# White Paper: ‘Shut Up, Listen and Spin’ Online PR and Social Media Agency Work

Roger Warner of Content and Motion presents a five-step plan for planning, creating and measuring the effectiveness of social media campaigns.

**Question**:
How many online consultants in flip flops does it take to screw up a good marketing plan?

**Answer**:
Normally just one, but we’ve seen whole agencies go ‘tribal’ on a perfectly sound set of ideas on more than one occasion.

You’ll be pleased to learn that we propose a rather less trendy approach (we own sensible shoes and often wear suits to meetings). Taking the pretentious out of PR, this paper is designed to demystify all this hip digital marketing stuff and show you how we normally execute a basic Online PR campaign – in under 10 pages!

It’s quite simple really:  all we do is **shut up, listen and spin**. Here’s our five step guide…

## Step 1: Shut Up

This first step is arguably *the* most important aspect of good Online PR and Social Media strategy. If our clients are good talkers but not so good at listening then we politely request their attention.

Shutting up is really important because, as you’ll see, great Online PR programmes are never just about ‘me, me, me!’ For this reason, we never normally advocate building an ‘Acme Corp’ Facebook widget or a dedicated social networking platform straight out of the blocks. ‘If we build it, they will come’ was never a great maxim for the Interweb. Instead, we recommend some of the following…

## Step 2: Listening & Learning

This is good marketing 101: understanding what your customers. We *always* do a spot of research before we dive in. The goal is to get a feel for the kind of language that our audience is using in relation to our stuff, and to identify when and where they’re actively talking about it.

Here’s how:

### i) Keyword Research

Using Google Suggest we can quickly tune in and learn how people are searching the big, bad Interweb for our specific product/service offerings and the things that are related to them.

Ideally, we’ll find that our content commands a decent level of search traffic. Just *how* much will depend on the market we’re in – obviously one would expect less traffic for B2B terms and more for B2C… But whatever the case, this research will show us whether our current marketing language is in tune with the people that are out there looking for us.

It's easy to understand how keenly contested these 'keyword markets' are in relation to the rest of the web. We just plug them into Google to see how many other pages are out there ranking for the terms. Our aim is to find some keyword 'sweet-spots' around which to optimise our work …In other words, a set of descriptive terms that are well searched for and not particularly well used by our serious competition.

ii) Blog and Twitter Research

Next we apply everything that we've learned to Google Blog Search, Technorati Search and Twitter Search to see if these tools can reveal who's talking about us and where they're at.

Once we've identified relevant blogs and/or forums we can get a very concise feel for how 'influential' they are by running them through analysis tools likeLink Diagnosis and Xinu (in basic terms, if a site is popular and influential, it'll have a lot of links pointing to it – particularly from places like Technorati anddelicious). Having done this we make a note of the good ones and bin the rest.

iii) Research our 'High Net Worth' People

Next we use BackType to get a handle on the blogs that our most influential people are reading and to understand how these people are interacting with each other. BackType is basically a tool that lets us 'find, follow and share comments on the web.' In simple terms, once we've established a set of keywords and people to follow, BackType alerts us to their presence whenever they show up in blog comment strings. It helps us to stay abreast of all the latest influential chat and to ensure that we're monitoring in all the right places.

iv) Stay Alert…

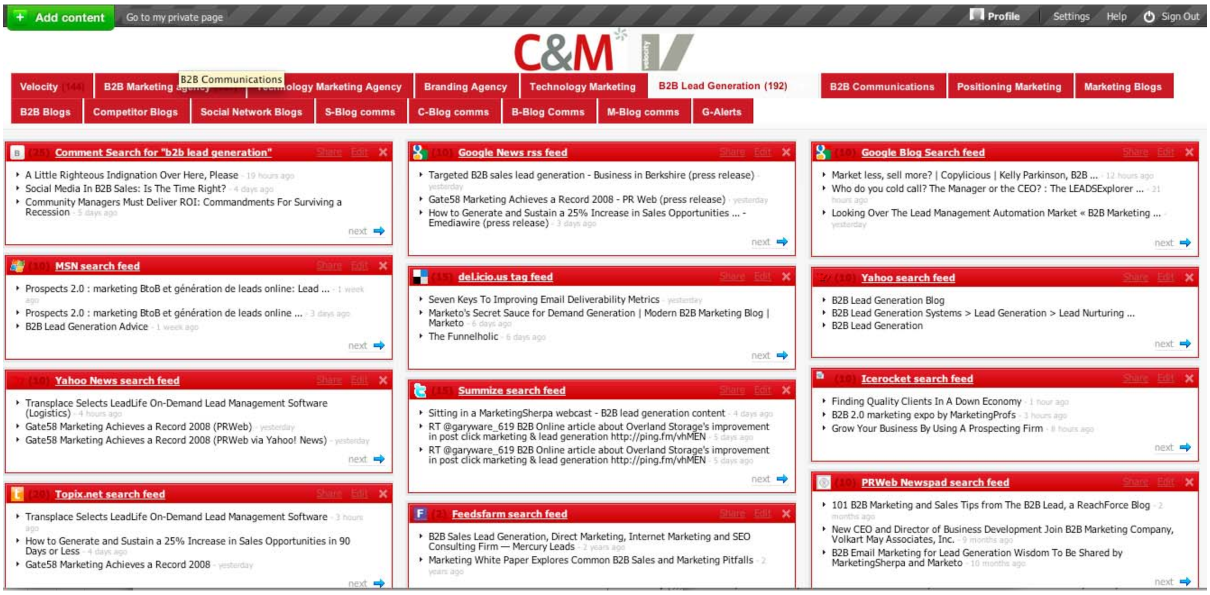
We also create a bunch of Google News, Blog and Video Alerts for all of our most important keywords, so that whenever somebody so much as sneezes on our patch we're the first to know about it.

v) Stay on Top of Things. Create an Online PR / Social Media Dashboard…

At this point, the prospect of so much data is probably making you itch. But don't worry – the Dashboard is where we pull everything together in one place.

All of the 'listening' information described can be accessed via a series of RSS feeds and aggregated into a simple Dashboard like the one below. This Dashboard is a central part of our work – it's our window onto the web. It's also one of the primary mechanisms for seeding our content effectively.

From left to right we have a variety of 'tabs' that provide important feeds on all of our brand-related terms and keywords from Google, MSN, delicious,Flickr, Twitter, and other key services. In addition, we have tabs that relay every new posting from competitor blogs, partner blogs and keyword-related blogs. We also have a variety of tabs dedicated to specific blog comments in relation to our target people, blogs and keywords. And finally, there's a tab for all of our keyword-related Google Alerts.




Our ‘dashboard’ is created using Netvibes, but you could just as easily use any RSS reader. The important thing is that it’s web-friendly so that it can be published as a page for a distributed team’s perusal. The other thing to note is that Campaign Dashboards are highly addictive: they’ve been known to kill mornings, evenings and weekends at single sittings – so use them wisely!

Step 3: Spinning Social Content

‘Social-ness’ is the magic ingredient of all great online PR.

Our primary goal is to find the right homes for our messages and to optimise them (with keywords) to resonate with our audience. Our ‘listening’ research and dashboard help us to write good targeted content and learn where it needs to be seeded.

Our secondary goal is to ‘spin’ it… to encourage people to pass it around on our behalf. In order to achieve this, we do everything we can to make it interesting and worthy of Tweeting about, blogging about, emailing to a friend, bookmarking, commenting upon, or linking to (ie, we make it spin-able’). If we’re successful at this then we achieve a wonderful snowball effect (formerly known in ‘creative’ circles as ‘going viral’).

Basic formatting ideas for Online spin can help. For example: if our clients have great spokespeople, we can make their demos more enticing and accessible by re-cutting them as (lo-fi) Vox Pop videos. Blog posts can be redrawn as useful ‘Cut Out and Keep’ charts, and best practice white papers can be re-edited as simplified ‘Top 10’ lists.

Traditional ideas of spin are also essential. Wherever possible we try to ensure that our content is aligned with the current news or ‘buzz’ agenda within any given market. This is all about identifying the dish du jour via our dashboard (i.e. via Google, Twitter Search and BackType) and then integrating it with our core content.

Here’s a trivial example… It snowed here in the UK at the beginning of February and, as usual, the country was brought to a standstill (nobody’s sure quite why, but it always seems to happen whenever the weather gets extreme). Within an hour or two a popular meme was spreading across the Twitter-sphere. Everyone had something to say about #uksnow, and so a Tweet using the phrase 'uksnow' became a surefire way of driving traffic to your content. Smarter applications of the same idea are fairly easy to come by – all you need is a nose for news, an intelligent way of tying your ideas to it, and a little bit of hustle (i.e. spinning yourself into the right online media pieces, blog posts, comment strings, and Google search traffic).

We also use simple web apps that make it easier for people to pass our content around and/or bookmark it – such as 'email a friend' tools, social bookmarking apps like AddThis. And we always ensure that everything we do is published via RSS feeds. We also create simple content 'widgets' via services such as WidgetBox with which users can plug our content into their own sites and profile pages (eg Facebook) at their leisure.

Finally, we always try to be free with our ideas. We ask all of our clients to give away any useful-but-non-core tools and services that they have. We do this because giving away peripheral value usually creates respect, trust, loyalty and – most importantly – something worthy of being linked to.

Additional Publishing and Distribution Thoughts…

So much for the 'spin.' At a practical level, we need to publish effectively so as to maximise our chances of getting noticed in the first place. To do this we use some fairly basic tactics:

1. We publish our content to the most appropriate channel on our target web site: i.e., the 'resources' channel, the 'tools' section, the press release page, etc (which in turn should be published via our RSS feeds). This puts the content in the public domain for random browsers and returning site visitors.
2. We blog about the new content (which also gets RSSd). This gives us a second opportunity to promote our content by alerting those people who tune into our blog on a regular basis (via RSS or directly).
3. We issue an online press release and/or a social media bulletin to announce the availability of the new piece. This might get us a little coverage on other online channels (blogs, media, etc), but most importantly it establishes some third party backlinkage to our new web pages – something that Google likes and that will tend to have a positive (although lower level) impact on our search rankings.
4. We bookmark it via social bookmarking sites (e.g. delicious and Stumbleupon) in line with our core keywords (often referred to as 'tags' on these services). This puts it in the face of other like-minded people who are using these services to help their browsing or search activities.
   (Note: we never abuse these services. Their true value lies in the communal effect of lots of people bookmarking lots of different web pages in relation to any given keyword/tag – so that fellow users are always presented with a rich and varied stream of relevant content. We would be doing more harm than good to the wider service if we were to only bookmark things that belonged to us (in fact, some services like

StumbleUpon will actively ban users who use their system for solely bookmarking their own content). This should never really be an issue, however, if you're using these services for your general bookmarking needs in your day-to-day work.)

5. We Tweet about the content on our own personal Twitter profiles as well as the campaign profiles. This places the content in front of all of our current Twitter followers. In addition, when keywords are used sensibly (as in the #uksnow example above) it also places it in front of people who are actively searching for related material on Twitter (either Dashboard fashion, or via Twitter Alerts (see Twilerts) or on an ad-hoc basis).
6. We also publish the content 'off-site' to relevant Social Media channels, using optimised profiles which have been set up in advance to support the campaign. For example, we publish video to YouTube (and embed the results in our blog posts), photographs to Flickr and articles to Scribd. Again, this places our content on other networks that have pre-existing communities that are – if well researched – already proven to be interested in the core keywords used to optimise our content.

We do all of the above to distribute our content, raise awareness of it and drive web traffic. Because this activity depends on fixed assets such as the size of our team, the number of Social Media profiles we create and the general volume of our web traffic and blog following, it can only go so far. This is why 'Going Social' is so important to our work…

Step 4: Going Social: The Mother of Online Spinning

Going Social really is the magic ingredient. To go stellar we need to rely on more than our own distribution efforts: we need to invite other people to spin on our behalf. This is where our 'Shut Up, Listen and Learn' principles come into play.

Our Listening dashboard gives us a view on who's saying what in relation to our content. It also tells us where and when. We use it religiously to get engaged with the people, communities and forums that are likely to be most interested and therefore most willing to help us spread the word. (And, if we're smart enough, it'll help us to find people that want to work with us and buy things from us at the same time.)

'Getting engaged' in this way isn't rocket science. All it takes is time and commitment. We're talking about developing relationships with people and places, so it's nothing new (good PRs have always been great at doing this). It's worth remembering that a PR relationship is for life, not just for Xmas… so we always start as we mean to go on and give as much 'utility' as we can over the long term to each person, platform or community.

In practice this generally means getting involved in debates related to blog posts and Twitter streams, the giving away of something valuable (content, tools, widgets, etc) and generally just being a good citizen by participating fully so that the overall value of the relationship or target platform increases over time. In short, we give a little to get a little… and if we can establish a good, professional (or fun loving) rapport then our counterparts are likely to reciprocate, get engaged with our content and spin it on our behalf amongst their networks and communities. It's a virtuous reciprocal circle of spin…

## Step 5: Measurement

Lastly a word about measurement, because in cash-strapped times like these, no campaign would be complete without it. It's important that we demonstrate progress and justify our keep.

Our general approach to measurement is quantitative and 'by whatever means necessary'. I say this because we've learned over time that it's not particularly helpful to throw random rubrics around with our clients. What they really need is a set of metrics that are a) understandable and b) applicable in a useful fashion. To this end, we're not particularly big on 'favourability' or 'sentiment' reports, but do like to create hard numbers and graphs that can be cut up and used in Powerpoints by VPs of Marketing and MDs. You can check out our general menu of quantitative Online PR and Social Media measures here. We use it as a 'pick and mix' for any given project, and usually focus on the following areas:

- Conversions: number of sales, sign ups, registrations, etc.
- Basic Web Site Metrics: visitor stats, bounce rates, etc.
- PageRank: have we moved the bar on Google and increased search visibility and traffic potential?
- Engagement: volume of blog comments, re-Tweets, media mentions, followers, etc.

## Conclusion

…and that's all folks. An Online PR / Social Media Agency campaign from A to Z in five steps. It's now my turn to Shut Up, Listen and Learn. What do you think….?

## About the Author

*Roger Warner is the founder of online PR agency Content and Motion. A collection of his previous white papers on the topic is available here. He has over 15 years experience in web, technology, and PR-related communications practices – including a lengthy stint as Director of PR for IBM Europe, and running campaigns for the likes of HP, Toshiba and other household names. Prior to C&M he had spent four or more years working with web and tech-related startups, generally helping them move from zeros to heroes.*