

Write Like a PR Pro



# Write Like a PR Pro

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

MARY STERENBERG

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



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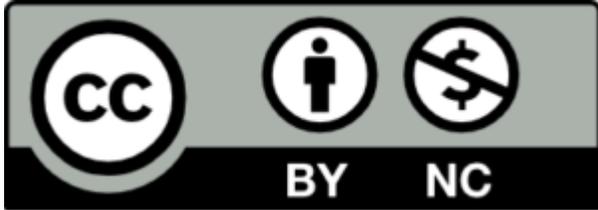
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# About the Author



Mary Sterenberg is an assistant professor of practice 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 has received multiple awards for her teaching and mentoring. Mary also supports the School of Communication's alumni newsletter, social media channels and website news 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 Columbus CEO, The Columbus Dispatch and Columbus Monthly. She also provides executive and media writing coaching. When she's not working with students and writing, she's wrangling her three kids and proudly wearing her soccer mom badge (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](https://twitter.com/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 marked "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 and communication 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 the creation of video and visual messaging on a broad level.

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 I: PR PLANNING & WRITING BASICS

Topics covered in this part include:

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

- [Good Writing](#)
- [Reading, Resourcefulness and Curiosity](#)
- [Associated Press Style](#)
- [The Writing Process](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Hinda Mitchell, Inspire PR Group](#)

## **Chapter 2: The Discovery Process**

- [Do the Research](#)
- [Understand Your Brand](#)
- [Identify Audiences](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Sonoma County Responds to Shifting Traveler Priorities](#)
- [Target Specific Objectives](#)
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## **Chapter 4: Strategic Messaging**

- [Know Your Message](#)
- [Create Compelling Information](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Encouraging Millennial Moms to Learn the Signs and Act Early](#)
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- [How the Pros Do It: Tapping Into TikTok to Target Young Teachers](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Heather Whaling, Geben Communication](#)



# CHAPTER I: 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, writing well and maintaining 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

**If you are trying to decide among a few people to fill a position, hire the best writer. That’s because being a good writer is about more than writing. Clear writing is a sign of clear thinking.**

– Jason Fried & David Heinemeier, *New York Times* Bestseller [Rework](#)

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. Bad writing costs American businesses about \$400 billion a year, according to a survey conducted by Josh Bernoff and reported in [Daily Beast](#).

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.”

Employers across many industries value writing, with 54% of employers listing “ability to communicate through writing” as a “very important” skill for college graduates in a survey conducted by the [Association of American Colleges and Universities](#).

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

I don't judge people based on  
race, creed, color or gender.

I judge people based on  
spelling, grammar,  
punctuation, and  
sentence structure.



someecards  
user card

# Reading, Resourcefulness and Curiosity

I have a confession. I cannot diagram a sentence. If put on the spot and asked to define a dangling modifier, 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 shamelessly obsessed 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. Now they're an affordable public relations and marketing tool that appears on restaurant table tents, college fliers and even resumes.

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:



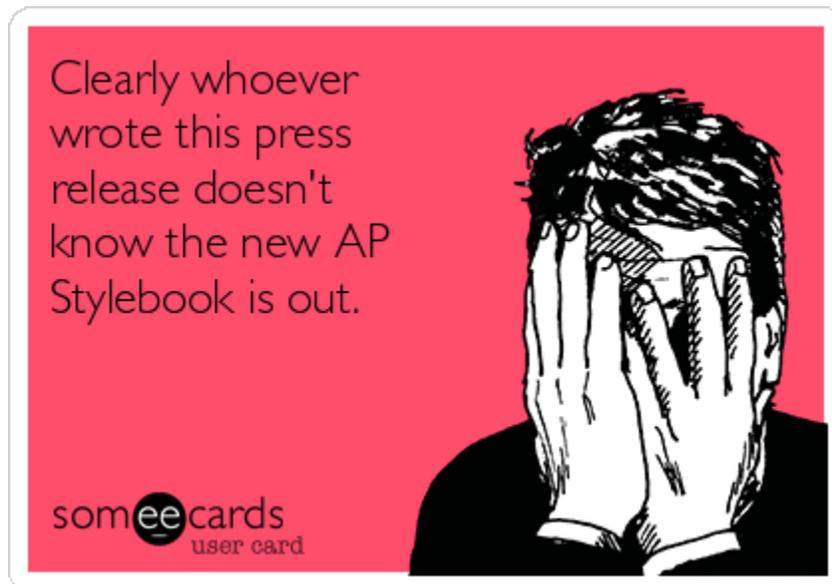
- [Grammar Girl](#). Mignon Fogarty, also known as Grammar Girl, explores many common grammar questions with a fun, easy-to-understand style. Check out her website or social media platforms, or listen in on her podcasts.
- [Everybody Writes: Your New and Improved Go-To Guide to Creating Ridiculously 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.

***Inclusive Storytelling***

The 2022-24 edition of the AP Stylebook added a new chapter on “[inclusive storytelling](#).” This chapter offer guidance on ensuring accuracy and fairness by:

- giving voice and visibility to those who have been missing/misrepresented
- showing sensitivity about certain words/phrases
- expanding beyond usual sources and story ideas
- including necessary context and background
- striving to recognize and overcome unconscious biases
- using thoughtful and precise language

The chapter expands pronoun guidance (i.e., use of they/them/their) and includes 35 new or revised disabilities-related entries.

Strong writers make accuracy a top priority. Accuracy goes beyond writing in a way that is grammatically correct. It also means choosing words and putting them together in a way that tells the most accurate version of a story.

**The words – even a single word – that we choose to describe a person or convey a scene shape the thoughts and perceptions of readers and listeners...Is the person an addict, or a person with a drug dependency? Is the woman elderly, or a 70-year-old marathon runner?**

# The Writing Process

The writing process needs to include three steps:

- Plan
- Write
- Edit

The amount of time you spend in each step and how you go about each can vary. Some people like to spend a lot of time planning and save themselves time in the editing process. Others like to brain dump quickly and spend more time revising and reworking. Either can work, but walking through the writing process and hitting every step makes the final writing stronger.

## **Plan**

It can be easy to shortchange this step and jump right into writing, but time spent on strong planning and solid research saves time overall. It makes writing faster and reduces time spent revising.

During the planning process, make sure you're clear why you're writing and what the goal is. Know what you're asking of your reader. Maybe it's just for their attention or maybe it's some type of action, but know what you want from the reader. And be clear how that aligns with larger marketing or business objectives.

This is also the time to make sure you understand your reader. It's important to think about the reader's relationship to your organization and their likely attitude about or potential objections to your message.

Finally, this is when to gather information for what you're writing and get organized. Gather more information than you think you need. Think about quotes, anecdotes, statistics and images. Consider who you can or should ask for information. Check credibility of sources. Test things out and observe.

## **Write**

This book walks you through much of the writing you would do in a professional public relations or communication role. The style of writing varies for each, but the writing should still be sandwiched between time spent planning and then editing.

## **Edit**

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.

This step in the process is also your opportunity to delete extra content or identify missing content. To double check facts, grammar, Associated Press Style, word choice and tone.

# 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.

Learn more about [Inspire PR Group](#)

# CHAPTER 2: THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

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 discovery process is needed to find the "why" and explore other information relevant to development of a strong strategy.



# Do the Research

Marty McDonald, president of [Fahlgren Mortine](#), a full-service integrated marketing agency headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, says the 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 Fahlgren Mortine.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*  
<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=101#oembed-1>

# 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, former 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.

When you ask an organization about their target audience or “ideal” customer, many will say “everyone.” That may seem like a good answer in terms of sales volume or making many different types of customers feel welcome. But it’s a poor answer in terms of strategic public relations (and ultimately an organization’s bottom line in many cases).

Identifying a target audience doesn’t mean an organization won’t provide goods or services to other people. It just allows the organization to be more intentional and effective in reaching or building a relationship with a certain group, whether it’s for a shorter-term campaign or as long-term customers.

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.

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 (WIN). As the discovery process moves into the planning process, this information will support development of messaging, visuals and platforms tailored to the specific audience.

## **For example...**

A veterinarian who specializes in guinea pigs might also care for many other animals. But if the vet identifies guinea pig owners as a key target audience, there are some strategic things he or she can do to build awareness locally that the practice knows a lot about guinea pigs.

The vet clinic still welcomes other pet owners, but its strategic public relations and marketing efforts focus specifically on guinea pig owners. The increase in business from targeting guinea pig owners alone likely would surpass increased business from more general efforts to reach pet owners (especially when they could be lost in the clutter of competing vet clinics spreading similar messages). It’s also a win for the target audience. Guinea pig owners likely prefer a vet who specializes in their animal.

# How the Pros Do It: Sonoma County Responds to Shifting Traveler Priorities



[Fahlgren Mortine](#) worked with Sonoma County Tourism in 2022 to encourage more tourism following the pandemic. Consumer priorities had shifted and research showed an increased consumer focus on personal wellness, authenticity and connecting deeply to culture and community, equity, responsibility and sustainability.

Sonoma County Tourism also needed to refine its core audience and target travelers who were open to wellness that was both personal and collective. Fahlgren Mortine helped SCT identify a specific “responsible traveler” audience and included demographic breakdown, behaviors and motivations of this audience to be considered across all campaign activities.

Targeting this audience, SCT launched a “Life Opens Up” campaign that positioned the destination as a place where life could open up following the pandemic through one-of-a-kind experiences. They showcased Sonoma County’s sustainable food and wine offerings, robust mix of outdoor activities, unique and immersive wellness experiences and laid back luxury. The campaign resulted in more visitors and higher spending from visitors in Sonoma County as well as media coverage on SCT’s focus on responsible travel and sustainability.

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



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, 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: ANALYZING AUDIENCES

Effective public relations writing relies on the important steps of:

1. Identifying one or more intended audiences
2. Effectively researching these 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 psychographics, lifestyles and a deeper understanding of a target audience's wants, interests and needs.

Many organizations invest in paid research tools that give them access to robust and timely information on different groups of people. There are also plenty of free sources of information. You might choose to target a certain geographic area based on [U.S. Census Bureau](#) data showing that a large number of people in a certain age range live in that area. Or you might consider an older target audience based on a [Pew Research Center](#) study showing that young adults in the U.S. are reaching key life milestones at a later age. Or you could suggest targeting Gen Z with a product or service based on a [McKinsey Health Institute](#) survey showing that their social media engagement can feel negative but also can help with finding mental health support and connectivity.

You can also conduct your own primary research. Talk to people in the target audiences, do an interview or survey, conduct a focus group. If you have a strong need and the budget to gather quantitative and statistically significant data from a larger audience sample, you can also pay to conduct research.

Research shouldn't stop with one significant piece of research. The goal is to build a robust enough consumer profile that you feel you have a strong understanding of where and how to reach the target audience. You have a firm understanding of what they want, have interest in or need (audience WIN: wants, interests, needs). An understanding of how they like to communicate and where they get information. Then you're in a position to pair that with what you know about your brand and objectives and look for the sweet spot where your organization can benefit the target audience in a way that also helps the organization achieve its objectives.

Gayle Saunders is the founder and CEO of [The Saunders PR Group](#), a full-service public relations firm, specializing in strategic communications planning, diversity, inclusion and equity communications, media relations, community engagement, diverse outreach, media buying, stakeholder management, and crisis/reputation management.

In the video below, Saunders talks about the importance of audience segmentation and audience research and some of her best practices.



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<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=836#oembed-1>

# How the Pros Do It: University of Pittsburgh Forges Ahead



The University of Pittsburgh is a top-ranked institution with award-winning research facilities. Despite fairly high awareness of the university, there wasn't a deep understanding of what Pitt stood for or its tremendous accomplishments – especially outside of its home city.

The university was looking to refresh its brand and move into the upper echelon of nationally-ranked universities while increasing enrollment and boosting its reputation as a leader in innovation and a driver of change.

To reach these goals, Pitt worked with marketing and branding agency [Ologie](#) to create the Forge Ahead campaign.

Ologie began with a deep dive into audiences, asking five core questions:

1. Who are they?
2. What do we need them to do?
3. How can we reach them?
4. Where can we place media to reach them?
5. How will we apply messaging?

During the discovery process, Ologie looked at qualitative and quantitative data about the brand and audiences Pitt wanted to reach (prospective students, alumni, donors, Pennsylvanians, current Pitt community of students, staff and faculty).

They explored things like:

- Geographic and demographic data of audiences
- Competitor media placements across key regions and key cities
- Areas with high usage public transit
- TV and streaming channels with relevant viewership
- Social media platform usage across key audience groups



The campaign centered on the idea of “We will always forge ahead.” Research drove content, experiences and specific messages specifically for each audience segment (prospective students & influencers, alumni & donors, constituents).

The campaign launched with a range of digital and out-of-home assets released in waves across five Northeastern cities. It included digital ads, digital urban panels and transit shelters, streaming video and broadcast placements and public radio – plus a full three-level takeover of 30th Street Station in Philadelphia.

With 71 million impressions in five urban markets, the campaign raised awareness of Pitt in the surrounding region.

View an [Ologie case study](#) to learn more about the University of Pittsburgh campaign.

# PR Pro Advice: Gayle Saunders, Founder & CEO, The Saunders PR Group

## *Advice for Students*



You must have strong communication skills – not only verbally, but your written communication must be top par. Think about how you craft compelling press releases, pitches, blogs and social media content because at the end of the day, it's about storytelling. How do I tell a story that resonates with the audiences that I am targeting. It helps them have a connection with what we're doing.

Also, adaptability. The way that our communities are changing and the beautiful diversity that is our community across every spectrum. You've got to be able to adapt. The landscape is changing from what's happening in our world today to what's happening right in our backyard. You've got to be able to adapt, you must be open to learning new and emerging trends and we've got to be able to move the needle and move on a dime when that happens.

# How the Pros Do It: Travel Nevada Gives Post-COVID Tourists a Transformative Experience



As the largest industry in Nevada, tourism generated \$42 billion in visitor spending pre-pandemic, so returning to those levels was critical. To encourage travel in 2022, Travel Nevada worked with integrated communication agency [Fahlgren Mortine](#) to launch a campaign with the primary objective of getting visitors to spend more and stay longer.

Data from a Travel Nevada study as well as reports from other industry organizations revealed key audience insights that drove the campaign:

Consumers were seeking spontaneity, new experiences and unique stays. There was a trend of “transformative travel,” which was defined as “intentionally traveling to stretch, learn and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world.”

- Travelers wanted authentic local encounters with people and places.
- Consumers were looking for simple, wellness-focused experiences after time spent during COVID resetting goals and priorities.

The planning team saw an opportunity to target audiences with messaging about Nevada’s unusual experiences, quirky culture, true wide-open spaces and inspiring connections.

Messaging for the campaign, dubbed “Silver State Reset,” spotlighted “transformative” experiences throughout the state and invited potential travelers to hit the “reset” button in Nevada through paid, earned, owned and shared media.

A micro-site showed two “Reset Routes,” both starting in one of Nevada’s major metro areas. The campaign ran a trip giveaway on the site where two winners receive an all-expense paid trip through Nevada on those routes. The campaign partnered with micro-influencers who traveled the Reset Routes and talked about their experiences. A partnership with iHeart radio in Portland and Chicago let Nevadans along the routes speak with radio personalities about their transformative experiences to drive traffic to the micro-site. Media outreach to national publications also incorporated the “transformative travel” key messages.

The program resulted in nearly 130,000 contest entries and helped generate an increase in travel spending (+\$1,850 per household) and more frequent visitation (2.8 trips vs. 2.2).

Learn more about Fahlgren Mortine's [Travel Nevada campaign](#).

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- Ologie. (2023). *University of Pittsburgh Forges Ahead*
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# CHAPTER 4: 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](#), an agency that specializing in public relations, social media (paid and organic), content marketing, and data analytics/insights. 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.



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<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=74#oembed-1>



# 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. I 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.

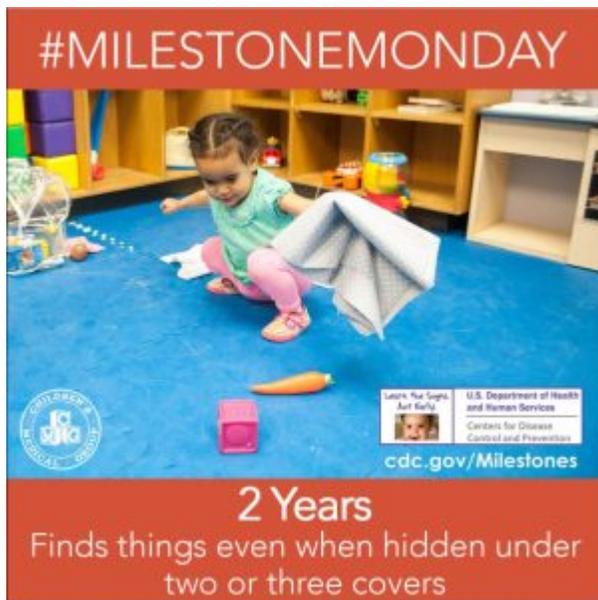
The core information (DO YOUR CHORES) remains the same, but you craft the messaging to appeal to specific audiences.

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. Crafting effective messaging requires a thoughtful consideration of:

- What is the organization’s relationship with the target audience?
- What does reader have/need?
- What tone or wording fits this reader?
- What are likely responses or objections to your message?
- What’s in it for the reader (why should they care)?
- What questions might they have?

# How the Pros Do It: Encouraging Millennial Moms to Learn the Signs and Act Early



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention partnered with [Geben Communication](#) to raise awareness among Millennial moms about developmental milestones to help them better monitor their child's progress and ask pediatricians the right questions along the way.

During discovery, Geben analyzed the current social media landscape around parenting and developmental disabilities. They also conducted a focus group with eight influencers who write about parenting and early childhood to discuss the most effective ways to reach and engage their audiences.

The resulting #MilestoneMonday campaign had a new influencer post each Monday and model the desired behavior: to check and track milestones at regular intervals. It also featured pediatricians on Facebook Lives and a Real Babies of Instagram push, with influencers sharing cute baby photos with information on the importance of checking milestones.

The campaign reached more than 40 million parents with resources.

Learn more about Geben's [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention campaign](#).

# 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: Tapping Into TikTok to Target Young Teachers

When McGraw Hill Education wanted to prioritize young, tech-savvy teachers in its upcoming communications strategy, [Geben](#) turned to TikTok for a fun and impactful influencer campaign that caused website visits to skyrocket.

McGraw Hill historically targets school system decision makers, but wanted to explore a direct-to-consumer strategy with the rise of virtual learning and adaptive learning programs during COVID.

Geben identified and secured 11 education influencers and worked with McGraw Hill to give them access to the adaptive learning programs. The influencers created a video on TikTok explaining their teaching experience during COVID and how McGraw Hill's programs are impactful for teachers and students. Geben amplified influencer videos and drove additional traffic to the product website through a series of TikTok ads using the influencer-generated content.

The combination of influencer videos and TikTok ads drove nearly 46,000 visits to the website. Learn more about [Geben's McGraw Hill campaign](#).

# 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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- Whaling, Heather. (2017, May) Personal interview.
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# PART 2: WRITING FOR OWNED MEDIA

Topics covered in this part include:

## **[Chapter 5: Writing for the Web](#)**

- [Formatting for Online Reading](#)
- [Blogging: Topic & Voice](#)
- [Quality Content Ingredients](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Breakfast with Nick Unpacks 11 Ways to Cook an Egg](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Nick Dekker, Breakfast with Nick](#)
- [Writing for SEO](#)
- [Leveling Up Links](#)
- [Competing with AI](#)
- [PR Pro Advice](#)

## **[Chapter 6: Executive Writing](#)**

- [The Business Writing Process](#)
- [Writing Business Emails](#)
- [Newsletter Writing](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Hinal Pujara, Belle Communication](#)



# CHAPTER 5: WRITING FOR THE WEB

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, read the blogging success story from student Rachel Gaylord below.



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

# Formatting for Online Reading

Readers consume information differently when they're reading on a screen. In fact, they don't really read at all. They skim.

- Some of the [earliest research](#) on reading online still holds true: only about 16% of people read online writing word-for-word.
- On the average web page, users read 28% of words at most (likely closer to 20%), [Nielsen Norman Group](#) research shows.
- [Eye-tracking studies](#) show that skimmers read in an F pattern, starting from the top left.

Dig more into how communication and marketing professionals are using visual content with this list of 50 visual content marketing statistics that came out of [Hubspot research](#).

**Good writing + strong formatting + solid information = great online writing**

Formatting matters, so it's crucial to cater online writing for readers who skim. These tips will help make your online content scanner-friendly:

- **Use bulleted lists when the content fits that format**  
Articles with one or more lists drives two times more traffic according to [SEMrush](#).
- **Use images or other visual content liberally**  
Visual also go beyond just photos. The [Content Marketing Institute](#) gives a nice overview of 12 types of visual content you can use in blog posts.
- **Keep sentences and paragraphs short**  
Try to stay under 12 words per sentences and limit paragraphs to one to three sentences to allow scanners to digest smaller pieces of information.
- **Separate paragraphs with a space rather than indenting**  
Spaces between short paragraphs creates visual breathing room. Larger blocks of text look overwhelming to online readers who may be tempted to skim right by.
- **Write strong headlines**  
A strong headline may hook a reader and encourage a more thorough read. A headline also may appear on a homepage and require a click before the reader can even access your article.

- **Look for link opportunities**

Including links helps keep your online writing short. Links allow readers to choose when they want to learn more and have more control over their experience. But don't include so many links that your reader feels overwhelmed with a constant choice of whether to click or keep reading.

- **Use headings to lead scanners through the content**

Scanners reading in an F pattern read the headline and the subheads. Using strategic headings and making them meaningful ensures scanners get a good overview of the available content and can jump around in the text. Headings also impact search engine optimization. This [Yoast article](#) gives more details on how to use headings strategically.

- **Avoid distracting backgrounds and difficult-to-read font colors and types**

# Blogging: Topic & Voice



5 Restaurants to Try This Month: August 2023



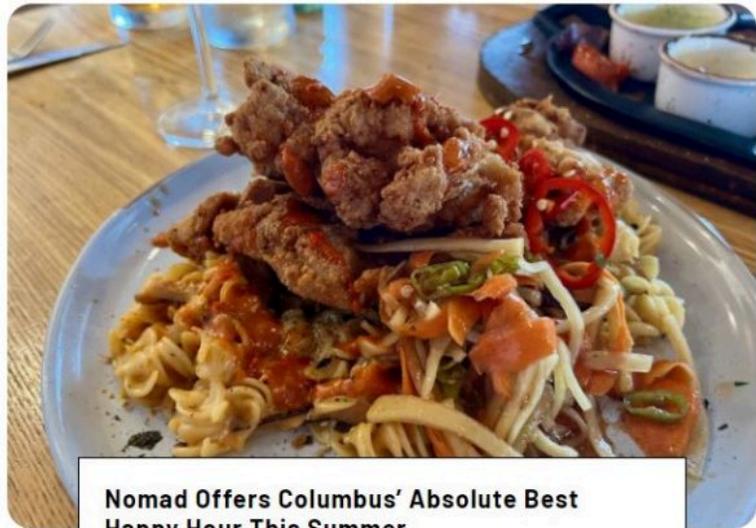
News: Tasi Cafe closing, Crema reopens cafe, Lupita's debuts in Merion Village



Discover the Irresistible Flavors of Bob Evans' Breakfast Sandwiches!



Parable Coffee



## Nomad Offers Columbus' Absolute Best Happy Hour This Summer

*The live-fire eatery Nomad, located on Polaris Parkway, has terrific food and drink, as well as one of the summer's best happy hour deals. Catch it through Labor Day!*

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 20,000 followers on his related Instagram account and receives requests for sponsored content.

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.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=129#oembed-1>

# 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 "[5 Restaurants to Try This Month](#)." 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. Whether it's helpful cooking tips or funny anecdotes meant to entertain, 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. Post length depends on the style of the writer, the blog and the post topic. Longer posts tend to do better in search results, so posts often run 2,000+ words. 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 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 with the post or clicking, so limit links to key outside sources and clearly show readers where links will take them. Avoid "click here" and make key words the active link. This helps search engines find your post for key information and it clearly indicates to readers 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.”



Photo credit: Real Mom Nutrition

Registered dietician Sally Kuzemchak runs the blog [Real Mom Nutrition](#). She says photos help break up the text of your post and tell a story. She adds that a great image can also get posts noticed on Pinterest and Instagram, which can quickly draw traffic and build audiences.

Assume all existing images are copyrighted unless you prove otherwise. Ask permission to use any existing images or infographics (via email to create a paper trail). Then link back to the original image and include photo credit within the post.



Photo credit: Real Mom Nutrition

You can also take/create your own images. Kuzemchak uses a DSLR camera with a 50mm lens for more of her food photography, but notes that many smartphone cameras take impressive shots as well. She suggests using natural light whenever possible.

“Find a good window with good light and diffuse that light with a white sheer curtain. Experiment using different angles, different settings on the camera, and

be patient with yourself as you learn,” she advises. She also encourages bloggers to learn the basics of [Adobe Lightroom](#) or another photo editing tool.

Kuzemchak takes all of her own photos, but you can also use royalty-free images on sites such as [Canva](#), [Unsplash](#) and [Pexels](#). Some of these “stock” images come with a fee, but many images are free. Keep in mind that they are publicly available and may appear on other sites, so original photos are ideal.

### **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.

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

Remember the importance of [formatting online content](#) for readers who are scanning rather than reading word-for-word.

# 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.

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

## *Advice for Students*

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.

# Writing for SEO

Writing for the web requires at least a basic understanding of [search engine optimization](#). The need to rank well on search engines depends on what you're writing and how readers can find it. Bloggers and many other websites depend heavily on SEO to drive traffic to their posts (though readers might also find posts through social media, email and other ways).

You could write an amazing post about your study abroad experience in Italy that never reaches anyone beyond your immediate family if you don't write the post with search engine optimization in mind. Just writing compelling content for the reader is no longer enough.

Strong search engine optimization starts in the planning process. Sally Kuzemchak with the blog [Real Mom Nutrition](#) recommends considering the topics target readers are interested in: questions they've asked, problems they're facing, or topics in other posts that resonated with those target readers.

She then uses a keyword tool like KWFinder to research keywords and phrases. She looks for words/phrases with strong search volumes and low difficulty to outrank competitors. She also Googles potential keywords and looks under "related searches" and "people to ask" as she refines her post topic and brainstorms questions to answer in the post.

Kuzemchak also researches her competition, looking at who ranks highest for a certain keyword or phrase. She looks at what information they provide and considers how she can do it better.

She then does the following specifically related to writing as she crafts her posts to help search engines rank her content high for terms readers are seeking to find:

- Uses the keyword and related keywords and phrases throughout the post, including in headings and subheadings. (But she also works to keep writing natural and avoid forced and awkward wording caused by "keyword stuffing.")
- Adds alt-tags to images and include the keyword and related words and phrases in images where it makes sense.
- Puts the keyword in the URL.
- Writes a meta description that includes the keyword and tells the reader up front what the post will deliver.
- Includes the keyword in the title but also makes the title enticing to readers so it can compete.
- Includes links to related posts.

# Leveling Up Links

Links impact both the reader experience and the ability of readers to find your articles through search engines. Following a few rules when you add links will make your writing easier to find and easier to read.

## **Make Keywords Active Links**

Think carefully about which words should become the active link. Skimmers who see “[Click here](#)” or “[Learn more](#)” likely have no idea where the link would take them because they haven’t read the context. If the link says “view the [complete Fahlgren Mortine case study](#),” the reader clearly knows where the link goes.

This benefits your readers, and it also helps search engines recognize the topic and relevance of a website.

## **Don’t Miss Good Link Opportunities**

Review final drafts looking specifically for any missed opportunities to link to helpful resources.

- Organization or program names
- Complicated terms that would benefit from a link to an explanation

## **Link to the Right Resources**

Don’t make readers work by linking to website homepages when you can link directly to a specific and more pertinent web page.

## **Avoid Ugly URLs**

There are times when you strategically want a full website URL to appear in the text of an article. If you’re creating awareness for your organization and its website, you might want the link to be embedded behind the visible website URL.

Bookmark Ohio State’s School of Communication at <https://comm.osu.edu/> to learn about new research and upcoming events.

Other times, it makes more sense to embed URLs (especially those that are long and ugly) behind keywords.

If you have questions about classes or graduation requirements, book a [School of Communication advising appointment](#).

# Working with AI

The introduction of generative artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT presents both opportunities and challenges for bloggers and other writers. In the coming years, there will be many discussions about and potentially regulation of many legal and ethical aspects of artificially generated content.

In February 2023, Vanderbilt University made [national news](#) when it used AI to write an email to its students about a mass shooting at another university. The email noted that it was paraphrased from an AI tool. Students spoke out about the insensitivity of using the tool for such a tragic situation and the university apologized.

A human touch to writing matters even when the topic is not tragic or extremely sensitive. For example, Google looks for content from an “Experienced Expert” on a given topic, and it looks for things like topic experience and expert authority that are not easily replicated by an AI tool.

Sally Kuzemchak at [Real Mom Nutrition](#) says she would never use AI to completely write posts and can sometimes tell when other bloggers have done that.

“The readers who come back to your site again and again are coming there for YOU and YOUR voice,” she says. “A personal connection with your readers is something that AI will never be able to compete with.”

Specifically for blogging, Kuzemchak recommends that writers compete with AI by always putting at least a snippet of their own experience or perspective into every post.

“Anyone can find a muffin recipe or a travel itinerary using ChatGPT. But YOU can talk about how you tested that blueberry muffin recipe 11 times to make it perfect or describe an amazing meal you had at a hole-in-the-wall restaurant on a trip to Chicago. Those details tell your reader: This person is real. They’re like me, they get me, I can trust them. That’s something they can never feel with AI.”

Artificially generated also can be inaccurate or lack the latest information, so it’s crucial to double check sources and facts when using these tools.

However, generative AI offers bloggers and other writers a new tool to use as they craft content. For example, Kuzemchak says she uses [ChatGPT](#) to help brainstorm headlines, meta descriptions and post outlines. AI also can generate a first draft for a blog post or article that a writer can modify to add expertise, personal examples, quotes or other information from credible outside sources.

Kuzemchak notes that she also uses AI for her blog in ways that go beyond content generation. She also uses the tool [RankIQ](#) to identify low-competition search terms and optimize posts with keywords for increased website traffic.

# PR Pro Advice: Sally Kuzemchak, Real Mom Nutrition

## *Advice for Students*



Think of your blog as a way to serve readers. What do you readers need? What problems are they struggling with? Listen to your audience in their blog comments, social media comments, DMs, and emails. What are they expressing and what is their core need? And how can YOU help them? Think of your site as less about you and more about your reader. That will help you compete in a crowded field and grow an audience of superfans who know, like, and trust you.



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# CHAPTER 6: EXECUTIVE WRITING

Whether you hope to work in the corporate or agency world, executive writing will be part of your job. It might be to write effective emails to colleagues or clients, or you could be producing a newsletter or writing talking points or memos for an executive.

The strongest executive writing is fast and accurate and easy to read and understand.

To achieve this, it's important to:

- Start strong and specific
- Be concise
- Embrace the ugly first draft
- Write for the reader

## **Start Strong and Specific**

Don't bury the most important information. Consider how to get that information as close to the top as possible.

You don't need to write the beginning or a headline first. In fact, if you do, it's wise to go back and consider needed revisions at the end of your writing process.

## **Be Concise**

Ask yourself what the goal of the message is and how much information the reader truly needs to understand or act on your message.

Things that waste readers' time:

- Big words and complicated sentences (avoid sentences with lots of commas)
- Passive verbs
- Unneeded openings or recap conclusions
- Wordy descriptions that could be an image or graphic
- Main messages that stretch beyond about 10 words

## **Embrace the Ugly First Draft**

Because you know an editing process comes after writing, just get going on the draft. It can be helpful to timebox yourself: give yourself 30 minutes to get as much as possible done on a piece of writing rather than waiting for inspiration or trying to make edits as you write.

## **Write for the Reader**

The lessons about analyzing audiences still apply to executive writing, even when you're just writing an email. Factor this in as you consider the structure of what you're writing as well as the tone and words you choose.

# Writing Business Emails

Before you consider skipping over this section because you already know how to write an email, please hear me on this:

**Poorly written or structured emails might be the top complaint I hear from employers about younger employees.**

Email helps you get a job and advance in a job. It helps you build a rapport with clients and colleagues and media. It's probably where you will spend the most time writing throughout your career.

Email marketing is also big business. The return on investment for email marketing is \$36 for every \$1 spent, according to [Hubspot research](#). Brands see email as an effective and affordable communication tool.

## **Subject lines matter**

When you get an email, you make an initial judgment call on your message based on the subject line. You choose whether to open now or wait until later. You may even have a positive or negative response to what you expect the message to include based on the subject line.

Many professionals use email as their to-do list or somehow incorporate it into their organizational system. Strong subject lines help others determine the purpose of your email and either act on the email or "file" it somewhere either mentally or literally.

If an email contains a request, consider including the ask in the subject line. If I get an email with the subject line "Request for a homework extension," I'm likely to open that email and answer because I can see it requires action and likely is time sensitive. I may not react in the same way to the subject line "Writing assignment question."

Whether you include a request or call-to-action in the subject line or not, try to make the subject as short and specific as possible. Look at this example provided by young professional Hinal Pujara.

Example email:

Subj: For Review: Script Edits

Hi X,

Thank you for sharing the first draft of the script! Sharing a status update that we've taken the first review and left suggested edits in the Word Doc attached. See below for next steps and action items for you. Are you able to share the answers to these questions by Thursday at 12 p.m. ET?

- Please review the edits to the script attached, and let us know if you have additional feedback.
- Are you available for a call next Wednesday at 3 p.m. to talk through the slide deck?

Thank you,

Hinal

### **Shorter is better**

Try to hit on the point of your email within the first couple sentences. This doesn't mean jumping in awkwardly. You may need to start with a greeting or something conversational, but don't shift the most important information too far down in the message.

Consider making an ask or a key message its own paragraph and bold to help it stand out. In example above, Pujara used bullets to clearly show the ask.

The shorter the email, the more likely the reader will focus on your key message. Look for opportunities to tighten the writing or edit out unnecessary content so it doesn't distract from the purpose of your email.

### **Tone needs to fit**

It's important to balance the tone of an email to make sure it reflects the tone of the brand while also embracing the right tone for the reader and the situation.

This might require a little research. Check a brand style guide, read website or newsletter content or look through email to make sure you have a good understanding of the brand's tone. Do your homework on the reader or audience to make sure you're taking their role and potential response into consideration. Make sure you fully understand the current situation, and if you're unsure, ask some questions for more background.

# PR Pro Advice: Hinal Pujara, Account Coordinator, Belle Communication

## *Advice for Students*



In professional emails, it is critical to articulate your message to the recipient in a clear, concise and effective way. You can start the email with a warm greeting, share a brief status update and then define action steps + needs with a deadline. When making a request in the email, you can increase the visibility of your ask by highlighting it in a different color or bolding it to set it apart from the rest of the email. To maintain conciseness and improve readability, you can also structure the email using bullet points. These techniques will allow your reader to efficiently read your email and identify the need. Keeping the subject

line straightforward is also just as important. Considering adding “Status Update” or “For Review” in the subject line to give the reader an idea of what they should expect in the body copy. By incorporating these strategies, your email will make a strong impression and ensure a smoother communication process.

# Newsletter Writing

Many companies send newsletters to maintain an ongoing relationship with employees, customers or other stakeholders. While a Google algorithm or social media platform shift could result in a loss of followers or viewers overnight, a company “owns” its email list.

Newsletters should be sent on a regular basis, whether that’s quarterly or weekly. They can educate, inform and entertain – and oftentimes, companies also want them to promote. A [Hubspot article](#) on creating email newsletters people will actually read recommends balancing content to be 90% educational and 10% promotional.

Most newsletters are sent via email or posted online, so the writing should be written and formatted for online readers who tend to scan rather than read (see the chapter on [Writing for the Web](#)).

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# PART 3: WRITING FOR SHARED MEDIA

Topics covered in this part include:

**[Chapter 7: Different Sides of Social](#)**

**[Chapter 8: Setting an Up Front Social Strategy](#)**

- [PR Pro Advice: Steve Michalovich, Nationwide Insurance](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Miracle-Gro Strategy Changes the Social Conversation](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Jeni's Generates Buzz About Upcoming Collab](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Rachel Gaylord, Belle Communication](#)

**[Chapter 9: Social Content Creation](#)**

- [Content Marketing](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Nathan Okuley, Digital Strategist](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Retailer Jumps on Holiday Hashtags to Increase Engagement](#)
- [Content Calendars](#)



# CHAPTER 7: 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 Instagram strategy, or even an Instagram 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 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.

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

“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 8: 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”**

Wendy's built a large social media following and received recognition like topping Fast Company's list of the world most innovative companies in the social media category (see [Fast Company's article](#) on Wendy's epic social strategy).

Their Twitter strategy of responding quickly and playfully roasting competitors and others helped put them at the top.



**Wendy's**  @Wendys · Oct 4, 2021

where the things that should be fresh are frozen, and the things that should be frozen are out of order.



**McDonald's**  @McDonalds · Oct 4, 2021

if u were the person who ran the McDonald's account for a day, what would u tweet

[Show this thread](#)

 818

 3,546

 28.2K



Wendy's posts strong content, but their social success also points back to a solid strategy of reacting real-time and with a unique and witty voice on a social media platform designed for quick-hit statements and back-and-forth conversation.

Brands can set an overarching up-front social strategy or vary strategies by social media channel. They can also employ different strategies for different campaigns or initiatives.

The Columbus Arts Festival, one of the most highly acclaimed arts festivals in the nation, returned in person after a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19. The festival worked with Irvin Public Relations on an influencer strategy. They identified and secured six micro (10K-100K followers) to mid (100K-500K followers) local influencers that catered to the Arts Fest's desired demographic and had feeds/content that complemented the festival's goals. The influencers posted in advance of the festival and attended and posted about their experience live. This strategy reached nearly 125,000 people and generated 15,000 engagements. See an [Irvin PR case study](#) to learn more about the campaign.

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



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<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=78#oembed-1>

# 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.

# 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.

# How the Pros Do It: Jeni's Generates Buzz About Upcoming Collab



Photo credit: Tori Behnke

[Belle Communication](#) worked with Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams to creatively generate widespread excitement and chatter leading up to and through the announcement of the brand's collaboration with Dolly Parton and the launch of her signature Strawberry Pretzel Pie flavor.

The campaign's three objectives were to increase Jeni's share of voice by at least 5% compared to competitors, secure coverage in food, lifestyle and entertainment media outlets, and generate widespread excitement ahead of the collaboration announcement.

With these objectives in mind, the Belle team researched Jeni's most recent collaboration with Tyler, The Creator. They also conducted research on the media and social landscapes. They found increasing popularity of brands and celebrities dropping clues and "Easter eggs" to engage audiences.

With that trend top of mind, Belle recommend a two-prong campaign approach:

1. Execute a four-week teaser campaign announcing an upcoming collaboration but not revealing the partner to generate chatter
2. Generate local and national media coverage of the collaboration

The social strategy focused primarily on Instagram, where Jeni's asked fans to post dream collaborators for the brand. Jeni's also dropped clues on social media and embraced the "leaking a secret" concept. Posts included a series of emojis teasing Dolly Parton and the in-feed photos gradually built a grid that ultimately revealed a picture of Dolly.

The campaign ultimately generated two rounds of excitement and media coverage: one when Dolly Parton was announced as the collaborator and a second when the new flavor was announced. The campaign drove record sales, crashing the website from traffic.



# PR Pro Advice, Rachel Gaylord, Senior Account Executive, Belle Communication

## *Advice for Students*



Photo credit: Tori Behnke

Recipe for a successful social media strategy:

1. Begin with clear and measurable goals for your social campaign that tie back to a larger business goal.
2. Stir in research from various sources including internal audience analytics, competitor analysis and general social landscape trends.
3. Mix the insights from your research with your target audience, priority channels and brand messaging.
4. Combine to form a playbook of actionable next steps.
5. Fold in creative content writing and high-quality visuals.
6. Bake for the campaign timeline, checking periodically to track success against goals.
7. Adjust as needed along the way to find your sweet spot.

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# CHAPTER 9: SOCIAL CONTENT CREATION

After establishing an up front strategy, the process moves into the content creation stage. 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.

## **Authenticity**

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.

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.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=79#oembed-1>

# 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 stomping 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.

# 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.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTENT MARKETING

For years brands have been telling stories to attract & retain customers. Here are a few examples...

1732

Benjamin Franklin begins publishing his annual **Poor Richard's Almanack** to promote his printing business.



1801

Paris bookstore **Librairie Galignani** starts to employ some very creative content strategies to grow its business, including opening a reading room, creating original books, and publishing its own newspaper featuring articles from influential authors.

1861

Samuel Wagner launches the **American Bee Journal** – a magazine that is still published today.



1867

Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company debuts **The Locomotive**, which is now said to be the country's longest-running company magazine to be continuously published under the same name.

1882

The **Edison Electric Lighting Company Bulletin** is first published to spread the word about the benefits of electric lighting.

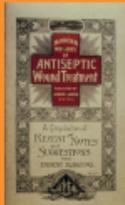


1887

Charles Scribner's Sons creates **Scribner's Magazine**, providing a look inside the lives of the publishing company's most famous authors. It competes with Harper's Monthly and Atlantic Monthly, but its main goal is to generate sales of its books.

1888

Johnson & Johnson launches a publication called **Modern Methods of Antiseptic Wound Treatment**, aimed at the informational needs of the doctors to whom it sells bandages. The company also launches two additional publications to share helpful articles with the larger medical community.

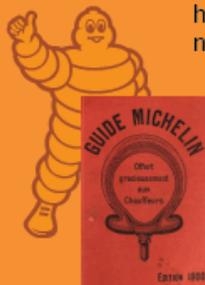


1895

John Deere launches its customer magazine, **The Furrow**. Still published today, it now has a circulation of 1.5 million, and is distributed in 40 countries and 12 different languages.

1900

Michelin develops **The Michelin Guide**. The 400-page guide (still published today with its iconic red cover) helps drivers maintain their cars and find decent lodging when traveling.

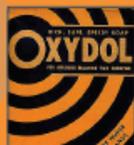


1904

The Jell-O company distributes free copies of its first **Jell-O Recipe Book**, contributing to the company's sales of over \$1 million by 1906.

1930s

Procter & Gamble begins its foray into producing radio content, in partnership with brands like **Deaf & Dumb**.



1924

Sears launches its **World's Content Marketing** **Store** radio program. With content supplied by Sears' Roebuck Agricultural Foundation, the station helps local farmers informed during



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 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 Instagram, 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 date and time. Many organizations pay for access to social media management tools like [Hootsuite](#), [Sprinkr](#) or [Sprout Social](#) with built-in calendar options that allow a review process and easy scheduling and posting.

## ***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 [A Complete Guide to Creating a Social Media Calendar](#) with more logistical details on content calendars.

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# PART 4: WRITING FOR EARNED MEDIA

Topics covered in this part include:

## **[Chapter 11: Finding and Making News](#)**

- [Understand the Media World](#)
- [Know News Values](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Ohio For Responsible Gambling](#)
- [Find Newsworthy Story Ideas](#)
- [Be a Gatekeeper](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Summer Safety Blog Post Piggybacks on Current News](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Making “Into the Deep” Into National News](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Missy Gleason, OhioHealth Newsroom](#)

## **[Chapter 12: Newswriting Style](#)**

- [Importance of Headlines & Leads](#)
- [Writing Strong Quotes](#)



# CHAPTER 10: FINDING AND MAKING NEWS

Public relations professionals act on behalf of their organization or client, so their role is to be an advocate for that 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 and brand journalism. She works 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:

- 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

In the video below, Gleason shares her experience finding and making news in journalism as well as public relations.



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<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=85#oembed-1>

# 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.

It's also important to understand and research the different types of earned media. Depending on the brand and its goals, a PR practitioner might be seeking coverage in Cosmopolitan magazine,

a local television news broadcast, a blog or a trade publication (which is specific to a certain industry).

When Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams collaborated with Dolly Parton for a signature flavor, they wanted coverage in food, lifestyle and entertainment media outlets. The [successful Belle Communication campaign](#) achieved this, securing even “wish-list” coverage like Rolling Stone, Billboard, People and the Late Show With Stephen Colbert. The partnership involved a prominent brand and a celebrity and spanned several different verticals, or areas of consumer interest (i.e., food, entertainment).

In a different campaign, Slide Nine partnered with Crunch time Apple Growers to increase consumer awareness of the SnapDragon apple. Earned media was part of a [larger campaign](#), but it looked at very different media outlets, including trade publications like Fruit Growers News.

It's crucial to do the research to have a strong understanding of what media outlets and reporters can help an organization best achieve specific objectives or reach key audiences.

# 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.

# How the Pros Do It: Ohio For Responsible Gambling

Ohio made sports betting legal in January 2023. Ohio For Responsible Gambling launched a campaign to promote responsible sports wagering to help connect people with available toolkits if they or someone they knew had a potential problem.

[Irvin PR](#) partnered with ORG to help people understand the scope and scale of problem gambling in Ohio and where to go to identify problems for themselves or others they know.

**How to gamble responsibly, watch for warning signs and identify risky behaviors during Problem Gambling Awareness Month: 3 Things to Know podcast**

Ohio Lottery's Karen Russo and Problem Gambling Network of Ohio's Mike Buzzelli join Stephanie Haney on the 3 Things to Know podcast



The legalization of sports betting made this campaign timely and local, but Irvin PR also gathered information on the scope and scale of problem gambling in Ohio. They found that the number of calls to Ohio's Problem Gambling Helping had gone up each of the last five years and nearly tripled in January 2023. Research showed callers were getting younger and that the amount of time spent playing before realizing there was an issue went down, signaling that the behavior was becoming more addictive. This data showed the significance and impact of the ORG campaign.

Irvin PR then considered the human interest news value and compiled personal anecdotes from people who lived with addiction or were impacted by people living with this issue. They explored efforts and research to combat problem gambling and had statewide experts available to talk to media.

The campaign received 322 media placements during the first three months of 2023 and achieved the objective of appearing in every major Ohio media market (Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo, Youngstown).

View the complete [Irvin PR case study](#) for more information on this campaign.

# 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.

Public relations practitioners can pitch newsworthy story ideas to reporters. They can also publish their own newsworthy content, practicing “brand journalism” or “corporate journalism.” This allows readers to find the content directly, and it often results in coverage by other media as well because the information has news value. It can also be a help to the declining number of journalists working hard to cover the news. There were more than six public relations specialists for every reporter in 2018, the [Muck Rack blog](#) reported using U.S. Census Bureau data.

OhioHealth got a great response from the public and media for its Secret Lives series, which showed the other sides of physicians, nurses and subject matter experts. One [article](#) highlighted a nurse who pursues her passion for singing on the side and [another](#) a physician assistant who volunteers at a pay-what-you-can-afford café.

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.

# How the Pros Do It: Making "Into the Deep" Into National News

Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau partnered with integrated communication agency [Fahlgren Mortine](#) to raise awareness of a first-of-its-kind deep-sea exhibition that opened in spring 2022.

The campaign sought national media coverage for the new "Into the Deep" exhibit to inspire leisure and business travelers to experience the Monterey County region with overnight visits.

Fahlgren identified 100 media outlets to target throughout the year, researching journalists with an affinity for stories highlighting the top destinations for the coming year. Fahlgren also mined for story angles tied to the Into the Deep exhibit that would resonate with national morning show targets: CBS Mornings, Good Morning America and TODAY.

In December 2021, Fahlgren Mortine found a CBS Mornings' TikTok video featuring footage of a phantom jellyfish sighting in Monterey Bay. The team leverage this timely content to connect with the show about the new exhibition. They saw that the footage aired as part of the show's "What to Watch" segment and used LinkedIn to find the producer of that segment. They sent a custom pitch to that producer and followed up several times. Based on questions from the producer, they uncovered additional research on how deep-sea life could be helping to protect the planet.



The CBS Mornings segment was six minutes and broadcast to an audience of nearly 7 million people. It also appeared on CBSnews.com, which garners more 22 million unique visitors monthly. The campaign also secured 58 earned media placements in outlets such as Outside Magazine and USA Today.

See the [Fahlgren Mortine case study](#) to learn more.

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

## *Advice for Students*



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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# PART 5: WRITING FOR PAID MEDIA

Topics covered in this part include:

## **[Chapter 12: Ads and Fliers](#)**

- [How the Pros Do It: Targeted Messages Show Where Grinnell College Shines](#)

## **[Chapter 13: Video Messaging](#)**

- [Role of Video Messaging in PR](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Gonzaga Experience “Unfolds” Leading Up to March Madness](#)
- [PR Pro Advice: Mark Love, Ologie](#)
- [Areas of Caution](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Eggs Across America](#)
- [How the Pros Do It: Combatting Distracted Driving](#)

## **[Chapter 14: 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 II: ADS AND FLIERS

The lines between advertising and marketing and public relations become very blurry in today's communication world. For example, public relations professionals looking to build and protect an organization's reputation and develop relationships with different audiences may need to run a paid ad to build awareness or shift perceptions of a brand.

Ads often pair words with visuals, though not always. Written words can also translate into an audio ad. So content can range from just a few words to a complete article that runs as a paid ad in a media outlet but looks very similar to the earned content.

Paid ads tend to carry less credibility with consumers than owned, earned or shared media. Consumers often ignore or actively avoid paid ads unless ad content directly addresses something they want or need. But the advertising industry continues to evolve and look for ways to put relevant messaging in front of consumers at just the right time in ways that benefit both the consumer and the advertiser. A win-win. Even if ads are placed in the right place at the right time, the written content for paid media needs to capture reader interest and quickly showcase a benefit for the reader – often in very few words.

PR professionals need to consider not only the target audience, but also the advertising format. Oftentimes, a similar message must be reformatted for multiple ad formats. A campaign might run ads on streaming audio and on billboards in target cities. The messaging needs to feel consistent but be a fit for those very different formats.



# How the Pros Do It: Targeted Messages Show Where Grinnell College Shines

Grinnell College saw itself as a small liberal arts college in the middle of Iowa. But when the team from marketing and branding agency [Ologie](#) visited campus, they saw a community with academic excellence that chose to study far from urban distraction. A college and town that became the birthplace of extraordinary journeys.

Ologie created ads for different audience segments by program, major and interests. The ads focused on three messages:



As Ologie launched the campaign, they also tracked responses and optimized ads to focus communications on the most engaged prospects by audience segments.

“By testing messages in real time and pivoting as data would suggest, we’ve appreciated the opportunity to use empirical evidence to inform marketing decisions,” Joseph Bagnoli, Jr., vice president for enrollment, dean of admission and financial aid.

The campaign generated a 64% increase in applications and a 12% increase in prospective students who feel “very familiar” with Grinnell.

Read more about [Ologie’s work with Grinnell College](#).

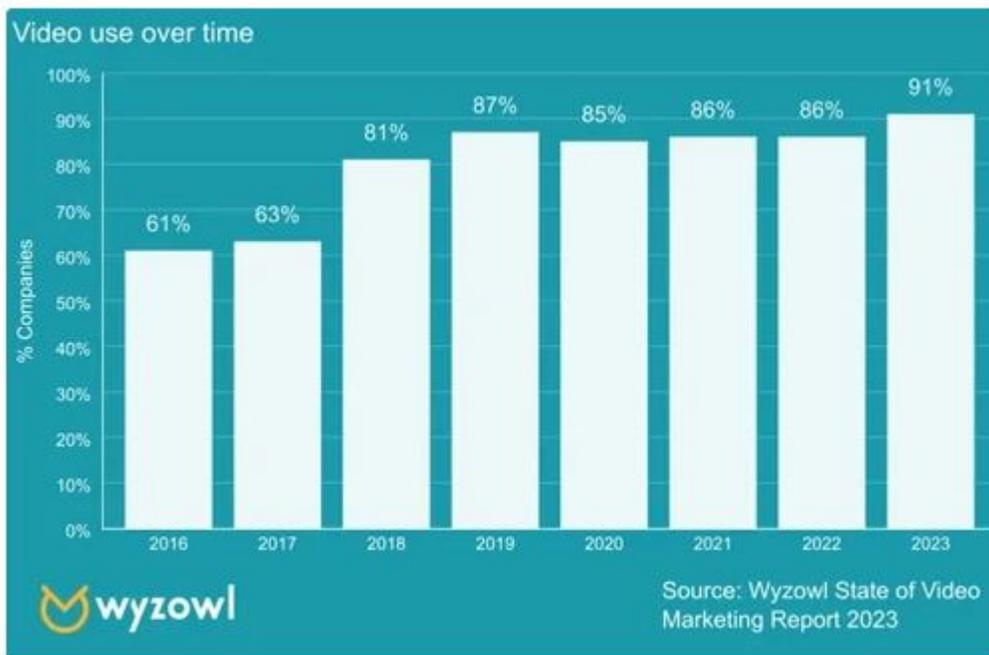
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# CHAPTER 12: VIDEO MESSAGING

A few statistics to consider when discussing whether video should be included in the strategic message creation discussion:

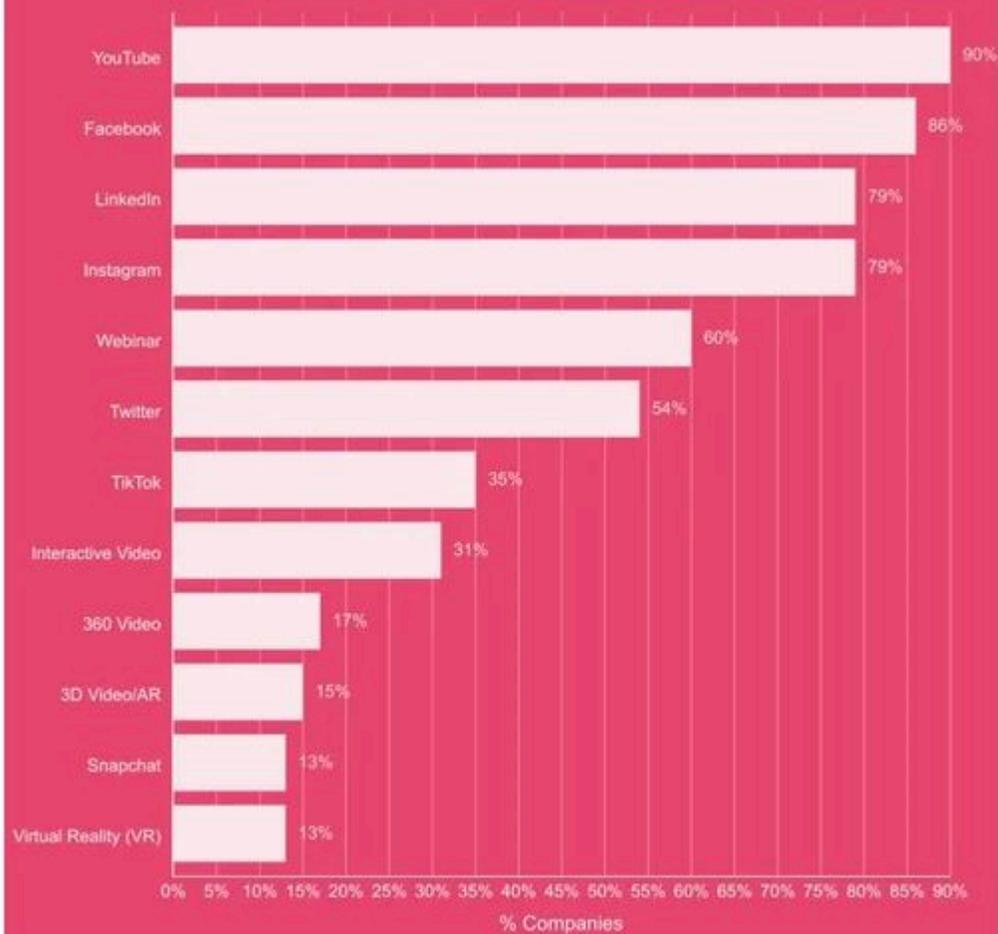
- Video accounted for an estimated [82% of all internet traffic](#) in 2022.
- In 2023, 91% of businesses reported using video as a marketing tool (an all-time high) according to the [Wyzowl State of Video Marketing Report](#). In the same report, people reported watching an average of 17 hours of online videos per week.



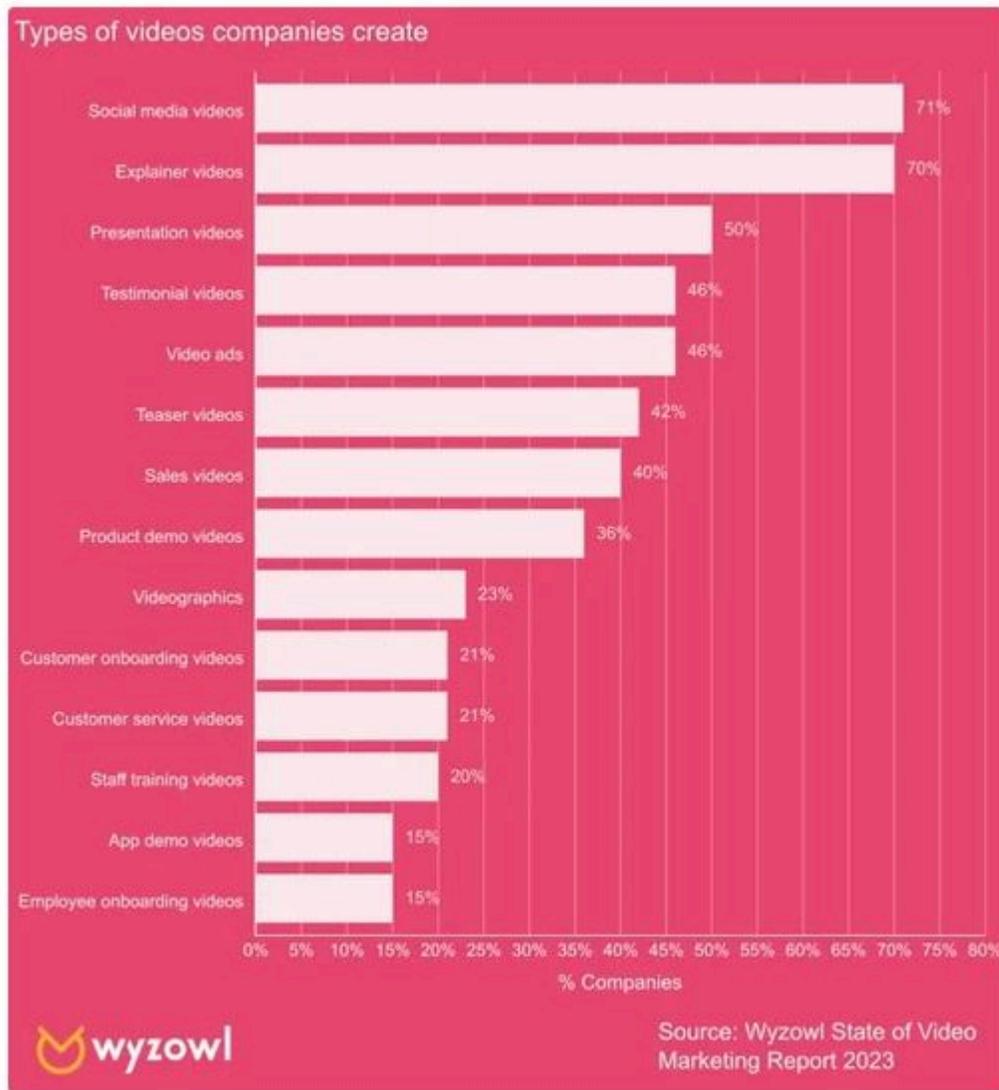
- A [2023 Hubspot study](#) showed that 66% of consumers watched video content to learn about a brand or product.
- [YouTube](#) has more than 2 billion unique monthly visitors and functions as the second-largest search engine in the world after Google.

Companies use many channels for video messaging. The length and type of content depends on the audience, the goal and where the video will appear. Organizations can also multi-purpose content, with longer-form content appearing on YouTube and shorter content becoming a television or social media ad for example.

### Video channels companies have used



Source: Wyzowl State of Video Marketing Report 2023



The American Red Cross produced the award-winning long-form video “[A Bloody Nightmare](#)” to encourage viewers to donate blood. The video pokes fun at cliché horror movie scenes, and actress Neve Campbell of the Scream movies tells viewers that what’s really scary is that 50% of Americans like watching blood get spilled in horror movies while only 3% donate it.



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# 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.

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. He says to 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.

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.



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<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=153#oembed-1>

# 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.

# 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.

# How the Pros Do It: Eggs Across America

To recognize U.S. egg farmers' contributions during the annual Hunger Action Month in September, the American Egg Board, the national marketing organization for America's egg farmers, worked with [Inspire PR Group](#) to create a short video with participating egg farmers from across the nation. The [Eggs Across America video](#) highlighted the many contributions America's egg farmers make to their local hunger relief providers.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=1073#oembed-1>

The video was designed to educate American consumers about the outstanding contributions U.S. egg farmers made toward hunger relief. The video included critical messages, eye-catching animations and a call-to-action for viewers to support their local food bank. The video incorporated clips of real U.S. egg farmers “passing” an AEB-branded egg carton from coast-to-coast.

AEB leveraged the Virtual Pass Challenge video concept that was trending on social media at the time of production. It received nearly 10,000 views across Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Learn more about Inspire PR's [American Egg Board campaign](#).

# How the Pros Do It: Reducing Distracted Driving

Integrated communication agency [Fahlgren Mortine](#) worked with the Ohio Department of Public Safety on a campaign to educate Ohioans about the state's new distracted driving law. The discovery process identified young drivers as the primary audience for the campaign.

When writing for young drivers, the Fahlgren team worked to find a voice and tone that would be authentic and familiar, that would educate without lecturing.

This video shows two teens bantering about the new law in a way that feels authentic to Gen Z. The video secured a nomination for an Ohio Valley Regional EMMY award.



*One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:*

<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=1077#oembed-1>

Learn more about Fahlgren Mortine's [work with the Ohio Department of Public Safety](#).

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# CHAPTER 13: 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.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/writelikeapro/?p=84#oembed-1>

# 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 differences 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 Olympics, but they send different messages and so select different facts and visuals to support each message.

## Message #1: [USA Athlete Performance](#)

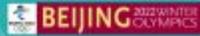


## Message #2: [Olympic Games Fuel Economy](#)

# Beijing 2022 fuels economy

## Editor's Note:

The Beijing Winter Olympic Games will bring direct and indirect economic benefits in more than 50 industries, including environment, health, ecology, sport, science and technology and transportation. The 2022 Beijing Olympics will focus more on industrial upgrading, green and sustainable development, people's well-being and the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the 2008 Beijing Olympics boosted China's GDP by an average of 0.3 percent a year from 2002 to 2008.



## BALANCE SHEET OF BEIJING 2022

**\$1.51 billion**

**Other costs included** investments in hardware equipment, food and beverage and other areas

**Green costs**  
**Zero emission bus**  
 About 3,000 hydrogen-fueled buses will be deployed in competition zones. Each hydrogen bus traveling 100,000 kilometers can reduce CO<sub>2</sub> by about 11.8 tons.

**Clean energy**  
 Solar- and wind-powered Zhangbei flexible direct current power grid enables Beijing Winter Olympic Games to use **100 percent green and clean electricity** for the first time in the Olympic history.

**Revenue**  
**Broadcast**  
 AI, VR-powered broadcasting

**8K signals** provided for the first time for broadcasting

**Licensed product**  
 By December 2021, **45 sponsors, 29 licensed manufacturers and 58 licensed retailers** have signed up for the Beijing Winter Olympics. More than **5,000 licensed products** in 16 categories have been developed.

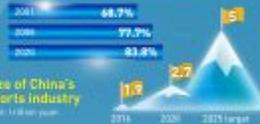


## INDUSTRIES BOOSTED

The Beijing Winter Olympics will significantly boost formation and infrastructure construction in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and create about **400,000 jobs** in sports, culture, tourism.

Stocks of digital, green, hydrogen energy, AI, ice and snow industry and other sectors have been favored by the capital market.

## The proportion of service industry in Beijing's GDP



## Size of China's sports industry



## Market size of sports competition and performance



## Market size of sport footwear and clothing

**598.9 billion yuan** by 2025

## Market size of ice equipment

**15 billion yuan** by 2025

**346 million** people participated in snow and ice sports nationwide by October 2021

## ICE AND SNOW INDUSTRY

### The number of snow and ice tourists in China



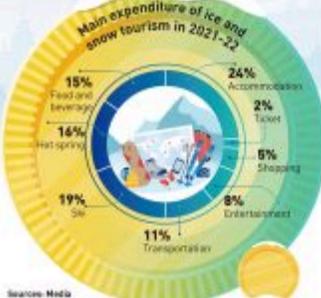
Note: The periods are snow and ice seasons, from October to April.  
 \* The numbers are forecasts.

### Scale of China's ice and snow industry



China is currently the world's largest primary ski market, according to a white paper of China's ski industry.

### Number of ice rinks and ski resorts



Source: Media research, industry association

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, the free online tool [Canva](#) provides 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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