

2023 Content & Public Relations Planning Playbook

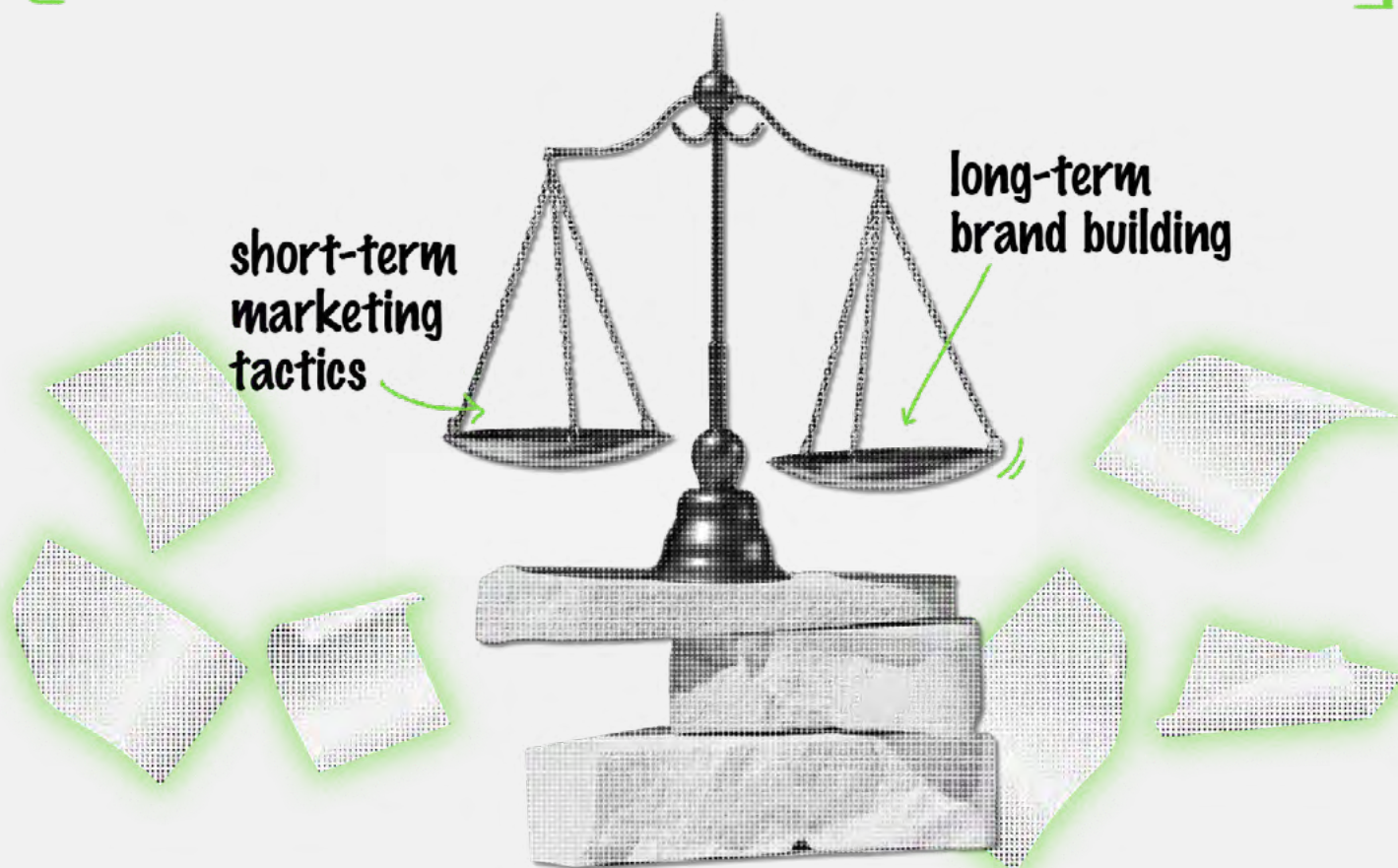
mutant
Perspectives



Introduction

The role of public relations (PR) and content has never been more important. Yet, with budgets under review amidst a teetering macroeconomic environment, marketers are once again confronted with choosing between short-term marketing tactics and longer-term brand building.

Public relations is arguably the oldest and most powerful marketing tool. In these times of misinformation and distrust, we've seen first-hand how it engages people, strengthens reputation, and drives broader business goals.



Meanwhile, content marketing has finally and rightfully evolved into a full-fledged marketing discipline for businesses to connect, engage, and convert customers. That's why you see so much of it everywhere – from whitepapers, to newsletters, to podcasts. Done right, great content can build dedicated audiences, brand loyalty, and advocacy.

In 2023, both PR and content will continue to present businesses with opportunities and give them a real competitive edge. Through our experience working with brands, including Meta (Facebook), Disney, Samsung, Shopee, and Subway, amongst others, we've identified five strategies for planning content and PR, specific to Southeast Asia. As we dive into each theme, we outline an approach – and in a way that meets the unique challenges of today.

KEY

Content

Considerations

for 2023



#1 More method, less madness to your content strategy

Today's changing media consumption landscape means that organisations have had to transform at lightning speed to reflect the world's digital present. Within this context, clients often tell us they're torn between which platforms to create content on with the limited in-house resources they have.

Deciding which channels to invest in will impact your budget and overall content marketing success. But broadly speaking, social media content (both paid and organic) continues to pack a punch – as do SEO-led blogs and newsletters.

There is no set rule on how often you should assess your content strategy. If you have the budgets, then we'd recommend doing this every month, but otherwise, assess when you notice significant changes. It could be that your site traffic has slowed down, or your social content isn't being shared as you hoped. After all, time is money and when you don't see a healthy return from your content, it's time to audit.

"We don't have the in-house resources to create content across our different priority areas and platforms."

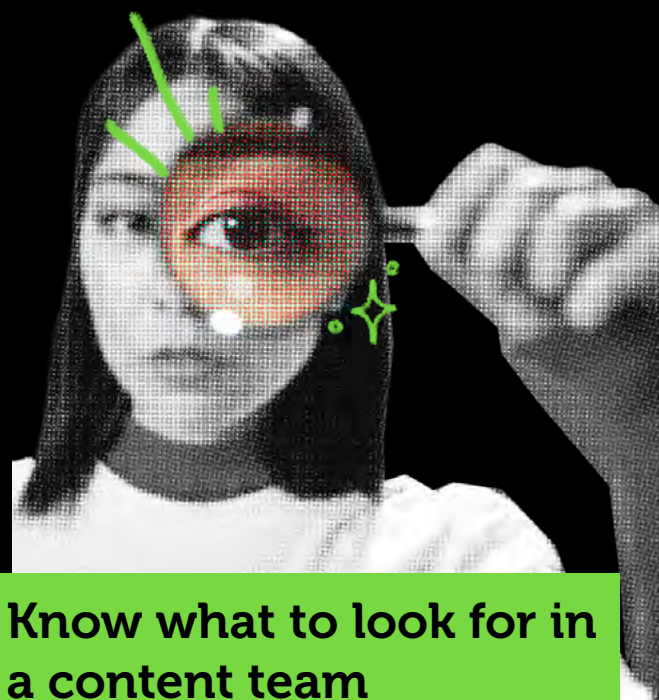
- Anonymous Client

While many agencies have beefed up their content capabilities, what you want is a group of people who can actually write well. And not, "oh yeah, I have a food blog in my spare time," kind of writing.

You need qualified and experienced professionals who can pen a research piece on renewable energy one day and deliver compelling social posts to launch a new perfume the next.

The members of a full-scale content team should work across content creation, marketing, and public relations (yes, PR people should have strong writing capabilities!) and be a mix of strategists, writers, editors, digital marketers, social media experts and more.

Ask about their storytelling capabilities. How do they figure out how to tell the right story? At Mutant, we hire former editors and journalists, so we know how to probe and get all the juicy titbits of information we need to create a compelling piece. And because we are also PR experts, we know which juicy details to leave out. This integration across PR and content is absolutely key, and will always provide stronger results overall.

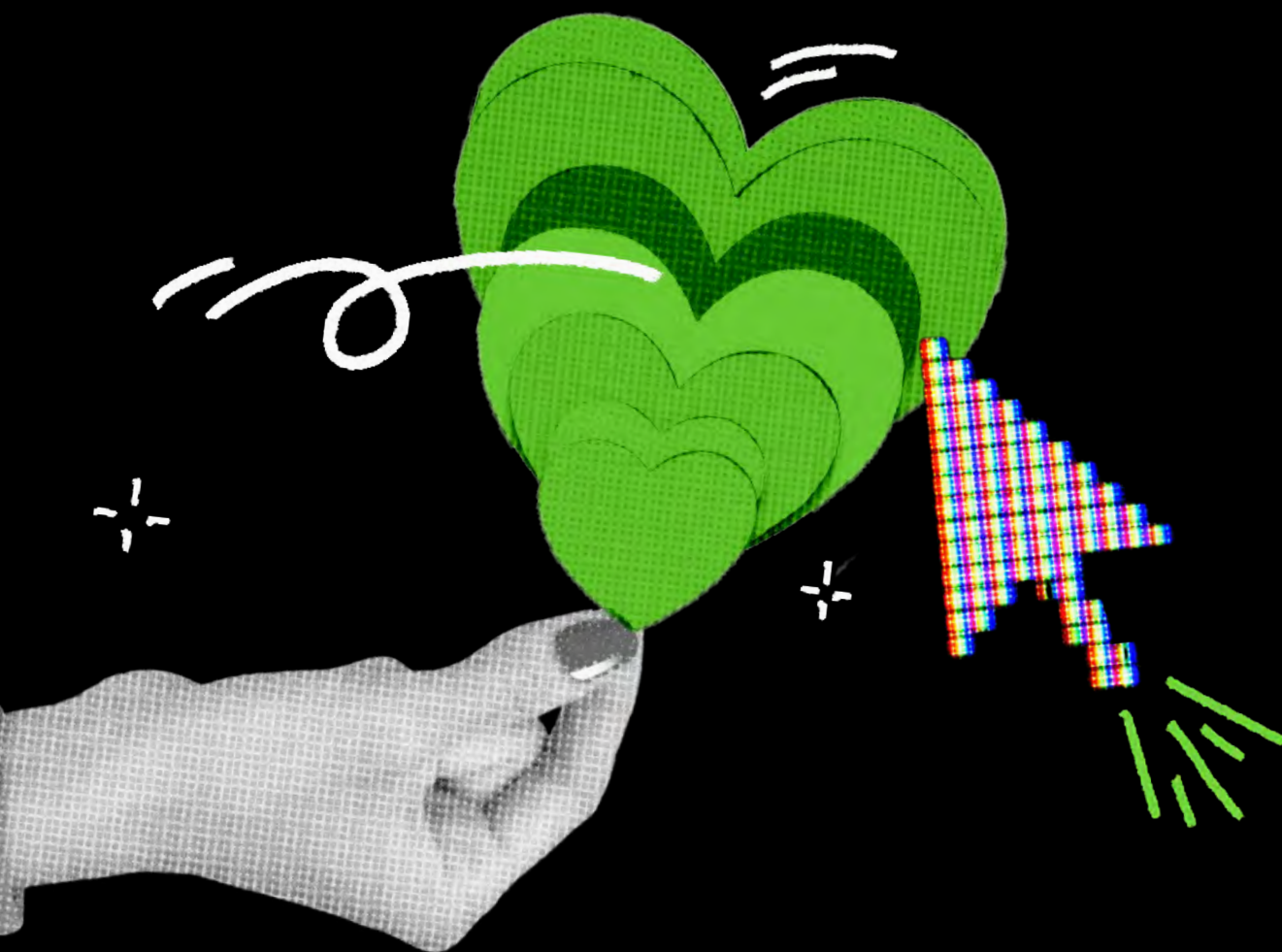


Know what to look for in a content team

#2 Empower your brand by humanising your content

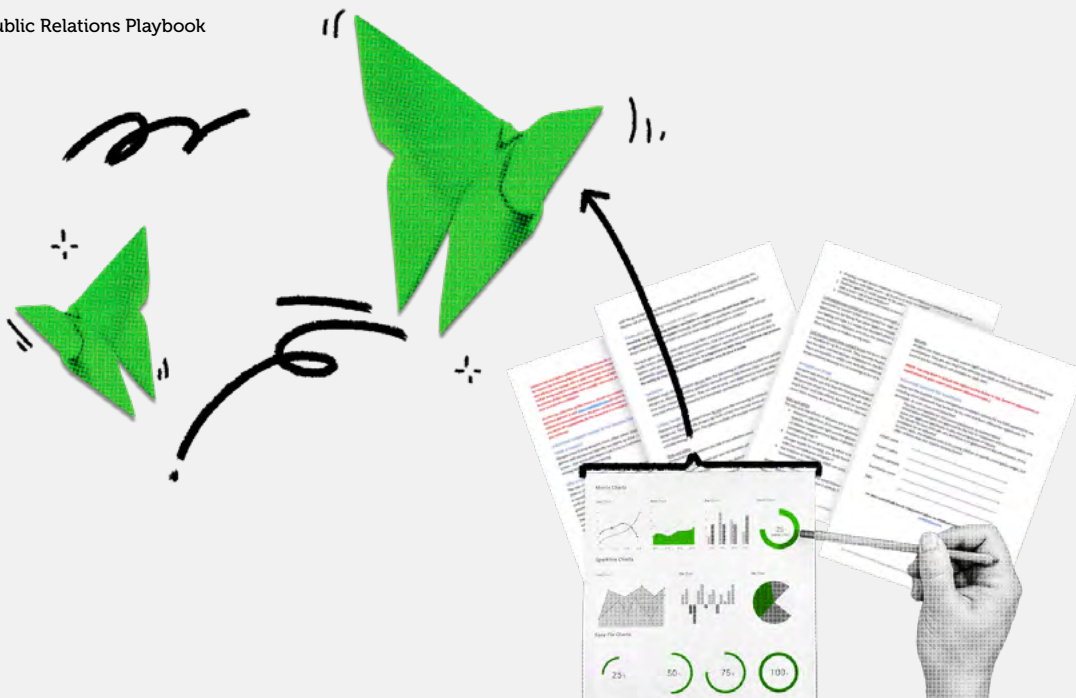
Audiences today are tech savvy, mobile-first and tuned in to a variety of digital content formats. They're more discerning of what they give their attention to, and less likely to let tone-deaf messaging fly under the radar. This can be a lethal combination for brands that think audiences can be engaged with buzzwords alone. Messaging around sustainability, for example, can easily be perceived as greenwashing without enough substance to back it up.

Further, online audiences can spot inauthenticity and they aren't afraid to say it. There's a reason why user-generated content (UGC), live streaming, and influencer marketing is on the rise; people want content to be as authentic as possible, and appreciate the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the real humans behind it.



This approach continues to be a massive shift for brands and the way they communicate. Rather than focusing on one-way corporate messaging, brands are being pushed to cut through the fluff, stick to the facts, and really resonate with their target audiences. Profiling – whether for executives or employees – has also risen in popularity (and effectiveness) for this reason.

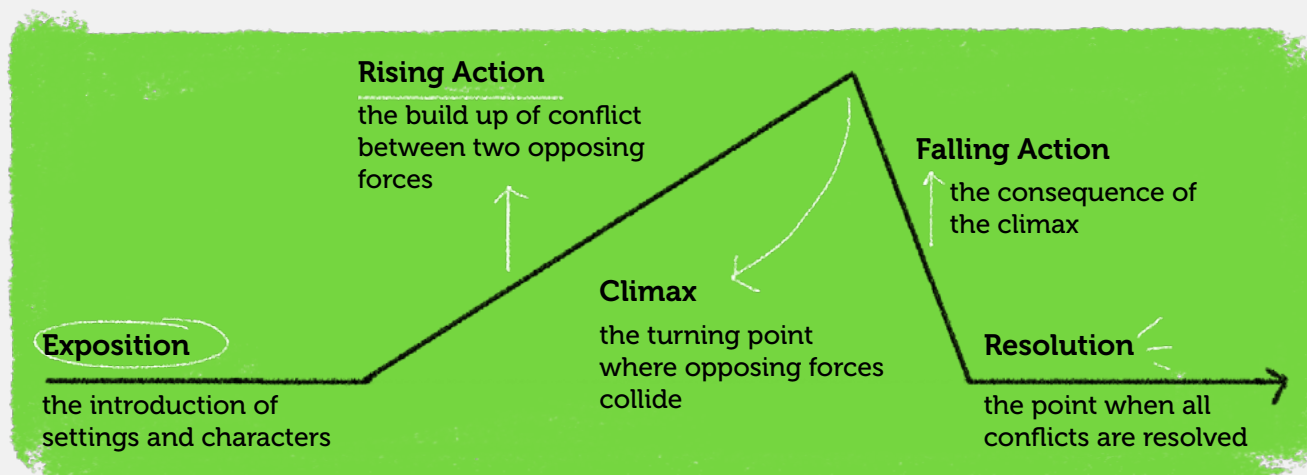
Even if a brand cannot make strong value-based claims, creating content that sparks dialogue and engagement goes a long way. With so many channels and formats available, brands have a huge opportunity to break away from being faceless digital entities and generate respect and trust by focusing on the people behind the brand.



#3 Bring data to life through storytelling

These days, simply presenting data is not enough. Rather, it has to be presented in a way that is clear, organised, and tailored to your intended audience. In short, your data needs to tell a story.

But, what does “telling a story” mean? As it happens, the ingredients needed to whip up a great story are pretty universal. Whether your story takes the form of a blog, byline or a research report, it will focus on a conflict between opposing forces. So as you work through your data, ask yourself how your findings might fit into this basic plot structure:



For example, the exposition can be about the current industry landscape. From there, you can discuss the challenges the industry is facing and use the data to qualify why these challenges are present. After that, you can lay out possible scenarios and solutions that can help others overcome the current challenges and ultimately thrive.

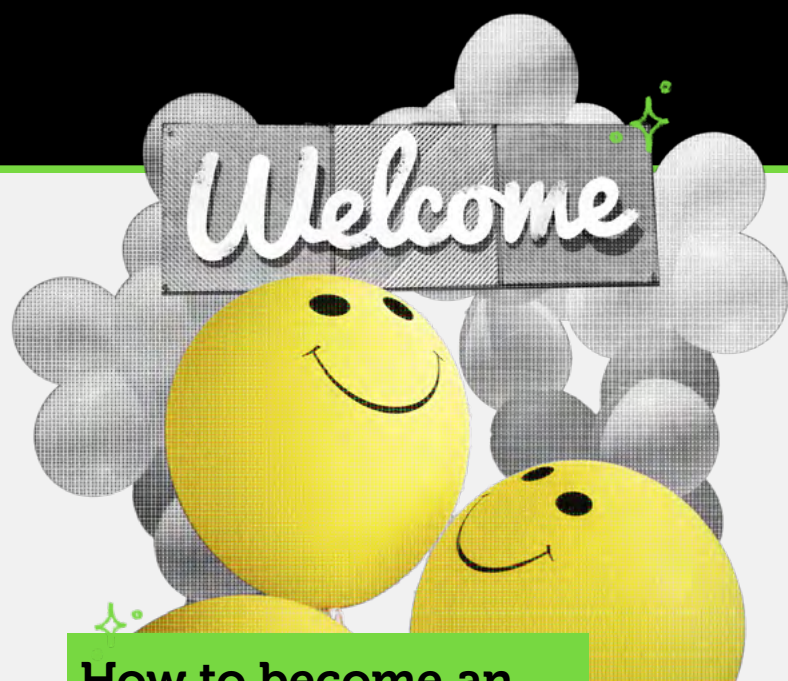
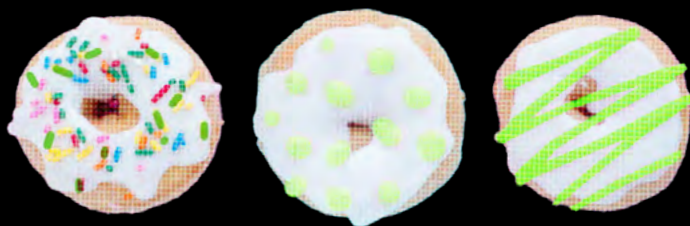
As you structure your story, remember to constantly ask yourself, “Why is this important? Why should my audience care?” If the data says that 9 in 10 people in the country use their smartphone to access the internet, it’s your job to explain why that’s important and why your audience should care. People want to consume content that’s relevant to them or the work they do, so you need to ensure the story you’re telling is one they’re keen to hear.

#4 Tell inclusive, representative stories

“What are your pronouns?” Found everywhere from social media bios and university classrooms to medical intake forms, this now common question has generated confusion, celebration and outrage in equal parts.

As ideas about gender have evolved from two options – she/her or he/him – to include gender-neutral options such as they/them, among others, more people and organisations are recognising the need for more inclusive representation.

Like everything, language evolves over time – and as the language we use to express gender identity publicly broadens to be more inclusive of people’s personal choices, brands should reflect these changes, too.



How to become an inclusive brand

All brands have a specific audience they’re looking to reach, and have built their identity and marketing efforts around reaching that audience. Everything from visual assets to website copy, ad campaigns, and social media content is likely anchored in what you believe will make your target audience stop and pay attention.

For example, let’s say you’re a heritage babycare brand. It’s a safe bet that your target audience is mothers. Because of this, the look and feel of your brand is likely

crafted to appeal to the traditional idea of mothers: heterosexual women who exhibit traditionally feminine gender characteristics.

But we know that it isn’t just cisgender, heterosexual, “feminine” women who care for babies and children. To become more inclusive, your brand needs to expand its target audience and brand identity.

This might sound like a complicated decision – but it’s actually quite easy. The quickest way to make the change and become more inclusive is to shift your brand’s mindset from appealing to mothers to appealing to parents. From there, consider who parents are these days – their age range, sexual orientations, genders, and ethnicities are absolutely core considerations. Ultimately, parents include heterosexual couples, working parents, single moms, same-sex couples, stay-at-home dads – the list goes on and on.

Once you’ve made this switch, you’ll be on the path to reflecting the world today in your content and marketing strategies.

#5 Optimise results (and costs) by planning ahead

Content planning and delivery cycles aren't what they used to be. The increasing use of social media, for example, has pushed content marketers to think more short-term if they want to stay topical. For many brands, this has resulted in a more ad hoc use of content for very specific campaigns that could potentially drive results – and because of this, they are missing out on the big-picture gains.

While it is important to stay nimble, planning ahead is still critical to effective content marketing – especially if you're looking to deliver strategic and high-quality content that is still cost effective and timely.

One of the biggest reasons for this is the evolution of the content marketing mix to include a variety of formats, all of which require increasingly specialised skill sets to create. Planning ahead allows for smarter budget and resource allocation that is optimised for these different formats from the get-go.



A good strategy to bridge the gap between traditional content calendars and the need for topical, trend-savvy content is adopting thematic campaigns across the year. These can be strategically planned ahead to coincide with important cultural or business-specific happenings. These themes provide structure and planning, while remaining broad enough to accommodate flexibility. Developing content templates or a planned series is an effective example of thematic thinking that sets parameters for quality and execution, while driving cost and resource efficiency.

Planning ahead also promotes effective goal setting and measurement by providing clear indications of what works for your audience and what doesn't over a significant period of time. The insights gained can inform both short-term pivots and continual planning for the long term.



Organic metrics that matter

Tracking metrics across content formats is crucial to measuring success. It enables marketers to make informed and timely adjustments to their campaigns that can refine efforts and optimise results.

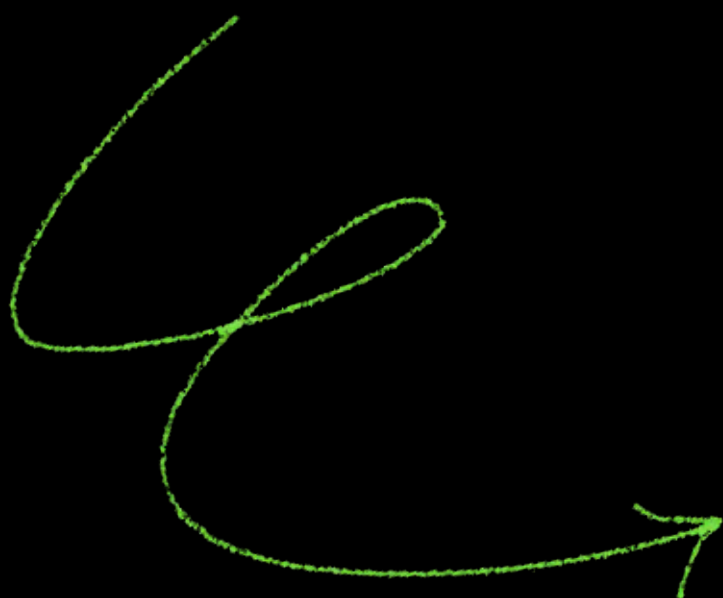
To make a qualified measurement, it's necessary to know the most important numbers to track. Here are some examples of organic metrics that matter:



Type of Content	Top Metrics to Measure	Why Are They Important?
Web content (blogs, webpages, SEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique page views • Average time on page • Pages/sessions • Traffic sources 	To assess the efficacy of not only unique pieces of content but your entire content strategy by mapping how many users are reading your content, where they are coming from, how long they are spending on your site, and if they are navigating to other pages on your site
Social media content (posts, articles, videos)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach • Engagement • Click-through rate (CTR) 	To understand what resonates most with your audience, which call to actions (CTAs) are most effective, and which posts would benefit most from a paid push
Electronic direct mail (emails, newsletters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open rate • Spam/bounce rate • CTR 	To track which subject lines and CTAs performed best, and if your content or mailing lists need review or overhaul
Gated content (reports, whitepapers, playbooks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique page views • Leads • Downloads 	Being able to generate qualified leads is unique to gated content, while unique page views and downloads help map the general performance and relevance of the content piece

KEY

**Public Relations
Considerations
for 2023**



#1 Fewer publications, but better stories

Southeast Asia is an important hub of business and economic activity, with plenty of news, events, and updates happening in the region on a daily basis. However, a shrinking media pool continues to create challenges for brands looking to land coverage. In Singapore, for example, the mainstream and broadcast media is now dominated by two publishing houses – Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) and MediaCorp – and recently, there's been even more consolidation, downsizing, and closures in the media industry, with many editorial staff members now doubling as journalists and content creators.

A lean editorial team with more responsibilities means that straightforward press releases are no longer enough to pique an editor's interest. From our conversations with journalists, it's clear that readers are demanding more, including a better customer experience, distinctive local content, and interesting angles that appeal to their passions and interests.



How we do it at Mutant

- Even before we pitch stories, we proactively establish a relationship with journalists so when we do go to them with an idea or a press release, they are more likely to respond.
- Personalise pitches, rather than sharing one general pitch broadly with hundreds of reporters.
- Localise pitches by setting the right context and its impact on the publication's audience.
- Co-create stories with media when possible by harnessing unique tools that clients may have.

- We offer an exclusive where possible. When this isn't possible, we try a new angle or an exclusive piece of information to add value to reporters' stories.
- Visuals increase the odds of a journalist running a story, so it's worthwhile to spend extra time on infographics and curated images.
- Reporters need time to digest the information shared – so we give them a couple of days before following up. And we don't follow up more than thrice.

For Meltwater, Mutant uses their interactive dashboards to showcase interesting insights around social chatter and public sentiment. We routinely use this to identify trends that we believe will interest the media, often resulting in strong media, including this [full feature coverage than ran in The Straits Times](#) – both print and digital.



#2 Work harder to land sustainability stories

Today, more people are demanding brands across industries be sustainable. In fact, consumers in APAC have become [increasingly concerned about ESG issues](#), and with quicker access to brands via social media, they are not afraid to scrutinise, call out, or boycott any undesirable behaviour. And yet, these are the hardest stories to land.

So what are brands to do?

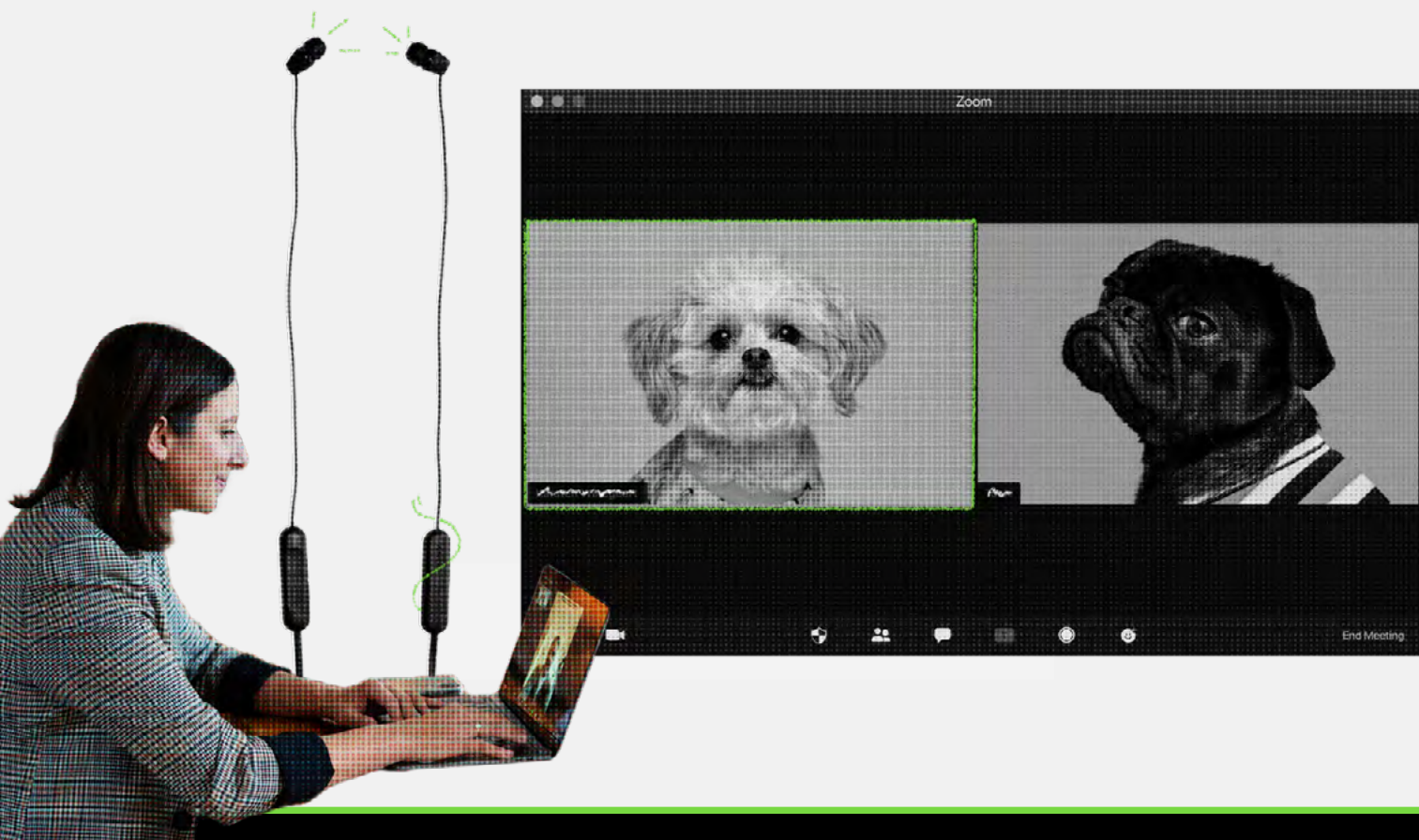
They get intentional with sustainability communications. One of the biggest learnings from Mutant's own experience with CSR is that sustainability stories aren't considered "sexy", especially in an increasingly short news cycle. One climate reporter [recently shared](#) that newspapers have been turning down "gloom and doom" climate stories because their readers were tired of negative stories and were struggling with climate anxiety.

Despite this, brands must never attempt to "spin a story" for the sake of a few easy headlines. Transparency, accountability, and authenticity are key factors when it comes to articulating a brand's sustainability commitments. Additionally, adding a human element, data-led insights, and evidence-based tips go a long way in making sure a story lands.



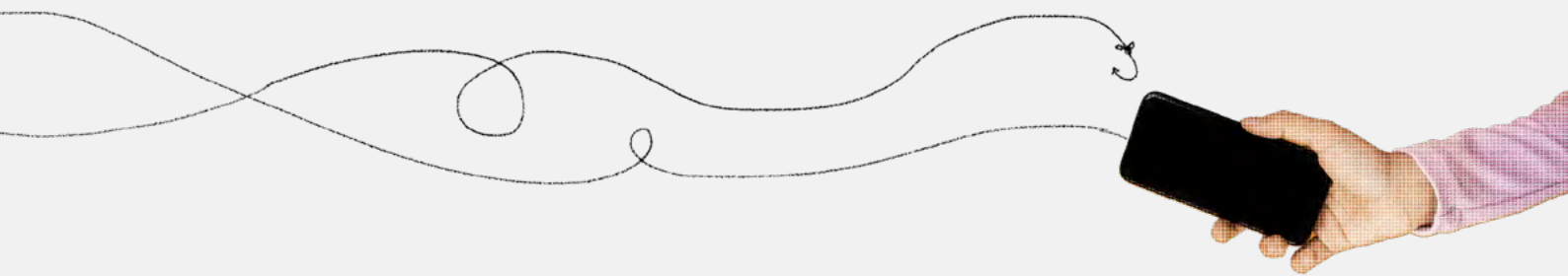
#3 Make it experiential

Let's be real: journalists love flexible and remote work just as much as we do. The pandemic-induced transition to Zoom interviews and mobile editing is here to stay – and as such, agencies and clients have had to adapt to these new ways of working. So in addition to ensuring that media training covers the usual soundbites and key messages, we now prepare clients for the nuances of Zoom interviews.



Things to prepare for a Zoom interview

- Be in a well-lit area or use a ring light. Avoid backlighting.
- Silence is golden. Ensure your windows and doors are shut, fans are not running, pets are not roaming, and anyone at home knows you are not to be disturbed.
- Use a laptop or tablet. Close all other programmes and apps.
- Set your camera at eye level, look directly into the camera, and centre yourself with at least your shoulders visible
- Use a clutter-free, natural background unless issued an interview specific virtual background
- Ensure your device has a good microphone, or else use a wired earpiece with a built-in mic.



If brands really want to draw journalists out of their homes and offices, it's important that the event is highly experiential, interactive, and offers a wealth of content creation opportunities. In short, you need to make it worth their while.



Subway Museum

Earlier this year, Mutant worked with Subway Singapore to launch the [world's first Museum of Subway in Singapore](#). The goal of the three-week event was to attract eyeballs and cut through the noisy National Day season, using never-before-seen interactive installations and limited-edition merchandise.

Doing this not only gave our media and influencer friends a great space to create content, but it really helped to bring Subway — the brand — to life. Besides gaining a whopping 81 media pieces, with 85% covering key Subway's brand messages, the museum received over 10,000 visitors, and entered the Singapore Book of Records for the "Largest Sandwich Making Game" and "First Sandwich-Based Museum in Singapore".

#4 Experimenting with content distribution

Media companies have had to embrace data and analytics to create the type of content that resonates with their audiences, and in doing that, they've discovered that readers' habits and needs have changed, leading to entirely new strategies.

According to [one survey](#) conducted in Singapore, 83% of respondents indicated that they get their news online, including through social media. In comparison, only 23% of respondents indicated that they get their news through print media.

To keep up, publications are now experimenting with different platforms and content types. Earlier this year, for example, The Straits Times introduced four new podcast series, each helmed by a seasoned ST journalist, and featuring expert industry guests. Importantly, with the emergence of alternative media outlets, such as [Folkative](#) and [USS Feed](#), especially in Indonesia, we encourage clients to engage and strengthen relationships with them.



Mutant worked with the Singapore Sports Hub recently on a collaboration with CNA Insider and Our Grandfather Story to produce a documentary episode on how the Singapore National Stadium keeps its free-spanning dome – the world's largest! – pristine. The pieces were made possible through exclusive behind-the-scenes access, interviews with the rope-access personnel, pre-discussions with key staff on skills required and the technicalities of filming at heights, as well as permissions for alternative filming methods such as drones and GoPros. Through differentiated and high-quality content that goes beyond the usual print or digital format, Mutant was able to elevate Singapore Sports Hub's brand storytelling.



[The Heroes who Face Their Fears on Top of the National Stadium, Hidden Hustles](#)

Also keep in mind that publications do not only publish on one platform: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok – you name it, they have it. These social media platforms allow them to create bite sized content that's easy to produce and consume. So if your stories don't make the mainstream cut – work with journalists to land on alternative media platforms.

#5 Continue to engage

To effectively communicate key messages to wider audiences, brands must take a value-driven communications approach to earn the media's attention. This means less individual, ad hoc announcements and more thematic or campaign-based work to communicate your brand's commitment to a topic.

Equally, once a brand begins to gain the media's attention, it's important to keep the relationship up, by supporting their stories with quotes. There will be times when brands are restricted in what they can say – but offering alternative comments or turning it down with a strong, relevant reason will go a long way in strengthening a brand's relationship with the journalist.



Approach 2023 with a plan

Despite the tougher economic environment, brands must prioritise strong storytelling and smart PR strategies in 2023 to reap real business results. This integration across PR and content is absolutely key, and will always provide stronger results overall. Just ask our clients.



Public Relations

We don't simply "do PR". Instead, we use data, insights, storytelling, and creativity to deliver real impact for your brand.



Content

Our team of former journalists and editors means you get the kind of content that has the power to change the way people think about you.



Social Media

Every brand has social potential. We discover, refine, and deliver on yours, bringing your authentic brand voice to your customers in the social space.



Branding & Design

With more than 25 years of combined branding experience, our creative experts are perfectly designed (ha!) to give your brand the love it needs.



Specialisations

As a person, brand or employer, you need to be adept in the art of selling yourself. Our media training will whip you into shape to face journalists.

If you'd like to learn more about our offerings, drop us a line at

hello@mutant.com.sg