only interested in, say, two announcements out of the 23 press releases that are in your kit.

Another useful feature of a content management system is the ability to create online press kits that can easily be broken down into different categories, which are also transmitted through the e-News Alert system. When the media are going to write their stories in their hotel rooms, they don't have to sift through all the announcements as the ones they're really concerned with are already waiting for them in their e-mail inbox.

From a PR staff standpoint, the online press kit has obvious benefits, including the ability to make last-minute changes and to avoid the collating nightmare when people have to stuff press kits manually.

Overall, e-News Alerts allow you to execute targeted distributions to the reporters that target you by:

- Breaking down your news into user-friendly categories.
- Having the media proactively sign up for the news they want to receive, thus eliminating any chance of sending them unnecessary news.
- Providing immediate return on investment as the system is controlled internally with simple upload procedures, eliminating the extra steps of generating press kits, sending e-mail blasts, as well as using a wire service, which may be unnecessary for a targeted distribution. **T**



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