



## Write Like a PR Pro



# **Write Like a PR Pro**

*Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world*

MARY STERENBERG



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## About the Author



Mary Sterenberg is a lecturer with the Ohio State University School of Communication and co-advises the Public Relations Student Society of America chapter and its student-run public relations firm The PRactice at Ohio State. She teaches writing and public relations courses such as writing for strategic communication, strategic message design, strategic media planning and public communication campaigns. Beyond the classroom, she works closely with local employers to create internship and career pipelines for Ohio State communication students, and meets often with students to critique resumes and foster connections between students and local professionals. She also supports communication for the School of Communication, managing an intern, social media and web content.

Mary came to Ohio State in 2011 after nearly 10 years working in health care public relations with the Ohio Hospital Association. During her time at OHA, she managed a daily email newsletter sent to thousands of hospital leaders, media and legislators, contributed to several statewide advocacy campaigns and launched the association's social media presence on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Prior to her work at OHA, Mary worked in print news media.

Throughout her career, Mary has freelanced for publications such as The Columbus Dispatch and Columbus Monthly. She continues to freelance for Columbus CEO and has edited several books for Hyden Consulting. When

she's not working with students and writing, she's wrangling her three kids and playing soccer mom (yes, in a minivan).

Mary earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from Ohio Northern University and her master's degree in journalism from Ohio University. Feel free to email her at [Sterenberg.2@osu.edu](mailto:Sterenberg.2@osu.edu) or connect with her on Twitter ([@maryIV](#)) or [LinkedIn](#).

# Acknowledgements

From the moment the idea for this book emerged at a ramen lunch with former student Chelsea Hagan, collaboration was part of its DNA. Thanks to student Kaitlyn Edwards for a semester of brainstorming and legwork to get things started and student Anna Loss for the cover artwork. A big thank you also to the professionals included in this book, especially those featured in the videos who volunteered their time and expertise (and in many cases allowed me to invade their offices and homes). Much appreciation goes to videographer Adam Bey, who traipsed around Columbus with me to give students a glimpse into different corporate environments. And to my project manager Alexis Duffy with The Ohio State University Office of Distance Education and eLearning, who kept me on track and connected to other university professionals who could answer questions ranging from library database use to copyright law.

I thank the amazing School of Communication and PRSSA students at The Ohio State University for giving me a role as a teacher and mentor that blesses me beyond measure. I thank my husband and kids for the gift of time to pursue my passions. Love you all to the moon and back.

# Introduction

I'm a writer. Might seem simple, but putting words on a page sent me on a free trip to Europe, earned a scholarship that kept me out from underneath crushing student loans and paid my bills for a fair number of years. Now I'm an educator *and* a writer, and when I post notecards around the classroom and ask college communication majors to stick their names next to a category, only a few kindred souls seek out the wall with "Writer." I get a lot of "Strategic Thinker" and "Digital Content Creator," and even some "Techy" and "Advertiser" notecards because the world of public relations and communications now includes many things and requires a variety of skillsets. I respect the diversity of interests, but I see a lack of appreciation for writing as a core job skill for nearly all of the jobs in the public relations field. Nine of every 10 of the professionals who visit my classrooms, speak to my students or serve as mentors to the students I work with have the same answer to the question "What is the number one skill students need to be competitive professionally?" Writing. And this comes from professionals who work in social media, event planning, marketing, graphic design and many other areas where it may not seem as obvious that writing would be key. This book starts with a refresher on strong writing and the cornerstones of communications and moves through how to write strategic and strong content for the core platforms used in public relations. Recognizing that images and video often pair with the written word to send strong messages, the book also covers on a broad level the creation of video and visual messaging.

A great way to learn is by surrounding yourself with people who have more experience or knowledge than you do. You can watch, listen and then try and re-try as you build your own experiences and skillsets. This book asks professionals who create messages in various ways for different platforms to share the fundamentals of message creation as well as some nuggets of wisdom from their professional journeys. They give real world commentary and examples to show HOW to apply the instruction presented and WHY it matters in a professional setting.



# PART 1: PR Writing and Planning Basics

Topics covered in this part include:

## **Chapter 1: Cornerstones of Communication**

- Good Writing
- Reading, Resourcefulness and Curiosity
- AP Style

## **Chapter 2: Setting Strategy: Finding the “Why”**

- The Discovery Process
- Understand Your Brand
- Identify Audiences
- How the Pros Do It: Selling a New Nevada to Millennials
- Target Specific Objectives
- How the Pros Do It: Overcoming Apathy to Register New Organ Donors
- PR Pro Advice: Marty McDonald, Fahlgren Mortine

## **Chapter 3: Strategic Messaging**

- Know Your Message
- Create Compelling Information
- How the Pros Do It: Selling #LifeinCbus to Millennials
- Stay True to Your Brand
- Choose Channels With a Purpose
- How the Pros Do It: Columbus Marathon Joins Instagram
- PR Pro Advice: Heather Whaling, Founder & CEO, Geben Communication





# Chapter 1: Cornerstones of Communication

A former teaching colleague who previously worked as an editor for the Associated Press used to challenge students to name one job where being a better communicator wouldn't be a benefit. He would let the room stew, throw out some examples (waste management, firefighter, pharmacist) and then let the room stew some more. The reality sunk in as the students thought about this. Communication is about interaction with other people. If you want to get a job, keep a job, be promoted or even have personal and professional relationships, communication is foundational. It could take the form of networking, public speaking, writing, persuasion, graphic design, group facilitation – and the list goes on. For professional communicators creating strategic messages on behalf of a brand, the ability to write well and maintain consistency in terms of written and visual style are cornerstones.

We'll look at several ways to proactively strengthen these cornerstones:

- Write
- Read
- Be resourceful and curious
- Stick to a style (Associated Press style is the most widely used among public relations professionals)



# Good Writing

“

**Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential for the many.**  
*National Commission on Writing in America's Schools & Colleges*

Many jobs and industries rely on good writing. Even within the public relations or communication industry, writing responsibilities can vary. You may be writing a news release, a newsletter article or a memo. Maybe you're scripting video shoots, writing speeches, drafting social or advertising content or writing scripts or instructions for the upcoming event you're planning. Strong writing for email also helps you show your professionalism, intelligence and attention to detail.

On the flip side, when you can't write clearly, concisely and quickly, it can cost you – money, time, clients, morale or even a lawsuit. Joseph Kimble, author of *Writing for Dollars, Writing to Please*, shares 25 case studies of organizations that saved time and money by improving the readability of their content. General Electric rewrote software manuals and customer calls asking questions plummeted. The U.S. Navy made memos quicker and easier to read, saving officers' time to the tune of \$27 to \$37 million per year. Read a [Ragan.com](#) article on “[How much money is bad writing costing your business?](#)” for details.

Employers understand the cost of unclear, clunky or otherwise poor writing. And the need for clear writing threads throughout many jobs in communication, whether or not the primary job responsibility appears to be writing. Heather Whaling is the founder and CEO of Geben Communication, which specializes in traditional and digital public relations. She says, “writing is still the most important skill” in today's digital world. Allie Lehman is the co-founder of The Wonder Jam, which has a strong focus on branding, graphics and photography. Lehman agrees, “it's really important for students to be comfortable with writing.”

As famous basketball coach John Wooden said: “When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur.” Writing improves with practice. The more you do something and work at it, the better you get. This is true whether you consider yourself a strong writer at the start, or someone who struggles with writing.

# 10 STEPS TO BECOMING A BETTER WRITER

1. *Write.*
2. *Write* MORE.
3. *Write* EVEN MORE.
4. *Write* EVEN MORE THAN THAT.
5. *Write* WHEN YOU DON'T WANT TO.
6. *Write* WHEN YOU DO.
7. *Write* WHEN YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.
8. *Write* WHEN YOU DON'T.
9. *Write* EVERY DAY.
10. **KEEP** *Writing.*

by Brian Clark  
copyblogger

In her book *Everybody Writes*, Ann Handley makes the argument that “good writing can be learned—the way trigonometry or algebra or balancing a balance sheet is a skill most of us can master.”

The boxes below highlight some of the most common writing errors and a few ways to intentionally improve your writing.

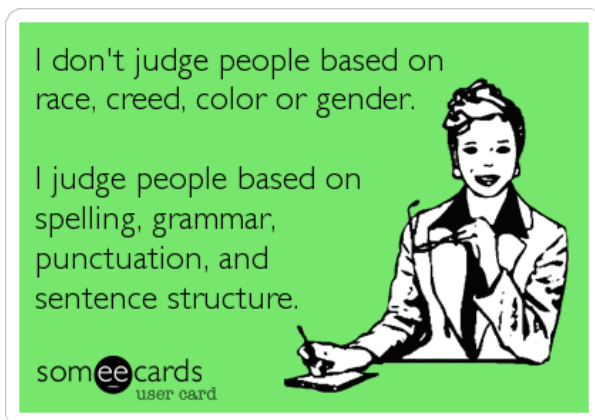
### Writing Pet Peeves

- Spelling errors
- Supposibly (it's SUPPOSEDLY)

- Affect/effect confusion
- Random capitalization
- Starting sentences with numerals
- Poor sentence structure (run-ons, fragments)
- Incorrect comma use
- Semicolon ignorance

### Quick Tips

- Use simple words, short sentences
- Keep it simple by adding visuals
- Challenge ‘to be’ verbs & use active voice
- Challenge prepositional phrases
- Avoid clichés, overused phrases & jargon
- Trim any other wordiness



Also make editing a formal step in your writing process to force yourself to analyze your own writing. Allow time for re-reading and corrections even when you're on a tight timeline. Before you send even a brief email to a colleague, pause and read through it one final time to correct minor spelling or punctuation errors. I'm not sure I'll ever fully recover from the realization that I (as a writing instructor at the collegiate level) sent a flier home to the families of 600 elementary students inviting them to "Gator Name Night" instead of "Gator Game Night" because I printed before proofreading. When my kindergarten-age son pulled it out of his backpack and pointed out my error, I tried to swallow my horrified shriek to praise his excellent reading skills.

# Reading, Resourcefulness and Curiosity

I have a confession. I cannot diagram a sentence. If put on the spot and asked to define a comma splice, I don't think I could do it. I have two journalism degrees and many years of experience in writing, yet much of my ability to write well boils down to being a shameless reader from early childhood. When I see words on a page, I know when they're right and when they're wrong, even if I can't give a perfect grammatical explanation for why they're wrong.

Reading can teach grammar, but it also gives you insight on different types of writing, different voices and different styles. Read newspapers, blogs, books in many genres, websites, Twitter posts, magazines. Read some things you know you'll like and some things that will stretch you.



Be curious. If you see something new or unfamiliar or interesting, dig a little deeper. Years ago, I was first introduced to QR codes when I kept seeing references on Twitter and finally looked up what they were and how they were being used. Several years later they were appearing on restaurant table tents, college fliers and even resumes as an affordable public relations and marketing tool.

In addition to reading and exploring things that pique your curiosity, there are many resources to help novice

writers grow and to help expert writers continue to advance. Take advantage of colleagues, mentors, bosses and educators who are willing to review your work and give constructive criticism. I had the highest respect for a student who told me she pursued a writing-focused internship because she knew writing was a weakness for her and wanted to intentionally focus on improving. It's much easier to seek out positions where you feel like you will shine and make a good impression, but the margin of growth is so much smaller. That student forced herself to spend the summer writing and receiving critiques and edits, and she returned in the fall with drastically improved writing skills.

There are also amazing resources out there as references when you have questions, need edits or just want to explore ways to step up your writing game. They can help whether you're Pulitzer-worthy or not able to recognize a run-on. A few to check out include:

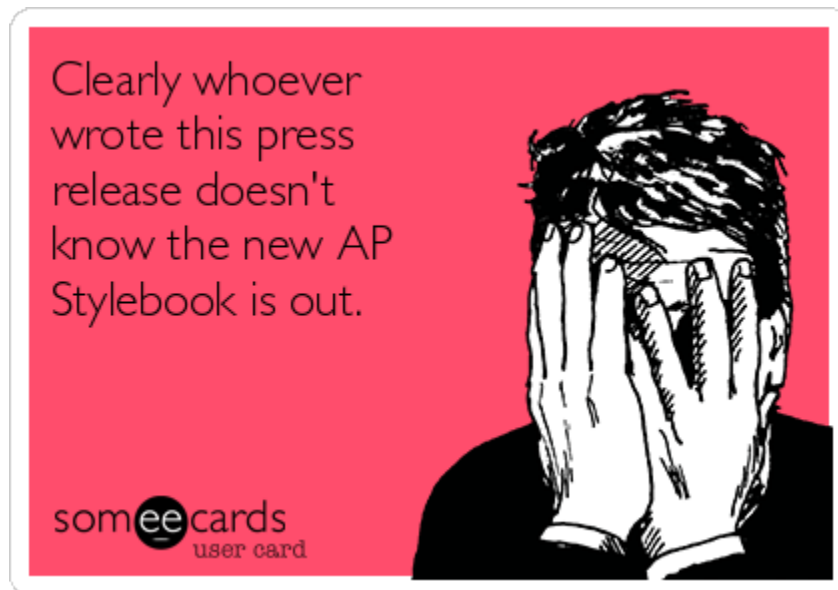
- [Grammar Girl](#). Mignon Fogarty, also known as Grammar Girl, explores many common grammar questions with a fun, easy-to-understand style. Check out her website or social media platforms, or listen in on her podcasts.
- [Everybody Writes: Your Go-To Guide to Creating Ridiculously Good Content](#). Marketing veteran Ann Handley writes a great book that goes from writing basics to best practices.
- Apps, websites and browser plugins. Do a little digging to see what's out there. Things like [Grammarly](#), which can help check your spelling and grammar, or [Hemingway Editor](#), which focuses on making writing more concise and readable.

# Associated Press Style

The majority of journalists and public relations practitioners use AP Style, based on the [Associated Press Stylebook](#). As the foundation for journalistic writing, this style focuses on achieving the best possible accuracy and consistency to make content easily read and understood by readers. This translates to the public relations arena because:

- Adhering to a consistent style improves readability and brand recognition.
- Using AP style gives you a common language with journalists, who often become the mouthpiece for your messages.

Many public relations agencies and corporations interviewing potential employees will require an AP style writing or copyediting test to ensure new hires come in able to write in this style from day one.



## ***Know the Basics***

It's worth your time to learn the basics of AP style that will surface again and again in your writing.

- Dates
- Numerals



- Dollars & percents
- Times
- Addresses
- Titles
- Names
- Composition titles
- Abbreviations
- Social media use

There are a few guiding AP style rules to memorize, but keep a hard copy or online version of the book handy for reference when other questions emerge. Like the English language, there are exceptions to many of the rules, but a few of the often-used AP style standards include:

**Every word has one and only one spelling.**

- Check the stylebook first – then a dictionary. AP style occasionally has “preferred” spellings. (e.g., adviser rather than advisor)

**Avoid unnecessary capitalization.**

- Far fewer words should be capitalized than you think.
- Always look it up before you capitalize anything other than proper names.

**Avoid excessive abbreviation.**

- Including an abbreviation in parentheses immediately after a name usually is not necessary.
- In most cases, capitals and periods are not necessary for an abbreviation.
- Some abbreviations are appropriate on all references: FBI for Federal Bureau of Investigation.

**Punctuate according to generally accepted rules.**

- Major exception: Items in a series. AP style says not to use the “Oxford comma” (e.g., The flag is red, white and blue).
- The book is a great reference tool. When in doubt, LOOK IT UP.

**In general, spell out zero through nine.**

- Many exceptions and contingencies to this rule.
- Look up “numerals” entry in the stylebook.
- Pay attention and memorize.

An updated version of the stylebook is published annually. Some years, the changes are minimal and other years

they are more significant. Many times organizations will use AP style as their overarching style but customize specifics such as how to abbreviate the organization's name or whether to capitalize the names of its boards or committees.

## PR Pro Advice: Hinda Mitchell, CEO, Inspire PR Group

### Advice for Students



There is no more important skill for candidates at our firm than the ability to write well. Well means succinctly, clearly and correctly, and that is a talent we expect all candidates, regardless of experience, to bring to our team. Every potential Inspire associate takes a five-part writing test that evaluates writing, spelling, editing, strategic thinking and content development. That is our objective measure of every applicant's ability to succeed in our organization.



# Chapter 2: Setting Strategy: Finding the “Why”

My CEO pokes his head into my office to tell me he thinks we need a company brochure and would like to set up a meeting for later in the week to discuss. When we sit down to talk details, what should be my next question as a public relations manager?

1. What information did you want included in the brochure?
2. When did you need this brochure?
3. Why do you think we need a company brochure?

These all seem reasonable questions, but it’s the role of the professional communicator to consider strategy before execution, so you have to start with the “why?” A big part of the job is asking questions and doing the research to ensure there is strategy – a reason *why* – behind a course of action. After sitting down with my CEO, I learned that he recently attended a conference and noticed that other executives had materials that easily fit inside a suit jacket and gave them a place to take brief notes or quickly give out basic company information. We discussed his needs and ultimately decided to create a notepad slim enough to fit in a pocket that had the company logo and some basic contact info and lines for note-taking. It was less expensive and time-consuming to create, and better met the need.

For larger initiatives, a more in-depth discover process is needed to find the “why” and explore other information relevant to development of a strong strategy.



# The Discovery Process

Marty McDonald, executive vice president at [Fahlgren Mortine](#), a full-service integrated marketing agency headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, says a discovery phase is where they start with their clients to get back to that question of “why.” They look at the past and current state of the company or initiative and consider what’s working and what isn’t. “We’re given permission to be curious and get back to the questions that matter. It sets the foundation for everything we do from that point forward,” McDonald says. And this applies to not just working with new clients, but new campaigns or phases of work with existing clients.

In the video below, McDonald explores what this discovery process looks like at the Fahlgren Mortine.

## [Marty McDonald YouTube Interview](#)

Fahlgren Mortine’s Marty McDonald talks about the discovery process.

This discovery phase is a crucial step in developing sound strategy. It can be difficult when a client or others within a company start with a course of action already in mind or come in anxious for creation of tangible products. McDonald says Fahlgren sets the expectation up front for why their team is asking so many questions and explains to clients that the point will come where they shift from asking questions and gathering input to implementing

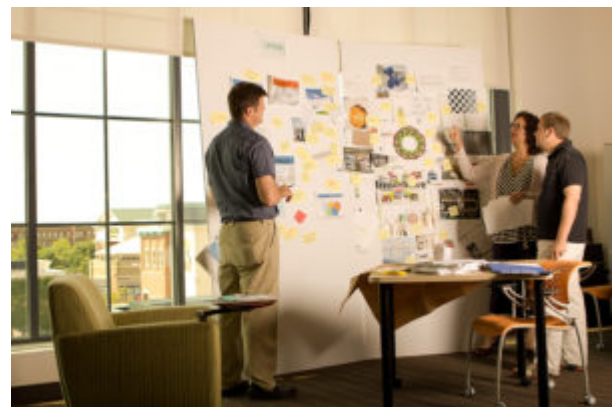
action steps. Discovery can move at different speeds and dig to different depths depending on available time and money and the needs of the project.

“That’s really the crux of what we do as communicators. We figure out what’s going on and where we’re going. Filter out what matters and what’s important. Start making new recommendations,” says McDonald.



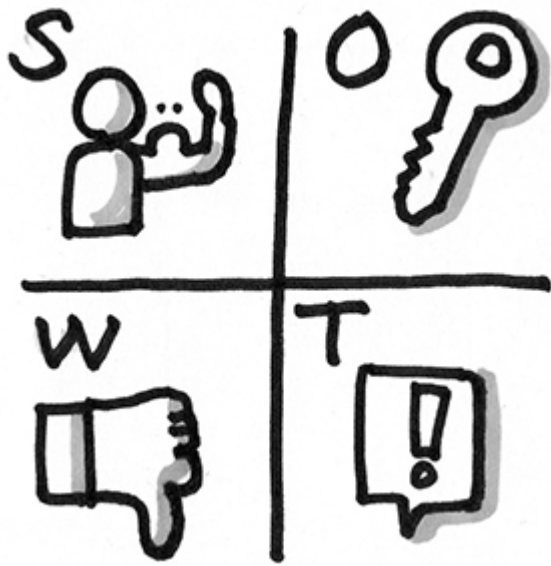
The discovery phase doesn’t follow a patented five-step program. McDonald says the nuts and bolts of discovery are custom every time if done well. What does remain constant? Knowing what you want to learn and then preparing well, developing a good questionnaire and conducting any other needed research to establish a strong foundation of information.

Discovery can be the starting point for a specific campaign or project, or an organization may just hit a “tell it to me straight” moment, especially when facing a transition such as new leadership, a major rebrand, a merger or another significant milestone. In these situations, discovery provides a comprehensive communication audit by a third party, which can give a helpful and objective analysis of how a company is communicating with employees, stakeholders, media, consumers and other potential publics. It can include an analysis of a company’s website, social media channels, graphics, media coverage, branding and print/electronic communications. It can include information from interviews with employees, customers and other stakeholders, or relevant information about the company relative to competitors or the current market environment. It identifies perceptions, missing links, inconsistencies and areas of opportunity. It also can help prevent the dangerous inertia that keeps a brand plodding along in the same (and often ineffective) way even as circumstances and the environment around it change.



The Fahlgren Mortine team pulls together information such as words and images that describe a client, data on target audiences and information on competitors as part of the discovery process.





An objective look at the organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a SWOT Analysis) provides a good framework for organizing this information about the current state of an organization and its situation. The SWOT creates a bridge between information gathering and analysis and planning.

Nearly every semester I ask my classroom of college students to name some of their favorite brands. Apple, Under Armour, Nike and Disney usually make the list, but another that surfaces without fail is Old Spice. This brand, which traditionally focused on an older target market, changed directions in 2010 with the release of a [funny video series](#) that made deodorant look young and youthful. This switch earned it a spot on the 2016 Forbes list of “[5 Examples of Rebranding Done Right](#).” It took an objective look at its brand, its competitors and the overall market and recognized an opportunity to shift its brand image and reach a new target audience. The discovery process helps organizations recognize these opportunities, especially in three important areas:

- branding
- audiences
- business and communication objectives

# Understand Your Brand

All communications, internal and external, should rest on a clear and unified understanding of an organization's brand. So what is a brand? Doug Frazier, chief strategy officer of Columbus-based public relations agency [FrazierHeiby](#), gave a definition of "brand" in a presentation to students that I liked and adopted. He said it was the emotional response customers have when they hear your name or see your logo.

Consider iconic and established brands like Coke and Apple. Emotions and images come to mind immediately at the mention of those brands. Smaller and younger organizations, like teenagers struggling to "find themselves," must proactively explore who and what they want to be and make calculated decisions to help define their brands. A firm understanding of a brand translates into greater consistency with messaging, images and actions that build trust and understanding with consumers.

# Identify Audiences

With so many ways to share messages – from the language used to the channel where it appears – knowing the intended audience and what these people want, need and care about is an important area for discovery. Audiences can be external or internal, positive or negative, consumers or influencers or media with the ability to sway consumers. The discovery process identifies past, current and potential audiences. It then digs deeper into those audiences identified as a target for the organization or specific initiative.

## **Really Know Target Audiences**

Public relations focuses on building relationships between organizations and different groups of people, and it's difficult to forge or grow a relationship without investing the time to get to know those people. This may include exploring information from basic demographics to lifestyles and a deeper understanding of a target audience's wants, interests and needs. With a firm understanding of both your brand and your target audiences, you can seek out points of overlap or ways your organization can integrate into an audience's lifestyle or appeal to specific wants/interests/need. As the discovery process moves into the planning process, this information will support development of messaging, visuals and platforms tailored to the specific audience.

## How the Pros Do It: Selling a New Nevada to Millennials



Fahlgren Mortine worked with Travel Nevada on an advertising campaign specifically targeting millennials. They faced the challenge that many people think they already know Nevada – cue mental images of Las Vegas. Travel Nevada wanted to reach younger consumers with different concepts of Nevada. Fahlgren developed a platform and began testing it, showing millennials mockups of a video ad. The Fahlgren team noticed that the audience reacted to the “Don’t Fence Me In” background song and saw an opportunity to tap in to the millennial tendency toward independence and individuality. They reworked the campaign and brought that to the forefront. View a [Fahlgren Mortine case study](#) to learn more about the campaign’s success.

# Target Specific Objectives

My family likes to play games. Whether it's a board game or a card game, whenever someone introduces a new game it always works best to state the object of the game. "You want to get rid of all of your cards." "You want to complete the most routes and stockpile the most points." With that object in mind, it's a lot easier to learn other details of the game and maybe even win. The same goes for strategic message development. With strong objectives – knowing the "point" and what needs to be achieved – the messaging can tie back to tangible results that support business objectives. In addition to analyzing branding and identifying audiences, the discovery process should clarify the short- and long-term objectives of a specific campaign or effort as well as larger company objectives. These could be business objectives such as increasing sales, establishing brand awareness, improving productivity or driving business during slow times of the year. Or they could be relationship-based objectives like creating repeat customers, improving employee retention, changing perceptions or encouraging trials of a product or service.

# How the Pros Do It: Overcoming Apathy to Register New Organ Donors



In 2016, Fahlgren Mortine worked with Donate Life Ohio and the Ohio Department of Health on an award-winning campaign with three specific objectives: increase consumer engagement, drive traffic to a website and add 65,000 new organ donors to the Ohio Donor Registry in six months. With these objectives in mind, the Fahlgren team embarked on discovery. A survey conducted several years earlier by Donate Life Ohio and the University of Cincinnati identified the top three myths people associate with organ donation. A successful myth-busting campaign addressed these issues but registration numbers had leveled again and the groups needed a new effort to challenge the returning apathy. Fahlgren faced the choice of mining existing data for new insights or spending campaign budget on new research. The team looked into the existing survey data, paying specific attention to respondents who said they would NOT register as a donor. They noticed that nearly a third of those people didn't have a specific reason for saying no. The data also showed that 86 percent of respondents said real life stories of organ recipients were an important factor when choosing whether to be a donor. Read this [Fahlgren Mortine case study](#) to see how clear objectives and a strong discovery phase resulted in a campaign that achieved its goals, won recognition from the Public Relations Society of America and ultimately saved lives.

# PR Pro Advice: Marty McDonald, Executive Vice President, Fahlgren Mortine

## Advice for Students

“

Stay curious. Have your eyes up. I like to use an analogy from race car driving. Today in communication and marketing we're going so fast. And if you're going that fast and you're looking right at the road in front of you, you're going to crash. But if you have your eyes up and farther down the road, you'll make better decisions and more thoughtful decisions about where you need to go. Pay attention to what's going on in the world around you: What brands do you think are doing well? What are headlines in news and what do you think about them? Show curiosity and a point of view. And look for variety in internships and coursework. Bring an integrated perspective and think differently.

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# Chapter 3: Strategic Messaging

We live in a world of message overload. Phones buzz constantly with new emails, social media posts and app notifications. Ads bombard us in movie theaters, online, on the radio, in stores and walking down the street. With so many messages coming at us all the time, it takes serious strategy and creativity to cut through the clutter. You need to plug into what your audience realistically wants, cares about or needs, while staying true to your brand and keeping your goals the priority.

Heather Whaling is the founder and president of [Geben Communication](#), a public relations agency based in Columbus and Chicago that supports clients primarily in traditional and digital public relations. Geben works with clients ranging from a large pharmacy chain to a small brewery. Whaling says strategic and intentional messaging becomes a powerful tool in supporting a company's larger business and brand objectives. Anytime Geben gets involved with a client she asks, "Looking back in six or nine months, what will make you say that hiring our firm was a good investment of resources?" This allows the agency to develop benchmarks and develop the messaging that will help us get the client to those goals.

In the video below, Whaling gives insight into the importance of strategic messaging and what the development of messages looks like at Geben Communication.

## Heather Whaling YouTube Interview

Heather Whaling, Founder & CEO of Geben Communication, talks about messaging.

# Know Your Message

Over the years, I have written about downtown housing construction, prison inmates training therapy dogs, technology that stores and protects electronic medical records, video games and presidential elections. I am an expert in none of those areas and spent hours researching and interviewing to have the knowledge to craft messaging that was accurate and compelling for the intended audience.

A writer who can read or hear complicated concepts or jargon-filled content and translate it into content that the average reader can easily digest is a diamond among professional communicators. Even when you're writing about information that isn't especially technical or difficult, it still takes time and effort to know a topic and message thoroughly enough to write accurate and readable content. Public relations planning and writing requires a constant learning curve.

When Geben creates messaging for both traditional and digital platforms, the starting point is always a clear understanding of the message that needs to be shared. "If you don't know what you want to say, it doesn't matter how you're trying to say it," says Whaling. "Messaging has to be foundational to everything that you're doing. Understanding what that message is and then storytelling, how you want to disseminate that message, is the core of what we do."

# Create Compelling Information

The storytelling part of the equation ties back to the audience. What narrative will generate attention, change attitudes or spur action from your target audience? You can't answer these questions without really knowing your audience. If I want the three kids in my house to finish chores, I know how to make the request compelling, but it completely depends on the kid. The threat of lost videogame time gets the 9-year-old boy moving. A stern plea moves the soft-hearted 6-year-old. The promise of getting out the Play-doh princess set has the 4-year-old girl tossing toys in the bin. The core information (DO YOUR CHORES) remains the same, but you craft the messaging to appeal to specific audiences.

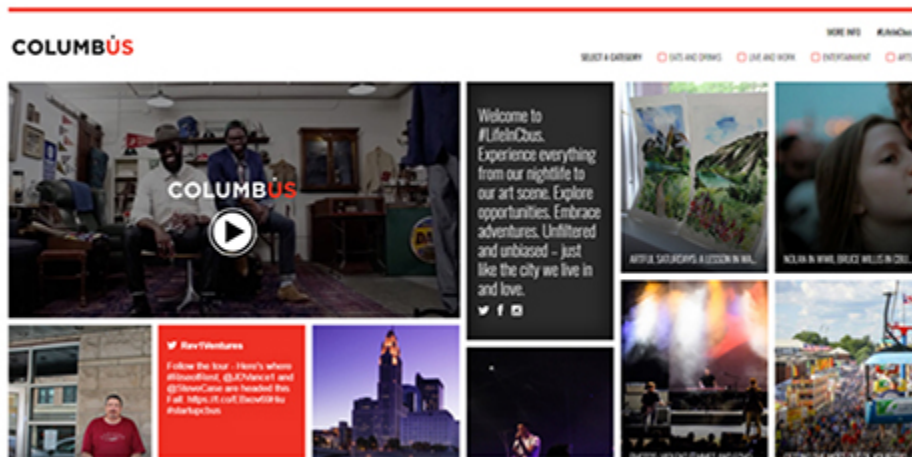
Whaling says a current challenge for public relations professionals is shifting the mindset away from broadcasting messages and toward tailoring messaging to more of a one-to-one feel. "How can you take something that's working big picture and make each customer feel like it was created specifically for them?" The discovery process identifies audiences, but understanding who they really are, how they talk, what they do and like and think – that is a separate step in the planning process.

# How the Pros Do It: Selling #LifeinCbus to Millennials

The mission: reach out to young professionals in specific cities with high relocation potential to let them know what Columbus, Ohio, has to offer and plant seeds about the city as a great place to live and work. Experience Columbus, a destination marketing organization focused on promoting the city to visitors, teamed up with Fahlgren Mortine to tackle this challenge. They selected a target audience:

- millennials aged 25-30 with influence in their social circles who were entrepreneurial, creative and willing to relocate in the next three to five years

Research on the audience showed that they relied heavily on the advice of friends and word of mouth, so a campaign was built to encourage people to share their authentic experiences about #LifeinCbus. Traditional advertising launched the #LifeinCbus hashtag, and the website [lifeincbus.com](http://lifeincbus.com) aggregated organic content from Instagram and Twitter as well as local media outlets. The campaign took a risk putting the messaging in the hands of millennials living and working in Columbus. But it paid off when Columbus millennials began sharing authentic messages highlighting what they loved about living and working in Central Ohio. The campaign could then amplify those messages with paid advertising. Understanding that long commute times and high cost of living were pain points for young transitionals in the target areas of Chicago and Washington, D.C., the campaign developed a [video](#) and highlighting messages like “Where Cost of Living is More Living Than Cost” and “Where Standing Out Never Means Standing Alone.” The #LifeinCbus campaign found messages that resonated by understanding its target audience – where those people want to get information, what sources they trust and what matters to them. *Read an Experience Columbus [blog post](#) about this campaign.*



The #LifeInCbus website aggregates content posted to the hashtag on social media.

# Stay True to Your Brand

Messaging that feels consistent and “on-brand” goes a long way in helping an organization build strong relationships with its audiences. Geben looks back to information from discovery: how a client wants to be positioned, what they want to say, what words they want to be associated with or not associated with. A newsletter article, a social media post and a news release from an organization may focus on different topics for separate audiences, but they should all remain true to the brand.

Whaling says her team helps clients achieve consistency by encouraging them to think of their brand like a person. What other brands would it hang out with? What organizations would it be involved with? Where would it shop? What kind of car would it have? The answers to these questions help build a strong brand perspective and voice for written messages and imagery. “There’s messaging in terms of words and phrases and sentences we want to be saying, but there’s also the visual component of the brand we want to be conveying,” Whaling says.

# Choose Channels With a Purpose

Messages vary based on the platform or combination of platforms where they will appear. Whaling recommends first understanding the audience and goal for each communication channel: who you are trying to target and what you are trying to convey.

## **Who are you trying to target?**

This requires a solid understanding of who the audience is. Knowing where they get their information and understanding how they interact with different media vehicles guides messaging decisions. A younger, urban crowd might notice eye-catching wallscapes walking downtown and interact with brands and influencers on Instagram while an audience of working moms might spend more time on Facebook or reading blogs.

## **What are you trying to convey or accomplish?**

Is it customer service, brand building, sales generation? Based on the goal, you can determine how to portray the content or share the imaging. You can make tweaks for each platform like adding a hashtag or removing words so the content feels like it was originally created for that channel.



## How the Pros Do It: Columbus Marathon Joins Instagram



Geben Communication partnered with the Columbus Marathon to launch its Instagram presence.

Nearly 700 photos were tagged and shared on Instagram around the 2012 Columbus marathon and the marathon didn't have its own Instagram account. Geben Communication partnered with the marathon to incorporate Instagram into the 2013 social strategy to show fans and followers race preparation behind the scenes and encourage those training for the race. Using an Instagram Ambassador program, the marathon partnered with online influencers who were running the race and used Instagram to share their training. The ambassadors provided photos highlighting a different theme each week: Where do you run? What are you wearing? How are you feeling? Racers and their supporters were already using Instagram, so the creation of a [@cbusmarathon](#) account provided a point of connection. Using influencers added more than 1,000 followers and more than 1,000 photos during the 2013 race season. Read the [case study](#) on the Geben Communication website.

# PR Pro Advice: Heather Whaling, Founder & CEO, Geben Communication

## Advice for Students



“ Writing is still the most important skill. It’s amazing to me when we look at resumes and cover letters. No matter what facet of PR you want to get into, at the core you’re a communicator so you have to be able to communicate effectively, especially in the written form. It can be even harder to write for social because you have to be succinct and clever and creative in 140 characters, which can be really tricky. But having the ability to write for diverse channels is really, really important. It’s something that people think isn’t as important, and it’s more important than ever.

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# PART 2: Writing for Owned Media

Topics covered in this part include:

## Chapter 4: Blogging

- The Big Picture: Topic & Voice
- Quality Content Ingredients
- How the Pros Do It: Breakfast with Nick Unpacks 11 Ways to Cook an Egg
- Embrace the Online Presence
- PR Pro Advice: Nick Dekker, Blogger, Breakfast with Nick
- PR Pro Advice: Lauren Powers, Blogger, An Explorer's Heart



# Chapter 4: Blogging

I worked a retail job the summer between high school and the start of college. The manager joked that she couldn't believe she hired me to sell jewelry because I came to the interview wearing not one piece of jewelry. I didn't love that job, but I didn't take it because my career goals included a future in the retail business. I took the job to make money and gain job experience for my resume that showed I could work well with people, be timely and responsible, meet and exceed goals and handle challenging customer service situations. Whether or not you plan a career in blogging, it can be a great "summer job" for a career in public relations or communication. It's an ideal training ground for skills that you will use in many communication jobs and skills that will make you more marketable to employers. These skills include:

- Writing that is grammatically correct and readable
- Writing for the web (pretty crucial when much of the content written for companies ultimately ends up on the web)
- Developing a strong point of view
- Positioning yourself or an organization as a subject matter expert
- Understanding the basics of search engine optimization
- Using a content management system
- Building and managing an online community

There is also a good chance that you *will* work with blogs in some capacity throughout your career. In *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, David Meerman Scott outlines the four uses of blogs for marketing and PR:

1. Monitor what lots of people are saying about you, your organization, your products, your industry
2. Participate in conversations by commenting on other blogs
3. Work with bloggers who write about your company, industry or products
4. Shape the conversations by creating and writing your own blog

The job responsibilities for many public relations practitioners include one or more items from the above list. For

additional insights, check out [The Benefits of Blogging](#) post authored by Lara Kretler, vice president at Columbus agency FrazierHeiby, and read the blogging success story from student Rachel Gaylord below.



“

In January 2017 I wrote a blog post after Kate Finley, founder and CEO of [Belle Communications](#), presented at an [Ohio State PRSSA](#) meeting. I tweeted the link to the post, tagged Kate and Belle and in minutes was offered an internship with her company. Blogging is a simple yet effective way to get your name out there! – Rachel Gaylord

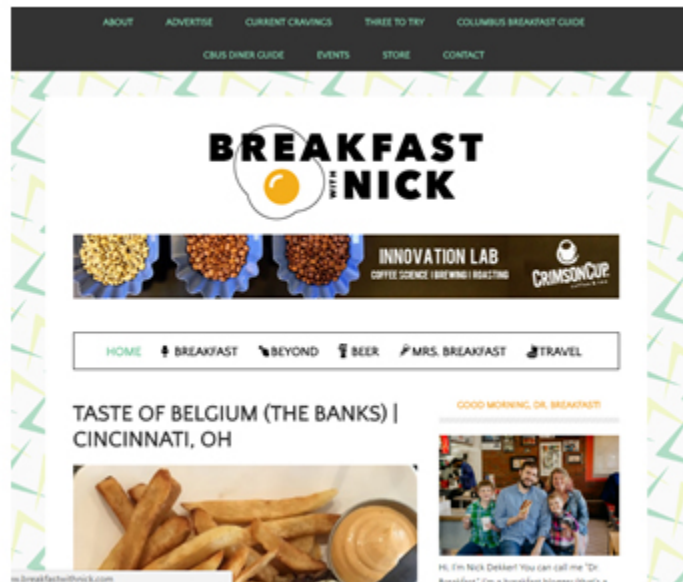


“

Guest blogs have allowed me to showcase my writing publicly and gain portfolio pieces without having to keep up with the hassles of a personal blog.  
-Emma Grubaugh



# The Big Picture: Topic & Voice



Several years after creating his blog Breakfast with Nick, Columbus blogger Nick Dekker now breaks 100,000 pageviews per month.

Columbus blogger Nick Dekker started his blog Breakfast with Nick in 2007 as a hobby. He grew up loving breakfast and started the blog as a way to remember the places he'd been and his experiences. Dekker now breaks 100,000 pageviews a month on his blog, has more than 11,000 followers on his related Instagram account and receives requests for sponsored content. He also published a [guidebook to breakfast](#) in Columbus in 2011.

An individual or a brand looking to launch a new blog should ask a few questions to hone in on a sustainable topic and voice:

- What do I know?
- What's my personality?
- What am I passionate about?
- Who is my intended audience?
- How much time do I have to devote to this?

- What skills do I have (i.e., writing, editing, photography, technology)?

Just like other platforms, blogs should define an intended audience (or two or three, but that’s about the max). For Dekker, this audience is anyone living in Columbus or traveling to Columbus. “I always think of people in the city and helping them discover a new favorite spot, get to know new places that have opened or rediscover an old favorite,” says Dekker, noting the trend of using food to get to know places. With that audience in mind and knowing that 75 percent of his readers live in Columbus, Dekker uses his blog to help readers discover local food and things to do. This means he also provides images, addresses, websites, dietary restrictions and other logistical information since his readers often rely on the blog to find new places to eat.

In the video below, Dekker talks about the importance of finding a niche and establishing a trusted voice in that space.

### Nick Dekker YouTube Interview

Breakfast with Nick blogger Nick Dekker talks about blogging.

Dekker says he follows advice he received early on from a fellow food blogger: the best thing you can do for your readers is to be honest and consistent. “If I gush about every place I go, it won’t seem honest. Having a trusted voice has helped me build a readership,” says Dekker. The voice in his blog – laid back, honest and passionate about food – built a niche that set Dekker apart from other resources offering formal culinary instruction or restaurant critiques.

Lauren Powers runs Columbus style and travel blog [An Explorer’s Heart](#). She notes that a defined target audience is also helpful if the goal is to monetize the blog because brands appreciate knowing who you’re targeting with the content. Polaris Fashion Place, AMC Theatres and Modcloth are among the brands that sponsor Powers’ posts because they’re interested in the target audience she reaches.



Local blogger Lauren Powers rebranded her blog into An Explorer's Heart to focus more on her key topics of style and travel.

# Quality Content Ingredients

A captivating voice baits the hook, but a blog won't land a strong and returning readership if the content and mechanics behind the voice are subpar.

***What are some examples of strong versus subpar content?***

*Timely and Current Connections*

*Originality*

*Organization and Relevance*

*Links*

*Visual Appeal*

*Proper Mechanics*

*Formatting Fit for a Scan*

## ***Timely and Current Connections***

Blogging requires planning, because new posts should appear regularly. An established blogger, Dekker posts two to three times a week. He uses Google calendar to keep content planned two to three weeks in advance, and he schedules sponsored posts and paid work often a month or two in advance. Creating a content calendar helps ensure a steady flow of content and also encourages strategic and timely topic choices.

Beyond adding fresh content on a regular basis, the posts themselves should be timely. This might mean tying in to a current event or trending topic: in Dekker's case, visiting a newly opened restaurant or offering "[12 Ideas for Spring Brunch Season](#)." With a more timeless or evergreen topic, content can link to current other resources or websites.

### ***Originality***

Whatever the blog topic – food, fashion, sports, cars, vintage Barbie dolls – be original in the thoughts shared and the voice and writing style used to share them. Dekker speaks in his own voice about his experiences, keeping content casual and in the first person. He seeks out new and interesting restaurants and experiences and talks about them with his own personal spin.

Unique and fun visuals also add interest. Photos, other graphics and multimedia elements can bring the content to life and capture the attention of readers scanning the page. In a post about Kittie’s Café in Bexley, Dekker highlights key options at the WiFi and laptop-free café, including the s’moretado drink, one of the standout menu items to not only hear about but see.



Dekker highlights Kittie’s Cafe in his blog, featuring unique offerings like the s’moretado.

### ***Organization and Relevance***

Good posts have a strong and relevant takeaway for readers. Maybe it’s helpful cooking tips or purely to entertain, but writers should know what they intend for the reader to gain from reading each post.

Keep an eye on word count and structure the content. It’s not a meandering diary entry. A typical guideline is 300-500 words, but it depends on the style of the writer and the blog. Creating a rough outline before writing can help writers organize key messages and place links and images.

### ***Links***

A blog post that starts a conversation and links to other great content mean readers never need to hit a dead-end. Links give readers a choose-your-own-adventure experience that lets them explore examples, dig deeper into the post’s main points or check out other perspectives. Use links to connect your blog content to other expertise, unique perspectives, resources or examples.

Links also force readers to choose between continuing on or clicking, so limit links to key outside sources and clearly show readers where links will take them. Avoid “click here” and use the text in the link to indicate where the link leads.

### ***Visual Appeal***

Images tell great stories and most blog posts fall flat without some type of photos, graphics or video. Dekker recommends using original artwork as much as possible, “especially considering the fact that we all carry small cameras with us.”

An Explorer’s Heart author Powers is also a photographer and includes multiple photos with each post to use both images and words to share information. In a 2016 post [How to Plan a Trip to Aspen, Colorado this Fall](#), she includes 24 photos that illustrate different aspects of her content from scenery to fall leaves to local hot spots.



Powers illustrates the fall foliage and weather in Aspen.

when she unknowingly posted a copyrighted photo, and her suggestions for avoiding this pitfall.

Assume all existing images are copyrighted unless you prove otherwise. Ask permission (via email to create a paper trail) and then link back to the original image and include photo credit within the post. Read about author and blogger Roni Loren's [expensive and lawyer-filled experience](#)



This image features a local Aspen hotspot.

### ***Proper Mechanics***

Blogs position their writers as subject-matter experts. And it's hard to build trust as an expert with spelling and grammatical mistakes, inconsistencies or other weak writing. Dekker says he uses the lessons he learned from journalism, skills like careful proofreading and fact checking.

Other fundamental to keep in mind:

- Using active verbs

- Crafting strong headlines
- Proofreading carefully for both grammar and spelling
- Relying on a stylebook for consistency
- Learning about and using keywords to help readers find your post
- Editing. Editing Again. And Again.

Powers agrees that a good blog posts needs not only great photos but solid writing.

“It should be informative and the best out there,” Powers says. “The competition is tough, so a post with 100 words and a few mediocre photos won’t get you very far.”



Lauren Powers pictures the scenic mountains and brisk weather of Aspen in the fall.

### ***Formatting Fit for a Scan***

The majority of people don’t read online information word-for-word. They scan, and this means the length and format of online content should look different. These tips will help make your online content scanner-friendly:

- Cut online content to about half the word count (or less) than a similar piece of content intended for print
- Use shorter sentences and more, shorter paragraphs to allow scanners to digest smaller pieces of information
- Chunk the text by limiting content to one idea per paragraph when possible and separating paragraphs with a space to create visual breaks in the text
- Add subheads and make them meaningful so scanners get a good overview of available topics and can jump around in the text
- Look for information in the narrative that lends itself to a list format or series of bullet points
- Highlight keywords or subheads by making them bold or a different typeface (but use these sparingly so they still stand out)
- Avoid distracting backgrounds and difficult to read font colors and types

# How the Pros Do It: Breakfast with Nick Unpacks 11 Ways to Cook an Egg

Nick Dekker's most popular blog post ever explained to readers 11 ways to cook an egg (hard boiled, soft boiled, hard scrambled, sunny side up...) and what they really mean. Dekker kept getting questions from readers about eggs and worked on the post off and on for a year while other posts came and went. He makes his main point quickly and clearly with his first sentence: "How many times have you been asked that at a restaurant and not known exactly how to answer it?" The post then walks through ways to cook an egg with images, links to local restaurants, serving suggestions and conversational quips. The post remains a top search engine result for questions about ways to cook eggs.



# Embrace the Online Presence

Blogging falls within the world of social media, which means it works best as a two-way street. Successful blogs thrive as part of a community and this requires conversations with readers and relationships with other bloggers. Thanking readers for comments, answering questions and commenting on other blogs, especially those on similar topics or in the same geographic area.

Cross-marketing a blog with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or other social media profiles drives readership. Dekker's [@breakfastwithnick](#) Instagram account highlights food images for his more than 12,000 followers and Powers posts fashion and travel photos for the 17,000+ followers on her [@anexplorersheart](#) Instagram, which drives additional readers to their blogs. Powers also considers other strategic ways to share her content, giving the example that a post about a small town in Ohio might benefit from a tweet that tags the visitor's bureau and gets them to share the post.

Powers also recommends thinking strategically about the keywords used in a posts (the words and phrases that will make your post pop up when potential readers are searching online). She suggests looking at where those potential keywords rank on Google and whether there is strong competition for this topic.

“You need to find the sweet spot – a topic that is popular enough that people will want to read what you wrote, but also a topic that isn't too popular, so you can get on the first page or two of Google,” she explains. Powers notes that Google is looking for the best content out there, so you need to position yourself as an “expert” on the topic you're sharing.

For more details on keyword research and how to use keywords to optimize blog content for better search engine results, take a look at this VEIO design blog post: [How to do Keyword Research for your Next Blog Post](#).

## PR Pro Advice: Nick Dekker, Blogger, Breakfast with Nick

### Advice for Students

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Just start writing. You don't even have to write long blog posts to start out. Write some short things about a topic that interests you. A picture and a short paragraph. I took time to build content and that built readership and that helped me refine my style. Set a goal of two short posts a week about something that interests you and it helps you get to know your topic.

# PR Pro Advice: Lauren Powers, Blogger, An Explorer's Heart

## Advice for Students

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The most important thing you can do is start. However, at some point you will want to come up with a plan, if you'd like to monetize your blog. I think there's a big misconception out there that you just start a blog and the money rolls in. There are several ways to make money blogging, but it's important to position yourself so that brands know [who you are, who your followers are and how the brand might benefit from a relationship with you] when they contact you. For example, would you like to be an influencer? If so, you should focus on growing your social following. Would you like to be hired to write? If so, focus on your writing and use your blog as a portfolio/home base for your work. Would you like to write a book? Focus on writing long-form content, etc.

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# PART 3: Writing for Social Media

Topics covered in this part include:

## **Chapter 5: Different Sides of Social**

## **Chapter 6: Setting an Up-Front Social Strategy**

- How the Pros Do It: Miracle-Gro Strategy Changes the Social Conversation
- PR Pro Advice: Steve Michalovich, Nationwide Insurance

## **Chapter 8: Social Content Creation**

- Content Marketing
- How the Pros Do It: Retailer Jumps on Holiday Hashtags to Increase Engagement
- Content Calendars

## **Chapter 9: Social Community Management**

## **Chapter 10: Social Analytics & Reporting**

- Monitoring and Analysis for Beginners
- PR Pro Advice: Nathan Okuley, Digital Strategist



# Chapter 5: Different Sides of Social

Working on social media for a company or brand starts with an understanding that loving Instagram, having 2,000 Facebook friends or scoring a free burrito by tweeting at the local taco place does not make you a professional. Even knowledge of the major social platforms, what they can do and what content should look like on each one is now just one part of the highly evolved – and constantly evolving – world of social media marketing and communication. There are also situations where the solution simply doesn't lie with social media. A plumbing company looking to increase new customers may not need a new Twitter strategy, or even a Twitter account, when it can get a stronger return on investment by optimizing its search engine results to pop up near the top of the page when local residents look up plumbing-related questions.

But for many companies, social media plays a major role in their communication and relationships with key audiences. Steve Michalovich, digital planning consultant with Nationwide's Enterprise Digital Experience team, has worked in digital strategy and execution for nonprofit and startup companies, agencies and Fortune 100 companies. He emphasizes that from a brand perspective, the strategy for one social media platform or even digital as whole should tie back up into an organization's larger goals. Social should not live in a silo;

rather, it should support a larger marketing, communication, brand or digital strategy. Young brands need brand awareness while icons like Coke or

**“Social should not live in a silo”**

McDonalds need to move consumers to the next step, whether that is getting them to go into a store, visit a website or follow another communication channel.

“Good content is key. Obviously you want to publish something that is captivating and useful to the end user. But take a step back and think about why we're on social,” says Michalovich. Ask what conversation you want to spark with your following on social media. Ask how you will speak to followers and what exactly you're going to be saying. Understand what's going on “top of the house” for the brand and the conversation it's trying to instill, Michalovich explains. “It all comes down to the user base you're trying to attract – what do they expect and what do they need from the brand and what are they doing on social.”

Deirdre K. Breakenridge, author of *Social Media and Public Relations*, developed the [Social Media Strategy Wheel](#) that illustrates how strategy touches every step in the process of developing strong social media strategy and content. The core is audit and discovery, which keeps both the social media strategy and content firmly rooted in the brand's identity. Moving outward, the next ring identifies goals and objectives, applies research findings and incorporates the budget limitations. Spokes then grow from this hub and show how strategy impacts not only the

content itself, but the way it is distributed, the engagement with communities and the monitoring and measuring aspect.



copyright 2010 Mango Marketing

Social Media Strategy Wheel

Michalovich agrees that social media is much more than just good content. It's a larger and intentional process that includes:

1. up front strategy
2. content creation
3. community management



#### 4. analytics and reporting

The following chapters will expand on these four steps and show how the process of strong social media strategy development moves from the center to the outer rings of the Social Media Strategy Wheel above.



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# Chapter 6: Setting an Up Front Social Strategy

The center of the Social Media Strategy Wheel is audit/discovery – an analysis of a brand, including its social channels and what it shows on that very public face. Hootsuite offers a [social media audit template and guide](#) with suggestions on what to evaluate and how to organize the results. A realistic understanding of where the brand is and where it wants to be allows you to set goals and objectives specifically for social channels that support or align with a larger framework. It paves the way for development of an up front social strategy.

Let's say a major shoe retailer sets a goal to increase sales by 10 percent over the previous year. With this in mind, the retailer could consider social media as a tool to gain customer insights and provide market research on new potential audiences. Or it could focus on strategically growing its social following as a way to bump up sales since 57 percent of people who follow a brand on social are more likely to buy from them according to [Sprout Social](#). Yet another strategy might be to use social to support its brand as a retailer that provides strong customer service by extending that customer service into the social media space.

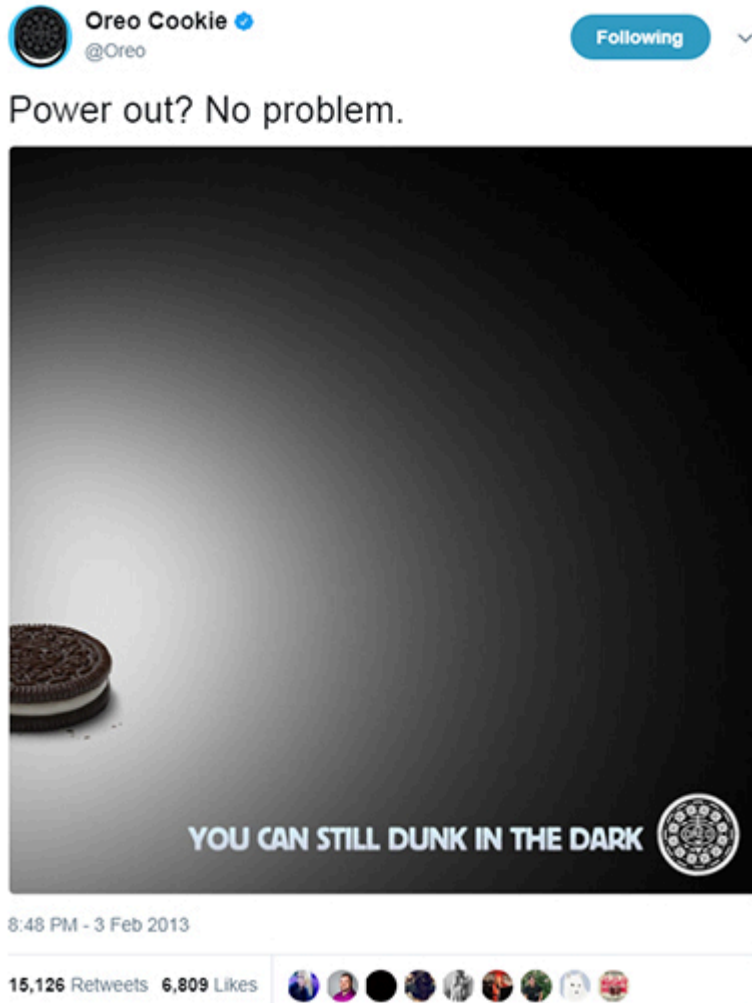
Up front strategies tie back to a company's objectives, but the ever-changing digital space also requires an ongoing social listening process that allows brand to flex strategies based on what others are doing and saying. Michalovich says one key is to not just keep an eye on what competitors are doing, but what everyone is doing.

"It's a really crowded space now so there's not really room for error. You're competing with everyone, not just competitors in your industry." And this competition requires strong strategic planning, rather than what Michalovich calls "random acts of social."

He advises having a buttoned-up strategy and understanding how you're going to communicate with people and the connections you're trying to make with social. "Have a really good analysis of what's going on in the industry and what others are doing to succeed." What are competitors doing? What are successful brands doing? What are new trends and tools?

**"Strong strategic planning rather than random acts of social. -Steve Michalovich"**

Oreo sent the tweet below during the 2013 Super Bowl when the power went out in the stadium.



Oreo’s marketing and agency team was sitting together in a social media “mission control” center in Manhattan to monitor social chatter during the event. This allowed for the quick creation of the visuals and witty real-time tweet, which generated 10,000 retweets within an hour according to [AdAge.com](http://AdAge.com). It also spurred a flurry of conversations in the communication and marketing world about the strategy of real-time marketing. The unexpected black-out gave Oreo a magical opportunity, but it worked because the brand set an up front strategy to monitor social conversation in person during the Super Bowl with decision-makers, creatives, strategists and others in a shared space to allow for quick and relevant responses.

In the video below, Michalovich talks about the importance of intentional strategy in professional use of social media.

### Steve Michalovich YouTube Interview

Nationwide's Steve Michalovich talks about the importance of intentional strategy in professional use of social media.

The following example shows how Scott's Miracle-Gro Company used a strong up front strategy on social media to appeal to a new audience and re-position its brand.





# How the Pros Do It: Miracle-Gro Strategy Changes the Social Conversation

Looking toward its busy spring season, Scotts Miracle-Gro Company decided to make a strategic shift from its existing communication platform and activate a social conversation to drive a new brand position that appealed to new gardeners. Miracle-Gro's platform had always been "we grow tomatoes twice as big," but people who don't garden don't care about that explains Michalovich, who worked on the campaign. There were many people talking about gardening on social, so Miracle-Gro set a strategy to use social as a catalyst to tap into those conversations and spur conversation – activating people to tell their own stories. The larger brand objective was to inspire new gardeners and shift the company's brand image. Inspiring user generated content on social platforms became a strong way to achieve these goals. Miracle-Gro began mining existing conversations about gardening and being outdoors. They introduced a hashtag and asked people to share their stories. This shifted the brand position from helping gardeners grow larger tomatoes to encouraging gardening as a way to make people feel happier and be healthier. "We created an ecosystem of storytelling, and social was a big catalyst for this," says Michalovich.

## PR Pro Advice: Steve Michalovich, Digital Planning, Nationwide Insurance

### Advice for Students

“

There are three key skills that communication students need coming out of school. 1) Collaboration. You're going to be working across a number of different groups and a number of different key stakeholders within company or if you're with an agency, across different companies and brands. 2) Adaptability. You need to be able to change on the fly. Especially in communication and marketing where things are changing daily. In social there are new digital platforms out there that you need to embrace and be able to use, and being up on trends is really key. 3) Empathy. You need to truly understand the end user and their goals and then craft communication strategies to best connect with them.

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# Chapter 7: Social Content Creation

After establishing an up front strategy, the process moves into the content creation stage. Breakenridge's [Social Media Strategy Wheel](#) illustrates how good digital content sits on a strong foundation of strategy, which requires not only a clear understanding of a brand and its objectives but also research. Research could include what you know about your audiences, your brand's larger industry, current news in your community and the world, and the different digital platforms where messages will be shared. This research allows you to share information and start conversations that inform, interest or entertain your audiences.

Nathan Okuley, digital brand strategist and social media marketing consultant, has worked with a variety of companies from large brands, to agencies to small businesses. He says he develops social content buckets with a brand's strategic goals in mind. For example, buckets might become:

1. brand story
2. product
3. behind the scenes
4. people of the brand

“As a consumer, when you think about the type of content you like to absorb, you can apply that same knowledge to your audience and decide what content will be most relevant,” Okuley explains. He emphasizes that creating social content for a brand requires a firm understanding of the audience and what they are seeking from the brand. For example, content meant to serve an existing customer should look different from content aimed at marketing to potential new customers. Content may even shift by campaign or by season.

In the video below, Okuley talks about creating content for a brand and the ways it looks very different than running a personal social media account.

### Nathan Okuley YouTube Interview

Digital brand strategic Nathan Okuley shares his experience creating social media content for a variety of brands.

Consumers crave authentic dialogues, which means brands must find a balance in the types of content they push out on social media channels. One way brands are doing this is through an increased focus on content strategy. The next section of the chapter provides an overview of the growing practice of content marketing as a way to reach consumers through valuable content and compelling stories.

# Content Marketing

Content marketing focuses on providing content that is useful to target audiences and telling strong stories to draw in consumers rather than simply pitching products and services. The [Content Marketing Institute](#) explains it as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”

This [Content Marketing Institute](#) infographic shows the evolution of content marketing and highlights companies that have leveraged strong content into connections with consumers.

## History of content marketing 2016

Social media channels can be a strong platform for content marketing. They provide a mouthpiece to share the “valuable, relevant and consistent” content to specific audiences. Michalovich gives an analogy from his time at agency Wondersauce that social can be a place to build equity, and it’s like feeding a piggy bank. “You’re periodically feeding consumers good content – something that might make them laugh or just good info. But eventually that piggy bank becomes full and then you’re going to cash in by asking them to do something like visiting your website or watching a video on YouTube. If you’ve built that trust with the user, they will take action.”



The content “buckets” a brand creates for its social media channels should align with the brand’s objectives, but

they should also consider what intended audiences want and value. This is the content that will feed the piggy bank.



# How the Pros Do It: Retailer Jumps on Holiday Hashtags to Increase Engagement

Okuley worked with a major retail brand that used Twitter as a top platform for reaching consumers. His client noticed that it did well reaching the intended audience but that repeat engagements were low – consumers interacted with the brand only once — and it was looking to increase this engagement. Trending holiday hashtags like National Donut Day and National Bestie Day were on the rise. This was content users liked and wanted, so media and other reputable content publishers began using the holidays as a form of content to reach audiences. Okuley says he and the group he worked with spent time dedicating content to these trending hashtags. “Suddenly brands are showing up on Mashable, BuzzFeed and Fast Company – sites that brands (especially large brands) love the attention of for having smart content.” If a brand could be one of the five or six that handled a specific holiday the best, it received the boost of recognition from media in addition to generating followers and engagement on social channels. The brand executed the up front strategy as well as strong content creation to increase repeat engagements.

# Content Calendars

One tool for blending different types of social media content and focusing on content strategy is a content calendar. A content or editorial calendar provides a broad view of intentional content over time. The calendar might include content for a single channel like Twitter, or content for multiple channels to ensure that an overall digital strategy is in play. It could detail content for a short-term goal or event, or for long-term content creation and tracking.

You can use something as simple as an Excel document or Google sheet to organize upcoming content by day or week. Hubspot also offers a [free template](#) and the Curata blog provides a [list of other content calendar tools](#).

## ***Benefits of a Content Calendar***

- You can apply strategic timing and guard against “dead spots” in activity level.
- You can optimize the type of content and consider how you’re representing the different content “buckets.”
- You can create consistency in voice and content, especially when multiple people post to one brand account.
- It allows for oversight such as an intern drafting content for a calendar that is edited and approved by a supervisor or an agency drafting content for review by a client.
- You can more clearly measure what works and what doesn’t and see what aspect of the strategy or content is resonating or falling flat.

Sprout Social offers [4 Steps for Creating a Social Media Calendar](#) with more logistical details on content calendars.

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# Chapter 8: Social Community Management

Beyond having an up front strategy and pushing out good content, successful brands also invest time and resources into managing their online communities. [Sprout Social](#) explains community management as “being able to navigate the online sphere of promoting your brand while engaging with your customers.” It requires a balance between authentic engagement and advocating for your brand.

## **Authentic Engagement**

Okuley emphasizes the importance of using social media to maximize the overall brand experience. “Brands need to create an online and offline experience for the consumer that:

- 1) gives them something worth talking about, and
- 2) makes them feel a part of your brand and feel like they’re valued as a consumer of your brand.”

The goal is consistency across all experiences.

## **JetBlue Embraces Customer Service On- and Off-line**

Several years ago I asked students to work in groups to prepare a brief presentation about a brand’s social media actions that illustrated a “best practice” or “worst practice” and justify what the brand did well or failed to do. One group presented about JetBlue. Honestly, I don’t remember now what the best practice was. What I do remember is that as the class was live-tweeting the presentations, JetBlue noticed and responded to students while we were still in the midst of the presentation. After learning that the tweets were coming from a class, it asked who the instructor was and sent a tweet to thank me for the positive conversation and tell me I was on JetBlue’s holiday card list. Sure enough, months later I received a tweet from JetBlue wishing me a happy holiday. The brand’s emphasis on customer service and responsiveness sailed through and earned it a gold star for community management.

## **Creating a Tribe**

Okuley says tools like location tags and keyword and hashtag searches can help identify people who might be interested in your product or experience and aren’t there yet. One of his clients is a coffee shop that watched the social media channels of other coffee shops just to see who’s sharing content or even posting while they’re in those spaces. This allows the company to identify potential tribe-members – whether it’s the coffee tribe, the Columbus tribe or the supporting local business tribe. It also can highlight potential influencers who could become part of a more strategic effort to build a community.

Monitoring is an important part of community management, but it is also a formal part of the process of managing social media channels. The following chapter explores the role of analytics and reporting in writing for social media.

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# Chapter 9: Social Analytics & Reporting

This step in social media messaging completes the four-step process and leads right back into creating or revising up front, content or community management strategies. Analytics also carry weight beyond suggesting social strategy improvements or reporting on the return on investment of social efforts. Social media channels have the ability to impact many areas of an organization: customer service, human resources, public relations, advertising, branding and more. For this reason, brands should be critically watching and listening in the social media space regardless of how active they want to be in contributing content. **The rise of online social networks means that public relations needs to be focused, more than ever, on listening to help facilitate conversations between organizations and their publics.**

Listening, monitoring and analyzing range from casual searches for people, conversations and industry resources such as [Mashable](#) and [TechCrunch](#) to extensive and expensive analytics using robust paid software.

The Ohio State School of Communication uses software to gather ongoing analytics on its Twitter account. For example, this word cloud gave a moment-in-time snapshot of the most engaging content and helped show what conversations gained traction – information we could leverage in future strategies.



# Monitoring and Analysis for Beginners

Analytics is an industry unto itself and can require significant investments of time, training and money. But there are some free and basic ways to look and listen that will help you make strategic content decisions for personal and brand social channels.

- Monitor yourself or your brand. Sign up for [Klout](#) as one measure of social influence. If you give this tool access to your social accounts, it assigns an influence score out of 100 and gives you a list of a list of the topics where you show expertise. It provides other services as well, but it can serve as one free and easy metric to see where you and other accounts of interest stand. It also offers a Chrome extension that adds Klout scores in Twitter so you get a quick gauge of each account's level of influence. (See the orange bubbles below)



A Chrome extension shows Klout scores in Twitter to give you an idea of an account's influence at a glance.

- Begin using the free version of a social monitoring tool like [Tweetdeck](#), [Buffer](#) and [Hootsuite](#). Explore options to set up search terms, create streams to organize information like news sources or competitors. Take a closer look at your followers and how they engage with you or your brand. Consider existing and potential influencers. Look at content posted by competitors, others in the same market or just brands or people that you think do a great job.
- Familiarize yourself with the metrics terminology: vanity measures, impressions, engagements. This Social Media Examiner article shares the [10 Metrics to Track for Social Media Success](#) and a Hootsuite article explores “[Do Vanity Metrics Matter on Social Media?](#)” Be sure to stay on top of industry changes, because the ever-changing algorithms and rules of social media platforms impact metrics. For example, Twitter’s movement away from putting posts in chronological order toward a timeline that gave more weight to certain tweets and users changed the game of posting to Twitter at the “optimal” time of day.
- Jump on any opportunity to do social work for a brand or company and bring analysis and strategy to the table, not just good content.
- Take classes, tutorials or seek out other ways to gain experience with measurement tools. [YouTube](#), [Lynda.com](#) and [Google](#) are just a few of the training grounds available.
- [Google Alerts](#): ask Google for a notification when you or your company or other search terms are mentioned online.
- Keep an eye on industry resources like [Sproutsocial.com](#), [Socialmediaexaminer.com](#) and [Mashable.com](#) to stay current on what’s changing or new in the world of social.

## PR Pro Advice: Nathan Okuley, Digital Strategist

### Advice for Students

“

The biggest opportunity for students is to own the digital landscape. I think there's a lot of stonping grounds that haven't been touched by traditional marketers or communicators and this generation of students specifically have grown up in this landscape and have used social media since being a child – they grew up with touch screens and all kinds of innovation and growth. They can step into existing environments and apply their perspective on digital. Don't be afraid to work for free.

Go out and ask brands if you can provide consultation or provide a few hours working on their social streams. There are a lot of businesses in your neighborhood that could use your help with just an ounce of the strategy lens. Take risks. It's a playground. You could start in social and end up in a variety of places but you've got to dive in. Also remember that your social media profiles from a personal perspective often have just as much weight as a resume might have.

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# PART 4: Writing for Video and Visuals

Topics covered in this part include:

## **Chapter 11: Video Messaging**

- Role of Video Messaging in PR
- Areas of Caution
- Lessons from Video That Apply to Other Formats
- How the Pros Do It: Gonzaga Experience “Unfolds” Leading Up to March Madness
- PR Pro Advice: Mark Love, Video Director, Ologie

## **Chapter 12: Visual Messaging**

- Practical Details Matter
- How the Pros Do It: Changes to Visual Packaging Drive Sales
- Photography Tips
- Telling Stories with Infographics
- PR Pro Advice: Allie Lehman, Founder, The Wonder Jam





# Chapter 10: Video Messaging

A few statistics for the cynics who question whether video should be included in the strategic message creation discussion:

- According to [Entrepreneur](#), 80 percent of online content will be video by 2019.
- Four times as many customers would rather watch a video about a product than read about it. And one in four consumers lost interest in a company if it didn't have video says [Animoto](#).
- A [Hubspot study](#) shows that on mobile alone in an average week, YouTube reaches more 18+ year-olds during prime time TV hours than any cable TV network.
- [YouTube](#) has over a billion users, almost one-third of all people on the Internet.

Check out [this infographic](#) if you're still not convinced:

# THE 2015 VIDEO MARKETING CHEAT SHEET

## VIDEO IS EVERYWHERE.

In the next three years, it is predicted to reach 79% of all internet traffic. Businesses are capitalizing on video, and are expected to spend nearly \$13 billion on video marketing by 2018.

### WHY YOU NEED IT

4 times as many consumers **WOULD RATHER WATCH A VIDEO** about a product than read about it



One in four consumers **LOSE INTEREST IN A COMPANY** if it doesn't have video



Nearly three quarters of consumers **BELIEVE A VIDEO** describing a service **IS IMPORTANT**

4 in 5 consumers believe that **DEMO VIDEOS ARE HELPFUL**



Nearly two thirds of consumers say companies that use video **KNOW HOW TO REACH THEIR CUSTOMERS**

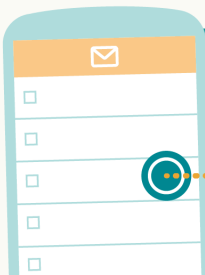


59%



A majority of consumers find it helpful to watch a product video **MORE THAN ONCE** before making a purchase

### WHERE TO PLACE IT



#### EMAIL

Consumers are nearly 50% more likely to **READ EMAIL NEWSLETTERS** that include links to video



#### SOCIAL MEDIA

More than half of consumers





# Role of Video Messaging in PR

Mark Love serves as video director at Ologie, a marketing and branding firm that specializes in higher education and K-12 clients. Though Ologie helps share messaging in many different formats, Love says video is a component of almost everything they do because of its ability to engage people quickly.

**Video is super important to everything that happens in communication nowadays. It's about communicating singular ideas quickly to people.  
– Mark Love**

In the video below, Love talks about the role video plays in the stories Ologie helps its clients tell.

[Mark Love YouTube Interview](#)

Ologie's Mark Love talking about video messaging.

Love says Ologie focuses heavily on this idea of storytelling in its work for clients, whether the format is video or something else. But he's quick to add that "every day that a project comes into the door, we want video to be a part of it. If you're not considering video and digital in your strategy as far as your marketing efforts go, you're going to be out of date or missing a fairly inexpensive, super high impact way to communicate with people. Because of that, we push it heavily."

That doesn't mean that you need extensive training in video shooting or production, but it does mean video should be one of the tools in the arsenal that you consider when choosing how and where to share a message. Along those lines, Ologie asks clients to focus less on what the ultimate video will look like and more on the problem they're looking to solve. This might be the need to showcase a new part of the school or just show prospective students it's a place "like you." Ologie then looks for solutions that fit the client's budget and personality.

## Areas of Caution

The ability to create videos quickly and easily using cellphones makes it tempting to churn out video content at every turn. But Love cautions against jumping right to video creation without a firm idea or plan. He notes that the percentage of the millions of hours of video on YouTube that is truly “watchable” is probably pretty low, and that it’s important to have a point of view because you’re trying to tell a story. “Ninety percent of your time should be spent thinking about what you’re going to make and 10 percent should be spent making it.”

Planning ahead also helps you capture the video you need to tell your story. Love points out that because you’re capturing real live things happening, you can’t go back and get more if you’re trying to capture that moment in time or that interview. He advises thinking ahead so that when you’re in the moment and that “thing” happens, you can make a decision based on the story you’re trying to tell.

## Lessons from Video That Apply to Other Formats

Attention spans are short and growing shorter. Love knows from experience that people aren't going to dive deep unless you catch them with something that's interesting enough for them to want to dive deep. Be unique, be entertaining and get to the point quickly. "You have to get into the person's brain quickly with something that is interesting and engaging and when they walk away they have to remember who you were that said it," Love says.

Extra Gum published a long-form video on YouTube for an advertising campaign featuring "The Story of Sarah & Juan." The video shows the romance of a boy and girl over the years and how gum wrappers played a role in their love story. Extra found a story that resonated – [AdAge](#) reported the video received 74 million views in a week and praise from a [Huffington Post article](#) that "Everyone loves a good love story – even a quick one."



# How the Pros Do It: Gonzaga Experience “Unfolds” Leading Up to March Madness

In 2015, Gonzaga University approached Ologie about producing a video ad to run during March Madness, where the team was expected to do well. On a tight schedule, the Ologie team held a brainstorming session and came up with the concept of “unfolding.” It became a platform around the idea that This is Where it all Unfolds and told the story of Gonzaga as a place where students’ futures could unfold in many different ways and a place whose story keeps unfolding. The resulting video spot starts at the end of different student experiences and runs backward. It ran on TV during network coverage of the men’s and women’s West Coast Conference and NCAA basketball tournaments. The video spot as well as digital ads, print ads and a social media plan drove viewers to [unfold.gonzaga.edu](http://unfold.gonzaga.edu) and the site was viewed more than 125,000 in a two-week period. Gonzaga expected a record-breaking freshman class the following fall. View an [online case study](#) for details of the campaign.

## PR Pro Advice: Mark Love, Video Director, Ologie

### Advice for Students

“

Don't get hung up on the technology or waiting until you have the right stuff to make your thing. If you have an idea, you can make a video today. You have a phone, you have friends, you have a brain. You can make it with the things you've got.

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# Chapter 11: Visual Messaging

Photographs, charts, cartoons, artwork, emojis, infographics and even color and font choices contribute to public relations and strategic messaging in a major way. Visual elements complement or even replace text in much of the messaging sent by brands on many platforms. Like other types of messaging, visuals must be consistent with the brand and focused on intended audiences and objectives to be effective.

Allie and Adam Lehman own [The Wonder Jam](#), an agency that builds brands by supporting design, websites, logos, branding and photography needs.



Allie and Adam Lehman, founders of The Wonder Jam, an agency specializing in branding, design and photography.

With a strong commitment to community, The Wonder Jam also offers classes and education to empower clients in these areas. Even with the agency’s strong focus on design, Allie Lehman is quick to note that “words and copy are so important.” She says the goal is to pair text with visual graphics and branding so that it stays consistent – if someone encounters that brand it seems recognizable and familiar. “Your brand is an idea that sticks in someone’s head. If something that you produce for a client gets put out months down the road, it still has that connection to what consumers saw months ago.”

In the video below, Allie Lehman talks about the most important considerations when creating and selecting visuals to send strategic messages.

### [Allie Lehman YouTube Interview](#)

The Wonder Jam’s Allie Lehman shares her experience and tips on visual design and messaging.

## Practical Details Matter

For graphics, the capabilities and needs of those producing the visuals also play a primary role. Allie Lehman says, “I like to ask the question of who’s going to be managing this work – who’s going to be posting it. Does it need to be duplicated for future months or years?” This dictates the type of visual produced and the programs used to create it. The Wonder Jam worked with a real estate group with multiple realtors who needed to create the same documents regularly. Complex designs originally created in the desktop publishing software Adobe Photoshop or InDesign were replicated in the user-friendly and free online site [Canva](#) so the realtors could duplicate them or populate ready-made designs month after month.

“We had talked about their goals, created things in our own programs and then created something that empowered them to own their brand,” says Allie Lehman. This protected the group from disjointed graphics that chipped away at the larger brand image.

# How the Pros Do It: Changes to Visual Packaging Drive Sales

In the video, Allie talks about working with simple syrup company [Root 23](#) and using market research to analyze competitors on the shelf next to Root 23. After considering difference such as how the different brands “talked” to customers and how ingredients were listed, The Wonder Jam chose to focus much of its efforts on the label design to make it really pop when customers saw it on the shelf. The agency recommended that the client invest in metallic ink. Within the first few months of this visual change, the simple syrups were in 10 different grocery stores.

The Wonder Jam also worked with [Primally Pure](#), which produces natural skincare products, on a rebrand. The client wanted its products to be so beautiful customers would want to leave it out on the bathroom sink rather than stash it in a cabinet. When the new brand launched, Primally Pure saw a large spike in sales but the label quality also inspired consumers to take pictures of the product and it created a lot of content for the brand and a strong conversation about the brand on social media channels.



Primally Pure packaging before the rebrand.





Primally Pure packaging after the rebrand.

# Photography Tips

Professional communicators use photography in many forms to share information: publicity photos in an ad, Instagram images and filters, environmental or headshot photos for a news release or website. Photos add interest and people often “read” photos more than words, especially in formats like social media. Media outlets also need visuals, so including photography can increase the likelihood that your news will be published.

The photos below, taken by The Wonder Jam team, come from the same photo shoot for [Otto Skin Goods](#), but each photo has a different strategic purpose and use. The goal of the first photo is to demonstrate how the products are made on a website landing page.



The second photo was intended to show texture and the final products on a large scale because it appears on a large display pillar for in-person trade shows.



Considerations for amateur photographers:

- **Technical quality matters.** Take and share photos at the highest possible resolution to achieve good contrast and sharp details. Know when the needed photographs require professional-grade equipment or a trained photographer.
- **There are different photos for different purposes.** Be clear whether the goal is a head shot photo for a website biography, a grip-and-grin photo of award winners receiving their awards or Instagram-worthy behind-the-scenes candid images. In general, avoid photos of large groups of people and seek to show activity in the photos.
- **Keep composition in mind.** Think about how to frame the picture and give yourself some options. Lehman says to get closer and get more angles. Get a really wide image or a square image. Or take a wider shot and crop it in later. Take photos from unusual angles to generate interest. If the size or shape of something in the photo is important, compose the shot with something in the scene that helps show the scale.
- **Lighting can make or break the photo.** Natural light is a friend to amateur photographers. Lehman recommends seeking out natural light, especially on a phone camera, to make images feel bright, real and authentic. It also eliminates indoor shadows. Keep in mind that outdoor light is very different based on time of day and location. Noon sun is very bright and flat. Photos shot in the early morning or especially late in the day just before sunset can have dramatic shadows and highlighted areas.
- **Rein in the filter selection.** Lehman says consistency is key with photographs for a brand, and this extends to the use of filters. If you choose to apply a filter in Instagram or another program, stick with that filter so the images look familiar over time and don't shift from warmer to cooler.

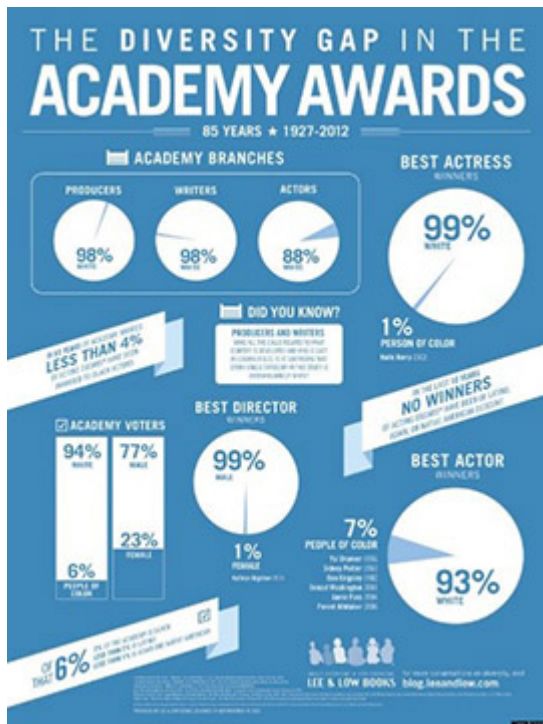
# Telling Stories with Infographics

Infographics use visuals to make information easy to understand. They can present complex information quickly and clearly, or tell a more compelling story by fusing graphics and text. To create a strong infographic:

- Have a planning process to determine the overall purpose and message
- Select strong details and data to support the primary message
- Find a relevant hook for your infographic: is something significant or new?
- Create a branded design with colors and font that connect to brand and/or topic. But make sure style never overwhelms substance.
- Use graphics and visuals that make information easier to understand. An infographic is not just an illustration and needs to tell a story.
- Treat the infographic as visual journalism: no factual or grammatical errors and be sure to include proper citation of all included information

There are many potential infographic angles and messages based on the same pool of information. Both infographics below are about the Oscars, but they send different messages and so select different facts to support that message.

Message #1: [The Diversity Gap in the Academy Awards](#)



## Message #2: Oscars 2016: Social Media Analysis

Even two infographics on the same topic might look very different based on the visuals used. If you follow the process above and need help with the graphic design, this [Buffer article](#) outlines several free online tools like [Canva](#) that provide templates and other support for infographic design.

## PR Pro Advice: Allie Lehman, Founder, The Wonder Jam

### Advice for Students



“ It’s really important for students to be comfortable with writing. We talk a lot about how writing is the basis for a lot of what we do. When we design a website we need text and to have intentional words behind it. Another skillset is having an idea of what looks good. Surround yourself by visuals that are interesting and start asking yourself why they are interesting. Have a reason for what makes it unique and apply that toward your projects or client work. Also, consider the art of asking questions. Being interested in what your peers are doing, what your professors are doing, what your clients are doing. Do not be afraid to ask why.

One of the best pieces of advice I got in college was from a professor. Even if you’re a great designer or writer or communicator if you don’t meet deadlines, you will not get as much work as the person next to you does even if they’re mediocre. The biggest indicator of a great worker, whether you’re more creative or more of a writer, is communicating it all effectively and meeting deadlines.

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# PART 5: Writing for Earned Media

Topics covered in this part include:

## **Chapter 13: Finding and Making News**

- Understand the Media World
- Know News Values

## **Chapter 14: Producing Your Own News**

- Find Newsworthy Story Ideas
- Be a Gatekeeper
- Brand Journalism: Producing Your Own News
- How the Pros Do It: Summer Safety Blog Post Piggybacks on Current News
- PR Pro Advice: Missy Gleason, Managing Editor, OhioHealth Newsroom



# Chapter 12: Finding and Making News

Public relations professionals act on behalf of their organization, so their role is to be an advocate for their brand. This role often includes providing information to the media in the hope that it will be published. It also can mean bypassing media gatekeepers and publishing newsworthy information directly to intended audiences in ways that may attract media attention as a byproduct. Finding and creating newsworthy information requires a firm understanding of:

1. News values – timeliness, prominence, proximity, significance, unusualness, human interest, conflict, newness
2. News angles – what is going to be most interesting to a journalist and his/her audience
3. How to break through a sea of clutter and competing messages

After working as a producer at Channel 10 news for 13 years, Missy Gleason moved from journalism into media relations. She began in media relations for OhioHealth, a large health system based in Central Ohio, and is now the managing editor of the OhioHealth wellness blog and newsroom. Over 100 OhioHealth employees work in communications, broken up into teams for media relations, marketing, internal communication, digital marketing, events/sponsorships and creative services.

Gleason transitioned fairly easily from journalism to public relations because many of the same skills used for telling stories in a newsroom can be applied within a corporation, with a different audience in mind. In the video below, Gleason shares her experience finding and making news in journalism as well as public relations.

### [Missy Gleason YouTube Interview](#)

OhioHealth's Missy Gleason shares her experience with finding and making news.

# Understand the Media World

Students interested in careers in public relations and related fields greatly benefit from media and newsroom experience. Gleason says when you understand what journalists need to show, see and tell, you have an upper hand on everybody else who wants to share the same story. You'll be faster and you'll understand what they need (hint: not just a talking head on camera, lot of visuals and B-roll). Public relations professionals without experience in a newsroom may not appreciate the tight and constant deadlines journalists face or the information and resources needed to create an objective news story. Corporate environments often move at a slower pace where decisions and messages require several layers of approval, and corporate policies and politics can come into play.

"It's a completely different animal working in a newsroom than in a corporate environment. And when you understand the time constraints and the stresses that a journalist is under, you are going to be able to make their job easier, which is going to make them want to work with you more," explains Gleason. It is the role of a media relations or communication professional to provide journalists with access to certain information and resources that make it easier for them to produce a story. This might be background information, examples, sources or photos and video.

## **Lessons I learned writing for daily newspapers and magazines that gave me an edge in the PR world:**

- Deadlines are life and death in the news business. Once you get a request for information, it's vital to find out when it's needed. Ask about it.
- A deadline is final. Don't expect extensions or give excuses. Find a way to get it done on time or submit the best you've got before deadline.
- It stinks when PR people don't respect deadlines or return calls. This made me eternally committed to responding quickly to media inquiries, even if just to tell them I was still working on an answer or source for their story from within my organization.
- Be persistent and resourceful. If one source doesn't return a call, try again or try a different source.
- Get it right. Triple check spellings, question all facts, ask if you're not sure, step away for coffee and come back for a final proofread. Do whatever is in your power to be completely accurate.
- Work fast. The more you work under the pressure of deadline, the better you get at producing accurate and well-written content quickly. Good time management and the ability to do good work quickly has never been more important.



# Know News Values

An internship or other newsroom experience also cements your understanding of the news values media use to choose what stories to publish. In the public relations role, you can look for stories that have strong news value or draw connections that create newsworthy content.

## ***Timeliness:***

- Pitch new information or events
- Relate company information to breaking or current news, anniversaries of important events, or holidays
- Find something new that hasn't been covered before or find new uses for old products

## ***Prominence***

- Embrace a thought leader as a spokesperson
- Tie information to someone with star power

## ***Proximity***

- Seek local connections and angles
- Tailor messages and angles for the readership of different news outlets

## ***Significance/Impact***

- Honestly assess what company news affects a substantial number of people and what those effects are

## ***Unusualness***

- Look for “nuggets” you haven't heard before or things that are out of the ordinary

## ***Human interest***

- Humanize your story – people like to hear about other people

## ***Conflict***

- Different views are fun – controversy fuels discussion and stimulates the mind

The priority of these news values shifts based on the media outlet. Familiarize yourself with any media outlets you plan to pitch as well as the nature of their readers or viewers so that you only reach out with potential news stories that fit their format and audience.

Media interest also can be attracted by:

- Special events
- Contests and giveaways
- Polls, surveys or other data
- Top ten lists
- Publicity stunts
- Rallies and protests
- Awards
- Anniversaries or milestones
- Babies, puppies and chocolate cake (ok, this one may be just the opinion of one former colleague but it certainly does seem to hold true over the years)

But keep in mind that reporters and their editors don't like to feel used or tricked. They might not cover events that seem arranged only to generate news. The key is to be creative and fresh enough that they will define what you are doing as legitimate news according to their definitions.



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# Chapter 13: Producing Your Own News

Many companies practice “brand journalism” or “corporate journalism” by creating and publishing their own newsworthy content. Readers can find the content directly, and it often results in coverage by other media as well because the information has news value. Like many organizations, OhioHealth has many stories to tell and not enough journalists to tell them. There were nearly five public relations specialists for every reporter in 2013, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).

The [OhioHealth newsroom](#) now shares media coverage of OhioHealth as well as self-published content such as a [video package](#) about how Ohio prepares for mass casualty disasters. This video allowed the health system to control messaging, protect patient information and review the final product – things that can be tricky or impossible when working with media.

As editor for OhioHealth’s blog, Gleason creates an editorial calendar and looks ahead to OhioHealth events as well as recognitions like Colon Cancer Month or National Donut Day to consider content that will help readers. (The result: A blog post on the healthiest choices for a Krispie Kreme run)



OhioHealth uses a blog to publish content directly in addition to working with media outlets on other newsworthy story ideas.

News values still apply. The [best performing blog post](#) for OhioHealth was written by a breast cancer surgeon who was diagnosed with breast cancer. She shared what she wished she would have known before she was diagnosed with breast cancer about what

she would face and what would surprise her.



A top performing post for the OhioHealth blog was written by Dr. Deepa Halaharvi, a breast surgeon who faced her own breast cancer diagnosis.

Gleason brought over the following skills from her years as a journalist that help her tell compelling stories on behalf of OhioHealth:

- Digging for a story
- Asking the right questions
- Helping somebody who doesn't do this job on a daily basis understand what your mission is and what you're helping them accomplish.
- Being objective
- Looking at everything from the audience's point of view

## Find Newsworthy Story Ideas

Staying connected and paying attention go a long way toward unearthing newsworthy content within an organization. Attend meetings and company events. Read current and past issues of company newsletters, magazines or other background materials. Review industry blogs to stay up on current trends. Conduct interviews with relevant people or to follow up on interesting leads. OhioHealth got a great response from the public and media for its Secret Lives series, which shows the other sides of physicians, nurses and subject matter experts. One [article](#) highlighted a physician who is also a ping pong champion and [another](#) about a neurologist who is an avid ballroom dancer. Gleason says she and her team also follow the news and watch anything gathering attention. “We ask ‘what’s happening in the world and is there a local or Ohio tie? Do we have an expert on this topic to help better explain the topic?’”

# Be a Gatekeeper

Suggestions for newsworthy content from others within your organization can be a great source of information, but Gleason says that is not a substitute for your own decision and thought process. It's easy to have someone on your staff come to you and say, "I want to see this in the paper" but it's important to recognize that you aren't an order taker. You don't say, "OK, I'm gonna go do that." You sit down and ask the questions:

- Why does our community need to know about this?
- What's special, what's unique?
- What can we educate people on?
- Should we comment on this? Do we really have something helpful to share or does it look opportunistic?

"It's really easy when you're working in PR to really just be a mouthpiece for the people who want their message out there, but being critical and being that person to ask the tough question and really get in your audience's head and ask why do I care?"

Gleason says these questions help her team decide what news to pursue rather than jumping on every trend. The process involves digging down to the crux of what the audience needs to know and wants to know and then presenting it in a way that will engage them and keep them reading or listening to your message.

# How the Pros Do It: Summer Safety Blog Post Piggybacks on Current News

Setting a summer editorial calendar for the blog, OhioHealth has a summer water safety topic scheduled for later in the summer when the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention came out with new information predicting an increase in cases of pool-born illness Crypto. Gleason and her team did a quick turn based on the timely CDC information and posted [Fun In the Sun: Avoiding Recreational Water Germs](#) the following week tied to the CDC news release for stronger news value.

## PR Pro Advice: Missy Gleason, Managing Editor, OhioHealth Newsroom

### Advice for Students



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When I was in college at Ohio State, this job didn't exist. It wasn't even on the radar. Content marketing, brand journalism. My advice to students is to dream big. Your job is going to change and things are going to evolve in your field and just roll with it. I never imagined when I started in media relations that this would be a job I could have. Look for ways to share stories that maybe somebody hasn't thought of yet because it could be your job in the future.



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