

The Weapons of Strategic Communication: PR & SEO



We need inbound marketers – no wait, we need an SEO professional – actually, scratch that, we need a content magician – err, maybe we need...

Does this feel familiar? With strategic communication efforts becoming entangled by the vines of emerging practices, confusion is inevitable. Consider the following analogy, as we try to bring clarity to this mess.

There are many ships in the sea of media and communication, some with giant brands and others with lesser known ones. Armed with various weapons, the ships compete for dominion (clients).

These ships are for hire. Imagining agencies and in-house departments as ships will help us better understand the roles and applications of PR & SEO – two powerful weapons of the S.S. StratComm (clever name, I know).

Let's start by taking a look at definitions from community and authority sites, displaying a comparison of interpretations.

Community Definitions

These are definitions from the most exalted community sites for PR & SEO

PR

[Public Relations Society of America](#): “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”

A funny teacher once said, “Public relations is a magical brain-washing force, controlling the emotions, buying habits, and individual choice of words of people lacking mental fortitude.”

SEO

[Moz](#): “SEO is the practice of improving and promoting a web site in order to increase the number of visitors the site receives from search engines”

A funny friend once said, “SEO is like steroids for your website, and sometimes, steroids can do terrible, terrible things.”

Relationship

The community definitions seem to have a clear split.

- PR is centralized on *increasing mutually beneficial relationships*
- SEO is centralized on *increasing number of visitors from search engines*

These two goals are separate in many capacities, yet allow for contextual synergies. For example:

- Consider an auto parts company
- PR efforts such as events build mutually beneficial relationships with car lovers
- These car lovers enjoyed the event so much they follow-up by searching for the website, thus fulfilling the goal of SEO

It works the other way to:

- Consider the same auto parts company
- SEO efforts such as optimizing local search, increase the number of local visitors to the website
- These visitors love their products and resources, developing mutually beneficial relationships, fulfilling the goal of PR

We should be aware these are merely reasonable examples of how SEO & PR can fulfill respective goals. Some ships do not have both the SEO & PR arsenal, rendering them less valuable than ships that do. Some ships have both. Take the auto parts company example. They manage to run a business, promotion, and a blog with infographics. That’s quite the artillery.

As we take a closer look at the nuts and bolts of these weapons, I felt it would be interesting to present the more *neutral* definitions.

Neutral Definitions

These are definitions from generally unbiased sites for PR & SEO

PR

[Wikipedia](#): “Public Relations is the practice of managing the spread of information between an individual or an organization and the public. Public relations may include an organization or individual gaining exposure to their audiences using topics of public interest and news items that do not require direct payment. The aim of public relations by a company often is to persuade the public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a certain point of view about it, its leadership, products,

or of political decisions. Common activities include speaking at conferences, winning industry awards, working with the press, and employee communication.”

SEO

[Google](#): “Search engine optimization is often about making small modifications to parts of your website. When viewed individually, these changes might seem like incremental improvements, but when combined with other optimizations, they could have a noticeable impact on your site's user experience and performance in organic search results.”

Relationship

I chose Google for SEO because it was basically a condensed version of the [Wikipedia definition](#), not mention Google is the authority on what and who can optimize their search engine. Here's what sticks out during comparison:

- The authority definition for PR is a reflection of the community definition – just a more detailed explanation. The same goes for SEO (if you check out the Wiki).

What can we extract from all of these definitions?

Perceptive roles. If we browse around the archives of Moz and PRSA, we find everything the community believes their weapon is capable of. And, for the most part, they're spot on. But something is missing.

What is the one thing that seems to elude all of the instruction manuals, strategy guides, and creative feature posts?

Authentically humble, realistic descriptions of why things worked for the readers market, not the writers market.

This is important for beginners and experts all together. Sure, we can strive to live by our industry's best practices, but if we blindly accept everything experts say, we only learn from those who have reached success *their way*.

If we develop our weapons based on blueprints we create from our experiences – what works for us and what doesn't – we'll be well on our way to conquering the sea.

SWOT Breakdown

Agencies are basically modified versions of the S.S. StratComm, with customized weapons and tools based on their respective budget and crew. I created the following SWOT analysis of SEO and PR, as an effort to highlight capabilities and limitations.

PR

STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short and long-term planning, tailored to single or multiple audiences, including events and coordination, special project management, media and investor relations, public advocacy, PSAs, field marketing for products, focus groups, public speaking, ghostwriting, and more.• Campaigns can dramatically increase sales, revive or reshape brand image, and reach massive populations• Still relatively new industry, with lots of job opportunities• High salary cap for managers• Free press
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Little or zero knowledge of SEO content writing and especially the technical side• No completely direct control over message placement and delivery (as opposed to paid advertising)• Quantifying ROI can be difficult, although there are various clipping services and ways to measure return
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By learning the technical side of SEO, practitioners can improve online efforts such as branding, promotion, and placement
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Campaign strategies and tactics are never “full-proof” – press is not guaranteed and goals will not always be met (this can deter stubborn clients from future business)• Those who cannot make the shift to tapping into digital publications will fade out

SEO

STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustainable industry / Exponential job growth• Very desirable service• Cost effective / low budget• Naturally learn about a variety of industries (just a nice bonus)• Easy to measure ROI with tracking and analytics
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific writing style and topics and limited technical skills (compared to coding)• Limited to digital space – little or zero experience with the strengths of PR (ie; public speaking or event planning and management)• Low average salary cap
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By learning more concrete communication skills such as public speaking, SEOs can improve the content they create with versatility (think of any good instructional video).• By picking up some coding skills, practitioners can create and sell helpful tools as an added revenue source
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alternatively, adapting means survival of the fittest. Those who cannot adapt will have diminished value and contributions to their team.• Similar to PR, unreasonable clients may be dissatisfied with campaign results, resulting in loss of business

Hopefully this shows similar themes between PR and SEO, while drawing lines between the actual tasks of each role. The next section is a fun bit, with some general conclusions about each practice.

Weapon Profiles

PR

Boss's Questions: Does our audience think we're good guys now? Are investors satisfied with our annual report? Did we get NY Times?

Myth Busted: Press releases are not the end-all-be-all of public relations. They are perceived as the standard tool for alerting reporters of vital news. Aside from that, public relations utilizes dozens of methods such as media alerts for basic information, event planning, special project development and management, and ongoing research throughout campaigns – to name a few.

Simplest Form: Fulfill the over-arching business goals for clients with communication objectives.

SEO

Boss's Questions: How much traffic did we generate? Did we hit "[enter page rank]" yet? Fine, how much do they want for the link?

Myth Busted: Guaranteeing the #1 spot in SERPs is not accomplished in one day, or one week – in fact, it’s not guarantee-able, ever. It’s a long-term process that can be improved over months of link-building and optimization.

Simplest Form: Optimize site and continuously work towards highest possible rank in SERPs

Overlap

Let’s toss out the labels for a second. It doesn’t matter if we are an “Online PR Specialist” or an “SEO Content Coordinator.” ***What matters, is if our strategic communication efforts fulfill our goals.***

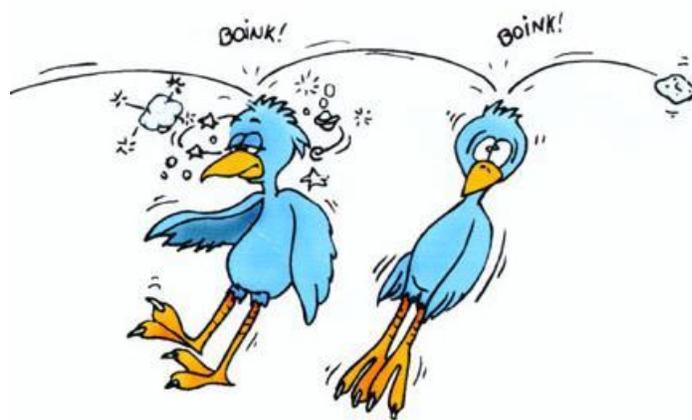
Joe Friedlein draws out the correlation, “SEO = link building & link building = brand building & brand building = PR.” I do agree with Joe here, but I have to point out there’s a lot more to this correlation.

Brand building entails emotional influence; a factor that is fairly detached from simple inbound links. Popularity is a big part of the brand building pie and is a direct correlation with quantify of links, but we cannot control messages and provoke particular emotions with link-building. Public relations involves tactical brand building strategies based on loads of demographic research.

Nonetheless, here are a few of the major overlaps in theme:

- Social signals indicate brand popularity
- Outreach targets (reporters and bloggers)
- Getting links and press circulation improves awareness

Synergy



The saying “kill two birds with one stone” is applicable to SEO and PR. In fact, we might even say “ten birds with one stone” because of **social integration levels**.

What are social integration levels?

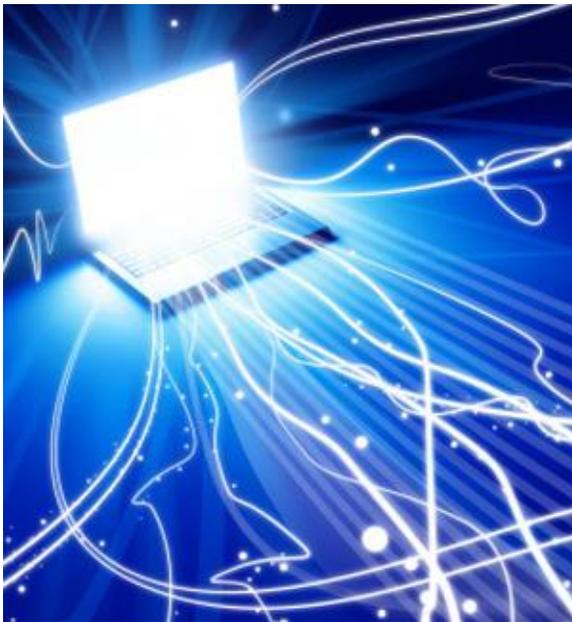
This is essentially the “ripple effect.” Let’s walk through an online PR strategy:

- We plan out a live Google “Hangout” for our fans
- We promote the event and create a unique hashtag with one of our keywords (inherited SEO practice)
- We add incentive by combining a giveaway with the event
- We set up and exclusive discount on our products for event viewers

- We set up Google Analytics to record everything (links, hashtags, purchase funnels, traffic)

Great! We're ready to rock n' roll. The event is a success – which is an online PR strategy (not SEO) – and we end up receiving a mountain of benefits:

- Increased exposure (PR)
- Increased traffic (SEO)
- Increase social mentions and shares (PR)
- Increase in revenue (PR)
- Increase in branded and keyword hashtags (PR)
- Increase in inbound links (SEO)
- Increase in brand reputation and positive sentiments (PR)
- Increase in fans & followers (PR)
- Increase in feedback and customer reviews (PR)
- And more...



Think about the synergy of SEO and PR like this:

Strategically increasing and optimizing mutually beneficial relationships with tactical and technical communication efforts.

Is Inbound Marketing The Future?

Everyone has their own opinion on the future of SEO, PR, and their own interpretation of the term "[Inbound Marketing](#)" or, as Seth Godin puts it, "Permission Marketing".

Here's my two cents. I don't think we need to come up with new marketing lingo and labels whenever we discover a new "method" of communication. I feel this way because it's not as if these discoveries are

ground-breaking – they're *slightly more convenient* or *slightly altered placement* or *tiny modifications*.

We call images with text on them 'memes' – let it be called, "Meme Marketing..." Sorry, I just can't get on board with this.

I prefer to keep SEO as SEO and PR as PR. The criteria, experience, and applications are separated by [fifty years](#) of development.

Here's where I lean to the middle. SEO, PR, inbound marketing or permission marketing – whatever you want to call it – they all fall under "Strategic Communication." Onboard the S.S. StratComm, overlap is

inevitable. This overlap is a natural signal suggesting we try new things and evolve our skills (not rename everything).

We can share/borrow tactics and practices, add them to our toolkits, and become *individually versatile*. In the search space, with Google Authorship gaining weight, it's becoming about what we are *individually* capable of producing. Whether it's SEO or PR, ***we're all strategic communicators***, and we can learn a lot from each other.

Thanks for reading!

Cheers!



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