PUBLIC RELATIONS — THE TOOLS FOR UNILATERAL COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE ON THE INTERNET

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Summary

The development of technology and IT tools have brought about an extraordinary acceleration of the public relations branch around the whole world. We live in the times of revolution in communication, in which one year is whole eternity. Messages, the speed of their publication, the tools are changing. The sender and the recipient, who have become used to the dynamics of the message and the fact that it is and will be distributed without spatial and temporal limitations, are changing too. Netscape browser, wp.pl, the era of Wikipedia, Facebook, dynamically developing YouTube, or Nasza Klasa, Twitter and a whole range of other tools from the scope of social media, as well as monitoring systems[1] — these are just chosen stages, or as others think, milestones in the pursuit of novelty and new forms of distribution of information. It is in times like these that public relations experts have to create, send and receive messages. Back at the end of 1990's hardly anyone expected that such changes could take place. It is also hard to predict what we will see in a few, or a dozen years. One thing is certain, namely, that changes will be taking place and will be even faster than now.

As the currently modern media already have a significant impact on voting decisions, or social transformation, the process is analysed and studied in detail. Moreover, what is subject to research is the question whether communication on the Internet should be based on mass communication, or rather on an individual approach. Private individuals make decisions based on their own needs, but companies have to analyse many factors that influence final decisions concerning the choice of tools, or the very decision concerning communication. Among these factors there are: scope, availability of tools, even the branch in which a company is active.

This article includes a presentation of chosen tools used in the process of unilateral communication with the environment, but also tools used for dialogue. Unilateral communication discussed in this article doesn't assume a response from the recipient, apart from a possible decision to take action in form of purchase, or clicking. At the same time dialogue gives the opportunity to interact, exchange thoughts and ideas, direct assessment. Moreover, the benefits from the process of conducting dialogue online, as well as the barriers hampering the dialogue will be presented. Also, the directions of changes taking place in association with the dynamic development of online communication tools and processes will be presented.

Keywords: public relations, marketing, media, communication tools, communication, new technology, online marketing, social media

Internet — directions of development and changes in distribution of information

Currently, business analyses the implementation of technologies and methods of communication with the environment allowing to build competitive advantage. However, it is worth pointing out that already now there is a whole range of various tools for communication and building relations by using the Internet, which attract more, or less attention. They can be divided into the following way:

1. Tools used for unilateral communication, or a support for this communication:
   a. Internet websites
   b. sponsored links
   c. positioning
   d. banners
   e. mailing
2. tools used in dialogue
   a. message boards
   b. social media
   c. viral videos
   d. blogs
3. other tools influencing unilateral communication, conducting a dialogue, engaging entities within the direct, or indirect circle of companies' interest:
   a. press offices for direct and indirect communication with the media
   b. tools monitoring online activity
      i. GOOGLE systems
      ii. companies' systems and solutions developed by companies themselves
      iii. tools for monitoring Internet media
      iv. tools for monitoring blogs, activity on message boards and others.

Despite dynamic development, the emergence and implementation of new technological solutions, there is still a significant gap between the expected condition and reality in terms of not just access, but above all the

will to use IT tools and Internet for handling social dialogue. This results from, among others, the following premises:

a) lack of trust for this form of communication (using the Internet) and building relations,
b) lack of ability to take advantage of modern technological solutions,
c) fears and other limitations associated with, for example, age or approach of some people in the management who still regard IT tools and something that doesn't directly bring benefits to their companies,
d) the specific character of branches and particular activities.

Other barriers have been presented in the further part of the article, however, the most significant ones are the result of limitations of mainly psychological character.

Benefits and barriers associated with communication and dialogue online

Among significant benefits we need to pay attention to during the analysis of the process of dialogue conducted online is the opportunity to reach precisely defined target groups. Internet very accurately segments and allows finding users characterized by particular features and profile associated with, for example, interests, or expectations. With such a defined and clearly selected group, it is possible to design a message, content aimed at this group, which will be later placed in the most suitable location. This way we can achieve concentration of spending and thus, we can save not just funds, but also time. Another benefit brought by the Internet is speed. The only blockade in this area is the time we need to prepare and accept contents on the level of company management, as its distribution can be immediate. Another benefit is certainly the low cost of online activity. Reaching the people interested in a particular message is obviously many times less expensive than in case of actions in traditional media. However, both the Internet and traditional media can efficiently complement each other. Both individuals and companies, which under normal circumstances would be unable to attract attention, often gain recognition and acceptance

by means of the Internet. Internet is also a huge database of knowledge, which it would be hard to obtain outside the Internet.

However, it is necessary to point out that apart from benefits, there are also barriers associated with online communication. The first problem is very high speed of change, which requires continuous monitoring of the environment and fast adaptation of a company's actions to changes in the instruments. Another barriers is much greater susceptibility to crises, compared to traditional media. Such crises can spread and grow much faster online, than in the world outside the Internet. It is also a fact that the Internet gives the possibility of being anonymous, which contributes to the escalation of crisis-inducing factors, as many entities, or persons with a competing goal may take up negative actions thanks to the feeling of impunity. Here it is necessary to add that a crisis started outside the Internet can quickly make its way to the Internet and there get stronger and more serious. Another important barrier, which is visible not only in the context of societies, but also companies is the weakening of direct relations in favour of relations established online. This leads to problems of personal nature and thus, internal in companies, as this way problems associated with personality and social psychology can pile up.

Tools supporting the process
of information transfer and dialogue on the Internet

There is a whole range of tools which support dialogue on the Internet. However, in this section also tools of a unilateral character, which have little to do with dialogue, will be presented. It is these tools that often lead to dialogue, constitute its basis and a starting point. They are also an element of the whole process of reaching the recipients.

One of such tools of unilateral communication is Internet website, which constitutes a basic element in the process of delivering often very broad contents to groups of recipients. What's important is that this content fully depends on the sender. Together with Internet websites, banners play a significant role in unilateral communication, despite their weakening role, they are still used in the process of promotion. Thus, mini-games encouraging to make decisions concerning the choice between

options appearing in association with a user's activity, are still being developed. Banners include a message, which we display and which we want to deliver to the final recipient. Their form and what they communicate have the biggest influence on reception in times of very big amount of advertising materials, which reach us as consumers of messages and informative contents.

One of the tools used this time mainly for strictly promotional purposes, in the context of the Internet website of a company/institution, are sponsored links. They are used mainly to promote an Internet service, but they are based on contents created around them. The effects is the establishment of direct links from particular locations on the Internet to the promoted service. It is possible to keep the costs of such activities in check, as links are often purchased based on the PPC system — pay per click.

An important and very often used form of promotion on the Internet is positioning. The main purpose of positioning in Internet search engines is achieving a situation in which the link to the desired website is positioned as high up in the list of the results of search by particular key words as possible. Currently, position in search engines means not only success in terms of image, but also success in sales. Research has shown that Internet users tend to reach for information and data contained in the upper half of the first page of search results. That's why Internet websites fight for the highest position. Positioning consists of two main stages. The first one is the analysis of the current position of the service in search engines, the second one is preparation of a list of key words, which typed in a search engine make it possible to find the Internet service. On their basis the proper stage of the positioning process is carried out.

What is becoming more and more invasive and thus less and less efficient is another of the presented tools, namely, mailing. This is an online equivalent of direct mail, which is supposed to build relations, encourage a purchase, attract new clients, or convince potential clients of the value of a company's product.[2] Regardless of the fact, whether the dispatch is carried out by means of own mailing system, on the basis of own e-mail database, or based on purchased solutions, or databases from companies offering for sale databases compiled based on own research, more and more often mail boxes are arranged in such a way that what

looks like spam is filtered out and eliminated. For this reason the efficiency of such form of contact is dropping.

What helps in online discussion, taking into consideration the accompanying goal of supporting communicational and promotional activities, is activity on message boards. In this case achieving the desired effect is possible only when discussion is planned and takes place on the most popular message boards in a particular area of interest. Posting comments on message boards makes it possible to not just conduct a non-invasive[3] dialogue, but above all, reaching groups of people directly interested in problems that we want to and plant to inform about.

Apart from message boards, what plays a major role in dialogue ae social media, in which contents are created by users themselves. Thanks to this they have now become very popular channels of communication. Micro-blogs, social games, fora for posting and distribution of videos, chats, all of this constitutes not just a challenge but also a response to the needs associated with the development of the market. The current stage of development of the Internet is called by some the era of Facebook, which is the biggest social media portal in the world.[4] Apart from Facebook, other services such as YouTube, Nasza-klasa.pl, Golden Line, Flickr, Crowdstorm, Slideshare, Skype, PHORUM, meebo, Myspace.com, LinkedIn, Twitter, Tweetpeek, Instagram and hundreds of others around the whole world lead to a situation in which direct relations are pushed aside and more and more, not just young people, get to know each other, exchange information, maintains contact by means of the social media. They are created taking into consideration such parameters as age, sex, or interests. In social media also companies have many new, exciting possibilities of communicating with current and potential clients, partners and employees, which were not available before the arrival of social media Internet.[5] Running a Facebook fanpage a company can not only promote its services and products, announce special offers, launch new products on the market, but can also efficiently communicate and that includes also recruitment.[6]

Younger and younger generations are entering the world of Internet and due to the intuitive nature of applications, kids don't start with playing on a playground, but with searching for data on the Internet, or independent communication with relatives. What is the reason for such a

dynamic growth of interest in social media? Certainly, the fact that in this case we are really dealing with dialogue, conversation, which is not controlled by anyone, but at the same time can be held in any location and time (it is enough to have access to the Internet). Another factor, which suggests that social media are starting to play an ever more significant role in social, but also economic life is that the dialogue in social media is open to argumentation, unrestricted and often exhaustive, further, it allows acquiring full information. What is becoming a norm in the process of social communication is spreading to the economy and its elements such as companies. Thus, not only young people, but also commercial entities take advantage of the tools enabling dialogue.

Another interesting communication tool using the Internet are viral videos. Adapting a video to the purposes of a campaign together with the target group, in combination with the script and form in which the video is prepared, gives the effect in form of an interesting, inspiring form of contact and promotion. Nowadays, the combination of short video forms and promotion, especially on a YouTube channel brings measurable promotional effects.

The last tool that will be presented in this article is blog. As opposed to an Internet website of a company, blog gives the possibility of interaction, which is not available on an Internet website. Blog enables discussion, answering questions, lively reactions, convincing people of a company's arguments. This is certainly not what an Internet website can provide. However, in order to be efficient a blog has to contain not just the above-mentioned element of interaction, but has to be run continuously. Posting new information once in six months is far from enough and may cause frustration among the recipients, leading even to the emergence and deepening of crisis situation.

The mentioned tools constitute a kind of a list of chosen forms of unilateral contact, or dialogue between a company/organization and the social environment, which are now created not only by clients, or potential clients, but also a series of other entities exerting a smaller, or greater influence on the functioning of a company. Both the first group of tools, that is, those used for unilateral communication and the second group of tools, that is, the tools supporting its functioning, but on the basis of rules of dialogue, currently play a very important role, not only in sales, but also

in the area of building and maintaining image. Aware companies pay attention to this.

Unfortunately, not everyone is aware of the fact that once published, information and data remain online, whether you like it, or not. By means of an Internet search engine, or special programmes it is possible to collect in one place all data concerning a particular user, his address, financial condition, etc. The same concerns commercial entities, that's why it is advisable to be aware of these risks in order to take advantage of opportunities provided by the Internet without harming yourself and the company.[7]

Prospects for the development of tools supporting communication

At the beginning of the 21st century the economy is undergoing a transformation from the production-service model to production-service-creative model, which means that at the expense of work in the industry (where more and more tasks are subject to the process of automation), new jobs appear in the area of communication.[8] In the coming months and years we will still be experiencing the process of changes that affect and will affect dialogue and communication on the Internet. The era of information is a fact and for this reason there will be further tools and new devices, which will be more and more visual and based on graphic and video content.[9] Business analysts predict that more and more organizations and companies will be adding social media to the range of their communication tools.[10] Not just social media portals, but also many other tools used for communication on the Internet will undergo a revolution, which involves continuous adaptation to the recipients' expectations. We may try to guess what the future will bring, but certainly over the next dozen years we will make a similar progress as the Internet has made since the 1990's.[11]

The changes discussed here are the result of not just the needs exposed by the participants of the process, but also the monitoring of these groups conducted continuously. One of the monitoring methods is eyetracking, which makes it possible to identify the elements attracting

attention of users viewing particular messages on the Internet. These surveys also make it possible to identify the elements which attract the attention of the surveyed to the greatest degree and the longest, they also make it possible to determine the model and the direction of space scanning by the recipient's sight. This is just one of surveying tools, which gives us the possibility of monitoring not just the current state, but also changes in the area of perception of what we receive as content and target image by means of the Internet. Certainly, not only eyetracking, but also a series of other projects will lead to a situation in which on the basis of continuously acquired information, more and more tools for unilateral communication, as well as online dialogue will be created. Here it is necessary to point out that both are necessary in current social reality.

To sum it up, it is worth adding that efficient online dialogue is possible, but only when certain conditions are satisfied. First of all, companies have to listen to and answer to changes in the environment, as only this way observation can lead to creative ideas. Moving further, from the point of view of companies and organizations, it is necessary to monitor the activities of the competition and taking reactive actions. Actually, it would be best to move faster than the rivals and be Ahead of them, but this will be possible when e.g. the company takes up the challenge in form of experimenting and implements solutions broadly used in social communication for its business needs. Going further, to hold efficient dialogue and not just communicate based on tools making it possible to push contents in just one direction, it is necessary to skilfully use the tools discussed in this article. It is worth engaging those who build efficient relations in modern media and communication channels based on the social environment. Finally, it is necessary to be prepared for crisis situations, which unfortunately in association with the lack of temporal and spatial limitations, which are often the advantage of modern communication and dialogue tools, are becoming an element of daily life which causes the frustration and fears of the managers. Crisis can lead to serious image problems. This is what you have to pay attention to most of all, as the consequences of a crisis may be very serious, including company bankruptcy.

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[2] Reed, J. (2011). *Szybkie łącze z klientami. Marketing internetowy*. Wydawnictwo Helion, Gliwice, p. 77–78.

[3] Takiego, który nie będzie odebrany przez społeczność uczestniczącą w dyskusji jako działanie stricte reklamowe, prowadzone przez firmę w celu nakłonienia do zakupu określonego towaru lub usługi.

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[7] *Bezpieczne korzystanie z internetu*. Wydawnictwo Wiedza i Praktyka, p. 19.

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