

Home » Sales and Marketing » *Oprah's* No Longer the Holy Grail

Oprah's No Longer the Holy Grail

Thanks to social media, a company no longer needs to reach top media to gain significant attention.

By: Hilary Kaye | 12/28/2009

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As a PR professional, I manage client expectations, which is not always an easy task. The request I hear most often is to be a guest on *Oprah*, followed by a plea to be featured in a *Wall Street Journal* article and then, in third place, a client's hope of being seen on the *Today* show.

The names of these premier publications and programs do vary--every client has a different hot button, although Oprah pulls in more than her fair share. But the reality is, few smaller companies scale these dizzying heights, and their expectations need to be managed. Not necessarily crushed, because small companies do make it into high-profile media; size is only one criterion. However, the odds aren't great with so many people clamoring for these spots, and no one likes to be disappointed.

But a very interesting thing is happening in PR today, and it's time for entrepreneurs to understand the shift that's taking place. I'm not sure exactly what to call it; perhaps "the Equalizer." Very simply, the Equalizer is allowing the little guy to get ahead and even the newbie to get noticed while still wet behind the ears. This trend took hold in the '80s and '90s, when companies of all sizes began sprouting websites to tout their services and products. Some actually were selling online, but most built websites to create a façade that gave them legitimacy. Lo and behold, a little guy working from a spare bedroom could give an impression of corporate clout--if he or she knew how to manipulate bells and whistles on the web and realized the importance of doing so. That phenomenon is very old news today, but a variation has emerged with the amazingly fast ascent of social media in our daily lives. A company that prioritizes social media--and actually begins mastering it--can loom large and powerful through its virtual presence. This is what I am talking about as far as managing expectations: A company no longer needs to reach top media to gain significant attention. There's no need anymore to long for the impossible dream--that dream is becoming very possible for entrepreneurs who strategically catapult themselves and their company into the social limelight.

I could offer suggestions about which social media outlets are best and how to maximize your use of each one and how to leverage them with each other. But there are so many articles and columns on these topics right now, a reader would have to be asleep at the switch not to notice them. This is the topic de rigueur, and I'd suggest that any entrepreneur looking to dive in do just that: Dive into the sea of published articles, listen to interviews with so-called gurus of social media, and then carefully think how this can be applied to your business.


Getting back to expectations, I'm not suggesting that entrepreneurs stop reaching for the stars--that is, traditional media stars as referenced earlier. But I would like to suggest that business owners stop frantically seeking premier media outlets as the only game in town.

Everyone can see that traditional media outlets are getting scarcer and scarcer. Don't find yourself without a game plan as those outlets continue to shrink their coverage. Instead, concentrate on strategically figuring out a social media plan that will work--not necessarily in isolation, but integrated with a traditional media plan. Together, it's a blockbuster combination that can work wonders.

I particularly enjoy seeing small companies land a huge traditional media hit and then blast it out via their well-established social media channels. When this happens, they are capturing the best of both worlds. Scratch that, it's the best of *all* worlds. And sometimes it happens in reverse: A story told from a solid social media presence can now lead traditional media to sit up and take notice. Some stories travel from social media to traditional media--it's now a two-way street.

Expectations? Well, today I counsel clients to expect the unexpected and realize that there are many avenues to media success. Sometimes these avenues cross, sometimes they don't. But having an integrated media road map will take you where you want to go.

Hilary Kaye is the founder and president of HKA Public Relations, an award-winning public relations agency known for its ability to generate credibility and visibility via a variety of established and innovative PR approaches.

 **Robyn Culver** 1 week ago

Finally, a column that addresses a realistic roadmap to leveraging media coverage without sounding like every other expert touting themselves as a social media guru. As a former talk show producer, there are only exceptional, sensational and amazing stories that make it on air with Oprah...formulating a plan as Kaye suggests is the best way to go!

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