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## Advertising's Role In PR

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in Public Relations

As PR people, we often talk about the blurring of lines between marketing, PR, customer service and social media. I don't know about you, but I haven't spent nearly as much time exploring how we integrate our efforts with various forms of advertising. Many agencies have a media buyer who develops that part of the strategy; however, that doesn't absolve PR people from having a basic understanding of advertising's role in "our" field.

I learned more about the graying of lines between PR and advertising when researching [ARAnet](#), a media company that offers two products: 1) [Adfusion](#), an article-based cost-per-click advertising platform, recently named to the Upshot Institute's 2009 list of 50 most innovative, powerful and useful online marketing tools; and 2) [ARAcontent](#), which generates feature article placements to help companies build awareness in daily and weekly newspapers, as well as SEO-optimized online placements on hundreds of media websites. [Scott Severson](#), the company's president, says ARAcontent helps marketers and PR professionals reach and win new customers in a way that is relevant, measurable and effective.

Well, that piqued my interest! Scott was kind enough to answer a few questions and shed some light on integration and how a service like his fits into public relations.



### Q&A With Scott Severson

Q: In years past, PR pros didn't always place as much emphasis on true measurement as maybe they should have. In this current economy, with companies cutting budgets and communicators having to justify their actions, where do you tell PR people to start if they're "rediscovering" PR measurement – or truly discovering it for the first time?

A: First, as an industry I think PR has let Google take credit for its work for too long, so I think the ["current movement to measure the reality of the value that PR"](#) provides is really important.

As PR is not one-size fits all, I always recommend starting with a client-centric approach to measurement. Meaning, measurement should be primarily based on the metrics that are important to the client. For us that used to mean, detailed print and online placement reports along with ad dollar equivalency. While we still provide these reports, our client's goals are changing. More and more it means, measuring the lift in organic search ranking we generated as a result of our SEO work, or how are we helping our clients reach consumers through social media outreach.

Q: The lines between PR, marketing and advertising are becoming increasingly blurred. In the purest sense, it seems like your product falls under advertising, but I know you believe that integration is key. How do you see a service like Adfusion working as part of an integrated online strategy? And, why should it be on a PR person's radar – and not just the media buyer's?

A: Right now it's a lot like the Wild West out there. There's a huge online opportunity that is still up for grabs. PR should take note because while Interactive agencies generally understand the online channel better. But [no one is better at telling a client's story than PR](#). Obviously social media is a big part of this, but leveraging technologies like Adfusion that employ brand story telling in a very measurable way can help PR stake a claim to a larger share of the client's budget.

Q: ARAcontent generates feature article placements in print and online publications that build awareness of clients' products and services. Coming from that perspective, what are your thoughts on sponsored posts and sponsored tweets? Can you briefly explain similarities and differences between sponsored conversations and your service?

A: In general I think sponsored tweets and posts fine, if there's an appropriate level of disclosure (see [Jon Burg's post](#) about his take on recent FTC guidelines). With ARAcontent, when editors are pulling content from our site, it typically runs without sponsorship designation as the editor is making an active choice to run the article based on their interest in the content and they are not being paid to do so (however, some editors do provide sponsorship designation, if that's their policy). In cases where we push content to online publishers and they have a financial incentive to run it, like they do with Adfusion, we always disclose that it is sponsored content.

Q: As a communication industry veteran, what do you tell practitioners who continue to ignore the power and importance of online communication, or leave it up to their younger staff members?

A: If you want to work in this space [you have to embrace change](#). It's a job requirement. For those who don't like change, good luck finding work in one of the industries that isn't going through this period of accelerated change that we're presently experiencing. I really think it's imperative to fully embrace where we're heading. Regardless of age, none of us can afford to leave the responsibility of learning new things to someone else.


As PR people, what do you think about this kind of [service](#)? Have you gone this route? What kind of results did you get? If you haven't gone down this path, would you consider it? Why or why not?



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I am the director of public relations for [Costa DeVault](#) and love helping companies understand how Web 2.0 is influencing communication.

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