



### **Corporate: Influencer Relations**

This case study explains how SEO-PR and *Parents* Magazine are proactively engaging and building relationships with bloggers and new influencers as part of an initiative, campaign, or ongoing program.

- **State the Problem / Challenge to Be Addressed:**

Sometimes you can be a victim of your own success. Such was the case facing the boutique search and public relations agency called SEO-PR. The specialist firm was called in late in the game to help *Parents* magazine promote a reader contest for the 2008 “Baby Photo Contest.”

Despite starting from behind, the firm was wildly successful securing more than 85,000 entrants.

**Here in lies the challenge:** for its 2009 contest, *Parents* magazine wanted to exceed the number of entrants secured from the previous year. Any increase over 85,000 entrants would be a magnificent accomplishment.

- **Describe the communications issue to be addressed / solved**

SEO-PR learned from its previous experience that keeping news of the contest alive until the deadline for entry was pivotal to driving registrants. After the initial press release announcing the contest, how could *Parents* magazine keep their contest top of mind?

Given the first call for entrants would be issued on April 2, 2009 and the deadline for entry would end on June 24, 2009, what could be done to keep the news alive for the three-month duration?

SEO-PR also faced a second substantial challenge. As a major niche publication, *Parents* magazine would find it unlikely that similar publications, vying for the attention of the same audience, would promote its contest. Consequently, SEO-PR turned to the blogging community as potential partners.

- **Define the target audience:**

The target audience was two-fold. First, SEO-PR aimed to reach a direct audience of parents or legal guardians with children ages three-months to six years of age. Second, they aimed to reach a blogging community that had influence over this target audience, colloquially known as “mom bloggers” and “family bloggers” where the latter is a pair of writers, for example a mother and a father, who team together to publish a blog. Building relationships with these key bloggers – through interpersonal and technological means – would be pivotal to their success.

- **Goals & objectives:**

The contest that *Parents* magazine conducted was not simply for publicity’s sake, rather it had a very clear goal: subscription leads. In the last couple of years new subscribers have become ever more important to print publications amid declining circulations. This contest and its success is vital to *Parents* magazine.

Every eligible entrant to the Cutest Baby Contest, by definition, meets the ideal demographic of potential subscribers to *Parents* magazine. In the process of choosing to enter the contest, entrants were required to submit contact information, such as an e-mail address, which provided *Parents* with a means to market to these prospects when the contest was over. Topping 85,000 entrants for the 2009 contest would provide a very tangible business outcome for the magazine.

- **Please describe the solution: The plan**

“The difference between search and social is the difference between information and influence,” said Greg Jarboe, co-founder of SEO-PR and principal strategist behind the *Parents* magazine communications strategy. Search is when people find information and even act on it, he explains, but social media lends influence. Bloggers have tremendous influence in social media, especially since blogging itself is social.

SEO-PR’s strategy, as the company’s name might imply, was to issue a series of four press releases optimized for search engines. Their research found that people actively searched for information under key phrases such as “baby photo contest.” The four releases would be timed appropriately to keep the news alive. The four releases would 1) announce the event; 2) provide tips from the editors for entrants submitting an application to the contest; 3) thank the blogging community for their support – this was instrumental to the relationship building; 4) announce the deadline was looming about two-weeks prior to the contest to submissions.

Search optimization would ensure people could find information, and then SEO-PR would follow up by reaching out to a targeted list of 200 bloggers that write about parenting issues. Specifically, SEO-PR looked for the so-called “mommy bloggers,” however, as evidence of their research and dedication, SEO-PR learned two key facets:

1. The so-called “mommy bloggers” view that term as derogatory and prefer to be called simply, “mom bloggers.” Getting someone’s name right when speaking to them is fundamental to building a relationship. So too is it with the blogging community, which can be highly fickle.
2. SEO-PR also learned that there’s another category of bloggers that would have an interest in the contest called, “family bloggers.” Family bloggers are distinct because they are usually a man *and* a woman – mother and father – who have teamed up to publish a blog.

- **The deployment:**

SEO-PR would issue four press releases, optimized for search with key word and create *link-backs*. The press releases were issued over PRWeb, an online news distribution service with special features to enhance search engine optimization and social media adoption. Each press release had a specific function:

- **April 2, 2009:** The first press release would announce the award. It would be optimized for search and social media using PRWeb, for example by incorporating a YouTube video packaged and distributed with the press release. Next the SEO-PR team would conduct targeted outreach to the list of 200 mom and family bloggers.
- **April 29, 2009:** The second press release would offer “Tips from the Editors” on entering the contest. For example, the editors often observed parents like to submit photos of their children in hats, yet hats often obstruct the view of a baby’s face in a photo and so would diminish an entrant’s chance of being selected as winners. This second release would serve to help keep the news top of mind, provide another opportunity to communicate with mom and family bloggers, and offer a second useful topic for a blog post. This release would also be optimized for search to improve *Parents* standing in search engines for key words like “baby photo contest.”
- **May 29, 2009:** The third release would be central to the *influence* and blogger-relations aspect of SEO-PR’s strategy. This release would *thank* the mom and family bloggers for writing about the contest – and more importantly reward key bloggers for their participation and contributions. Specifically the release would cite seven such blogs, who were not only participating in the contest, but had gone

“above and beyond” by sharing the information and lending their social influence. The press release cited these blogs by name and *included links* to those blogs helping to drive traffic and visibility both for the contest and for those individual blogs. Saying “thank you” and pointing out the selfless act of information sharing both further solidified the existing relationships with mom and family bloggers and also encouraged additional bloggers to also write about the contest. Again, this press release was optimized for the search engines and integrated social media aspects like the YouTube video.

- **June 12, 2009:** The fourth and last release would be the final call to action – a looming deadline can often provide powerful motivation for entering the contest. However, SEO-PR never forgot its fundamental principles – that people search for information and social media bears influence. This enabled SEO-PR with one more opportunity to go back to the blogging community it had previously and very publically thanked, with one final blog post idea. This press release was also optimized for search on PRWeb, incorporated social media like YouTube.

- **Were there any obstacles or challenges that needed to be overcome?**

SEO-PR faced three challenges, or potential challenges with regard to their communications strategy:

The first challenge was keeping the news alive for the duration of the contest. Once the initial release was issued, SEO-PR found creative ways in the following three press releases to keep the news interesting and top of mind.

The second challenge was communicating clearly that professional photography was not permissible. During the previous year’s competition, SEO-PR learned that entrants had attempted to use professional photographers and those entrants were disqualified.

The third challenge was concern over what impact the current economic situation might have on the contest. As it turned out, the recession was not a factor as there did not appear to be a recession in babies.

- **The tools involved:**

PRWeb was selected as the vendor of choice for online news distribution because the service has special features to enhance search engine optimization and enables the incorporation of social media.

PRWeb has developed an impressive network of distribution and syndication partners – that includes bellwethers like Google News, Yahoo! News, the Associated Press and Ask.com – and makes its customers’ news available to more than 70 million unique visitors in the United States alone. In addition to the PRWeb syndication network, PRWeb news releases are distributed *directly* to an audience of more than two million visitors each month on PRWeb.com including 250,000 RSS subscribers and 35,000 reporters and bloggers.

This network is important to SEO-PR because every time a network partners syndicates an optimized press release, it provides an additional hyperlink back to the contest’s Web site. Search engines recognize these links and boost visibility of the Web site in association with the key words – in this case “baby photo contest.”

PRWeb has also consistently led the market with innovative improvements. It was the first online news distribution provider to integrate social media and multi-media channels into its service. For example, PRWeb was the first major newswire to allow customers to imbed YouTube videos directly into online news releases.

Today, PRWeb has integrated a variety of other social media tools – key to SEO-PR’s efforts on behalf of *Parents* magazine – that increase a given press release’s visibility online including these two:

- **ShareThis.** The ShareThis feature enables readers to bookmark a press release over PRWeb with the social bookmarking tool of their choice. This includes common sites like Digg and Delicious and newer applications such as Stumbleupon, Yahoo!’s Buzz Up! and Google’s Bookmarks. It also provides the means to *re-publish* an article on popular social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn. These features made it very easy for the blogging community to share information with their social media community.
- **Social Media Video, Podcasts and Photo Integration.** PRWeb provides its customers with an easy way to incorporate a range of multimedia options into their press release distribution. For example, YouTube videos, podcasts and photos or logos can be easily packaged with the text of a press release – this breathes life into news announcements and search engine optimization. SEO-PR made great use of photos and multi-media, which provided mom and family bloggers with interesting visuals they could publish alongside their blog post.

- **The team / roles / components of program:**

SEO-PR divides their team role and program components exactly as their name indicates – one part focuses on search engine optimization and the other on public relations and specifically outreach; in this case outreach to bloggers.

- **Results: Describe qualitative and/or quantitative measures of success:**

The results of the campaign were nothing less than tremendous:

- *Parents* magazine secured 129,155 entrants to their contest, surpassing the previous year's benchmark by nearly 50 percent.
- PRWeb's analytics definitively measured the press release impressions and full page reads; collectively the four press releases secured 665,168 headline impressions and 8,865 full page reads. The fact that nearly 9,000 people personally read these press releases is a remarkable feat.
- Parents' Web site ranked #1 on key search terms including "baby photo contest."
- Search rankings were boosted in part because the press releases and subsequent blog posts produced 446 back links to six pages on Parents' Web site dedicated to the baby photo contest.
- The YouTube video received 888 views helping to drive search engine traffic.
- A search on Google Blogs demonstrates 76 bloggers posted references to Parents' baby photo contest.
- To demonstrate the influence of those blog posts, and the importance of including multi-media in press releases, five of blogs alone that linked to the photo contest Web site received 682,399 unique visitors in the month of June 2009 alone.

- **How do these results specifically map to the objectives stated above**

The results map precisely to the stated goals; *Parents* magazine secured 129,155 potential new subscribers.

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