

# Social media: a distinct discipline within the PR domain?

 By [Kat Potgieter](#)

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As a digital marketer I am particularly interested in the way digital is changing the marketing, PR and advertising industries' distinct yet overlapping landscapes. Rebecca Cronje's keynote address last week at the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) Conference titled, 'Hooked! PR's gone mainstream', led me to ponder just how the digital marketing shift as exemplified by the changing power dynamics from traditional content creator to consumer, is affecting the latticework of these industries.

I tracked Cronje down after the event and asked her a few pertinent questions. As head of strategy at Atmosphere Communications, she had some pretty insightful things to say.

**Question:** *Due to the rise of social media and the digital dialogue, a conversion of skills is required in order for campaigns to succeed. Do you agree with such a statement?*

**Answer:** I think so, because everyone does come with a different mindset, so whether you are on the advertising side, you are really thinking about strong, clear and single-minded message(s) and how to create strong content. On the PR-side we are looking at the news value; are people going to carry it? What is the story? What is the hook? You do have to play the role of asking 'so what?'

So I definitely think you all can't all be the same thing, and you definitely need the background and specialist mind-set, but we do need to all work together to make one orchestra of a campaign. I think it works incredibly well when people do [that].

**Q:** *Whose responsibility does it become to do 'social media'?*

**A:** That's the kind of question you could ask every single person and you will get lots of different answers. It is such an interesting debate at the moment and I think everyone can probably justify why it fits into their area. Obviously I'm going to answer you from a public relations point of view.

The way I think it works, and Atmosphere thinks it works, is it's a conversation channel, it's about tapping into what people are doing, what are they talking about; it's about 'liking' stuff, it's about sharing stuff, and ultimately you've got to create something that is really likeable. And how do you do that?

So from our point of view, it's about assuring that the content has got a very strong angle - that it's got a news angle, that there's something that's going to go out via social media and you are going to give to people to carry on your behalf.

I see consumers and journalists as kind of the same thing. If they don't like it, they can turn you off, they can say - if it

doesn't have a strong angle - why bother? I think everyone comes with social media skills and kind of looks at it in a different way, but I do believe it belongs in the field of public relations.

***Q: Do you think social media, despite it being an integral part of all three industries (PR, advertising AND marketing), should become its own field, as such?***

**A:** It's an interesting one, because at Atmosphere we have Dan Pinch that founded Society. Dan was actually a part of Atmosphere as the creative director for a couple of years and then within that we really saw this strong need for social media and Society was born out of that (which is now a stand-alone business that the team works alongside and integrates with all the time).

I do think where it works incredibly well where you've got teams of people like community managers managing pages; it's not something you can dip in-and-out of. It's not like, "oh let me check what someone's doing here": it's watching it 24/7, it's engaging 24/7. I think that having a social media team, if not social media bodies that integrate with different disciplines, is probably the way to go because you do still need to have that kind of dedicated resource (certain campaigns need constant monitoring, like on Twitter).

I think having specialists within social media is a very key benefit, but it's all about creating conversations, and creating hooks that people are going to carry for you. And I think what we've seen with Society, it's a prime example of that. It was an offshoot off Atmosphere; it is a stand-alone business that integrates within the broader marketing mix, and we work alongside them all the time.

***Q: Do you think the future of these industries veer towards a conversion of services, or a greater separation and sense of niche specialisation?***

**A:** It's two-fold: one - yes, I think it's a conversion of skills, because - to be fair - if you are creating a PR campaign without the other elements it's not going to go very far; you've got to have an idea that resonates across channels. And if I consider the SwapShop (Capitec) campaign for example; we need to use Twitter, Facebook, YouTube; we also need to use traditional press; we also need to use bloggers; we need to create ads. We [also] need to have the creatives and designers to create that stuff - so you need all of these roles. I think it is a conversion.

However, specialists also need to know what they're doing in those specific areas to bring them together, so they do work as part of a whole.

[Atmosphere] has been very lucky. I think that we've got a lot of the skills in-house. With Capitec for example, because the account is with ninety9cents (advertising), Quirk does the digital, and we do the PR.

I've worked on the brand for ages not and it's actually worked incredibly well where all of the agencies who don't sit together at all, [work together]. We meet all the time and we're constantly bouncing ideas off each other. We're doing a campaign now and we're all bringing our different skill sets to the table, so it can work really well.

Personally (and I'm sure a lot of people has touched on this as well) I think the future of where we're going, is not perhaps to have these individual role players; it's about groups of people that's going to work on a brief that comes in. [The question will always be: what do you need?] We need some social, we need some PR, we need some advertising. Maybe you only need some marketing, maybe you only need an activation: it's about meeting the client's brief at the end of the day.

***Q: Do you think it should become an industry norm for marketers, advertisers and PRs to do their own social media?***

**A:** No, it's a difficult one; if you look at Joe Public, and what it was doing with those campaigns (they were beautifully done), but I suspect it has someone in-house managing those campaigns and obviously creating the content and managing it from a community management point of view. I think now (because [industries] hasn't converged yet, and is something

that will come later) you need to have at least access to social media on-site, or at least a working knowledge of how to do it.

What I've learnt through all of this, is it's not about you anymore! It's about them, it's about the audience. It's about what they want, it's about what they like - they are the guys that are going to run with it. It is humbling because you can put out some stuff and it doesn't work, and you're like 'ah, oh well', and then you've got to kind of modify it. And I think that's why digital is so interesting, is that you *can* actually adapt and modify on the fly and see what people really like, and track it as it goes, so I think that's where it's all going to go.

## ABOUT KAT POTGIETER

An adventurous knowledge-junkie, Kat is curious about all things digital. She has moved into the digital marketing communications arena and is currently the in-house digital and communications specialist for chef school Capsicum Culinary Studio. A part-time Media Theory and Practice honours student at UCT, Kat's primary passions are engaging with people, being in nature and exploring consumer tech. Contact details: Twitter @extremelykat  
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