

THE

INBOUND

MARKETER'S

GUIDE TO

EARNED MEDIA

Where Content Marketing Meets Digital PR



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INTRODUCTION

Savvy executives continue to raise the short-term and long-term ROI expectations of online marketing campaigns, forcing marketers to explore new and more efficient ways of reaching their customers. As a result, a new strategy has emerged that has become one of the most effective ways to simultaneously generate leads, increase brand awareness and earn web traffic from search engines, social media influencers and online media outlets. This strategy is unique, as it leverages editorial influence to reach targeted prospects in a natural way. The results lift your brand out of interruptive online advertisements, like YouTube commercials, and place them into feature stories.

This strategy is known as Earned Media Marketing. It's a balanced combination of content marketing and digital PR. Earned media is one of three types of media that covers all major marketing channels.

90%

OF WEB TRAFFIC COMES FROM

UNPAID EARNED MEDIA

**SAVVY EXECUTIVES
CONTINUE TO RAISE THE**

**SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM
ROI EXPECTATIONS
OF ONLINE MARKETING CAMPAIGNS,
FORCING MARKETERS TO EXPLORE**

**NEW AND MORE
EFFICIENT WAYS
OF REACHING THEIR CUSTOMERS**

THE 3 DIGITAL MEDIA TYPES

EARNED MEDIA

Earning recognition or exposure from any media that gains recognition or exposure from people or organizations outside of your own (e.g. organic search, social media influencers, online media outlets, blogs, forums and online communities).

OWNED MEDIA

Any media that is owned and controlled by your brand (e.g. your websites, blogs, mobile apps and social presences).

PAID MEDIA

Advertising or purchasing exposure from any media created and controlled by people or organizations outside of your own (e.g. paid search ads, YouTube commercials, display ad networks and affiliate advertising).

The most effective earned media strategies are almost always centered on highly relevant, helpful and entertaining content that will be shared and consumed by a target demographic group. This content can be in the form of a PDF, video, how-to guide or any other value-add piece of content.

EVEN THE MOST RELEVANT CONTENT WON'T PROMOTE ITSELF

A digital PR effort is necessary to earn the media placements that will consistently put your content in front of the eyes of your target audiences. Connecting with online media outlets, the blogosphere, communities, social media influencers and search engines is crucial to earning media placements that will drive web traffic and leads.

This guide will walk you through the seven marketing results from earned media, along with the four building blocks of an effective earned media process: **RESEARCH, CREATIVE, PROMOTION AND CONVERSION**. You will learn why each step is important, as well as the value generated from each component. Common tools, tips and other process-oriented information also are included in this guide.



EARNED MEDIA RETURNS

Well-executed earned media campaigns create a digital chain reaction in which earned media placements in online media outlets, blogs and communities fuel discussion in social media and earn organic search engine traffic. This inbound traffic is then converted into leads, customers and online community members. Below is a more thorough explanation of the seven earned media results.



7

BIRDS

WITH ONLY 1

STONE





1. WEBSITE TRAFFIC AND CONVERSIONS

Web analytics often show earned media referral traffic from online media outlets, communities and blogs as having one of the highest conversion rates of any inbound source. Relevant links from earned media placements immediately drive volumes of carefully targeted inbound prospects and boost authority in search engines. Search engine algorithms consider backlinks from earned media placements to be both powerful and authoritative.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ

The social media influencers in an industry read the same online media, blogs and community content prospects do. The right earned media placements fuel meaningful conversation in social media that drives inbound prospects and creates even more authority in search engines.





Google™

3. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Inbound link popularity still rules the roost of search engine algorithms. One of the big differences between 2012 and 2013, however, is that links from social media really matter, and this is only the start of it. Earned media placements drive quality backlinks from top online press, communities, blogs and social networks.

4. OPT-IN EMAIL LIST GROWTH

Prospects will happily provide their email addresses and demographic data when offered great content. Email marketers can either buy costly prospect lists sold to other competitors, or they can build their own lists with an earned media campaign.





5. RETARGETED AUDIENCE ACCELERATION

B2C companies are experiencing great success with retargeting and remarketing campaigns. If done right, every visitor from an earned media campaign will be a potential prospect who thinks favorably about the brand's thought leadership. This interest can continue to be nurtured with relevant retargeted ads.

6. ONLINE COMMUNITY BUILDING

Having a vibrant online community is the ultimate goal of digital marketing. But building an online community is no magic bullet; it's tireless, perpetual hard work. Earned media drives new community members and discussion, and it sets the quality standard for user-generated content.





7. BRAND AWARENESS

The prior six results demonstrate the impact a successful earned media campaign can have on overall brand awareness and acceptance. Earned media is an excellent strategy for taking more “brandshare” in a marketplace. Another phrase for online brand awareness is digital relevance.

THE EARNED MEDIA PROCESS

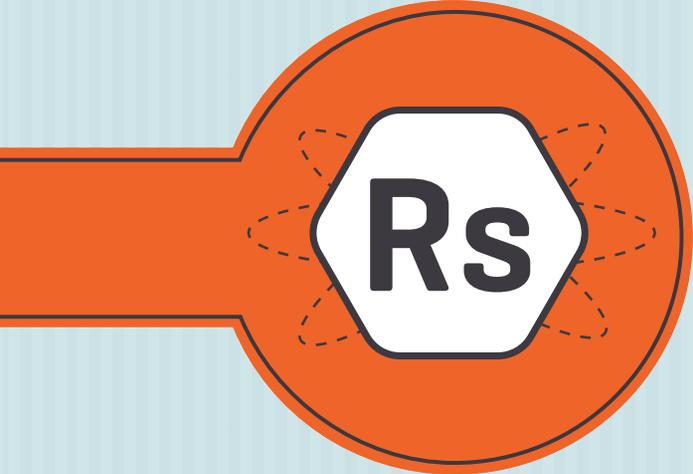


TODAY'S
“BIG IDEAS”
ARE POWERED BY
BIG DATA



RESEARCH

Earned media campaigns are highly targeted efforts that require a complete understanding of customer personas. An efficient research process is necessary to gather the knowledge required to develop remarkable content that will educate, inform and entertain a target audience. Online media outlets, blogs, digital communities and social media influencers must find genuine value in the content in order to earn the powerful media placements that fuel an earned media campaign.

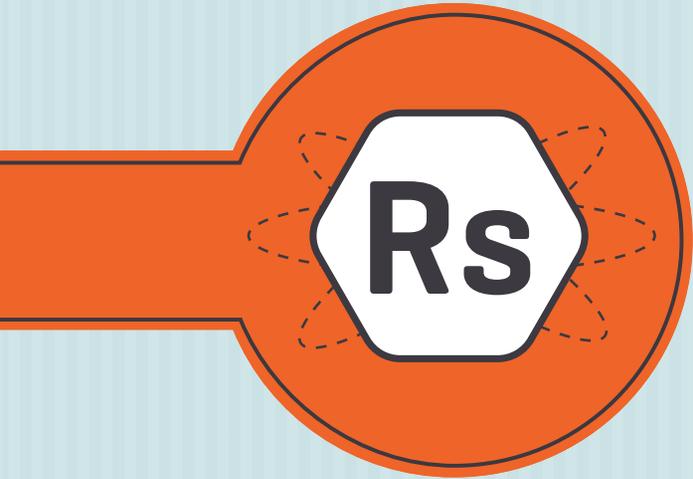


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ONLINE TARGET PERSONA DISCOVERY

More than likely, target market persona research already has been performed by most companies' marketing departments. If so, this is a great starting point for the research process. Persona profiles in print or other traditional media are different from their online counterparts, so there is a bit of "conversion" necessary to turn traditional personas into online personas. Use tools to discover and define target online personas, such as:

- **GOOGLE ANALYTICS**—Discover the highest-valued personas currently active on owned web properties.
- **EXPERIAN HITWISE**—View audience demographic data from the most popular properties on the Internet.
- **GOOGLE ADWORDS KEYWORD TOOL**—Find the most popular keywords target personas are interested in.
- **OPEN SITE EXPLORER**—Uncover connections between popular media outlets and corporate web properties.



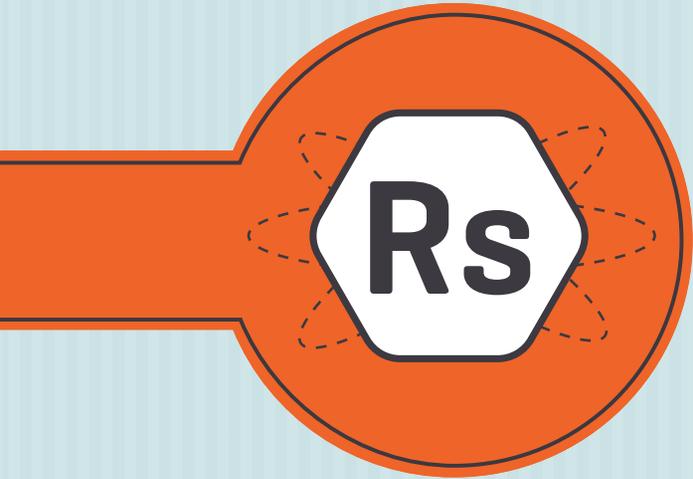
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ONLINE TARGET PERSONA DISCOVERY (continued)

Combining data from these tools will help build better target persona profiles. The goal is to procure actionable information about target personas, such as:

- **Where do they hang out online?**
- **What content do they consume and share on a regular basis?**
- **How are they entertained?**
- **Where do they receive ongoing education?**

Answering these questions will lay the groundwork for success in the creative, promotion and conversion phases of the earned media process.

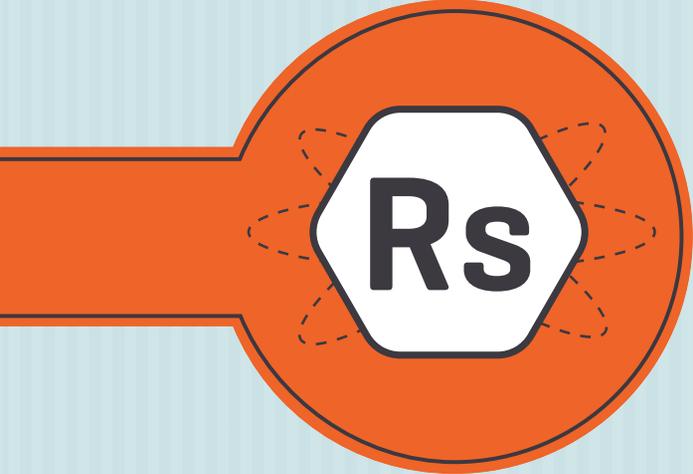


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IDEA GENERATION FOR CENTERPIECE CONTENT

The last phase of the research process is to define the centerpiece content that will be the focal point of the earned media campaign. If earlier research was diligently performed, idea generation for creative should be very straightforward.

For example, if research has discovered the social networks that top online media prospects frequent and the top content they digest and share on those networks, focus is quickly narrowed to certain types of content. Better yet, top contributors and community managers on those web properties can be contacted to discuss ideas for new content, setting the stage for promotion. It is important to make these types of contacts to help with design and development in the creative phase.



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IDEA GENERATION FOR CENTERPIECE CONTENT (continued)

If at a loss for inspiration, create a statement that carefully defines a problem prospects and customers are trying to solve. A well-formed problem statement can spark creative ideas in the context of 'helping prospects.' A golden rule of earned media is that slick self-serving advertising copy will never earn any relevant media placement.

The best content ideas should:

- **Educate**
- **Solve a Problem**
- **Entertain**

Run final ideas by team members, clients and online influencers that fit the target persona profile. Ask them if the content is something that they would share within their networks. Be sure to ask yourself the same question. The net promoter score is a great framework for determining if a good idea would fly with a given target audience.

Once the idea has been thoroughly defined, it can then be handed off to creative to turn research into vivid reality.

CONTENT THAT IS SO HELPFUL

PROSPECTS

WON'T KNOW HOW THEY LIVED

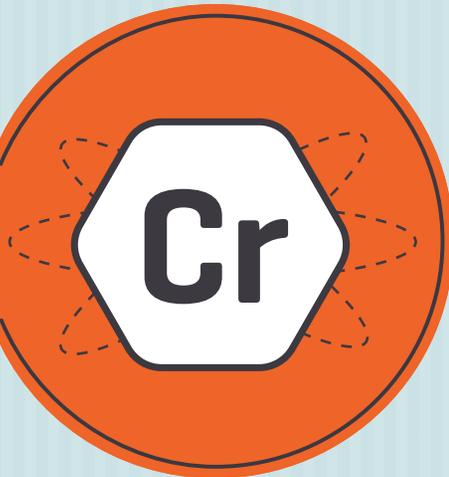
WITHOUT IT



CREATIVE

The creative process sets the stage for the success or failure of an earned media campaign. If promoted content is not genuinely informative, educational and entertaining, online media outlets won't share it with their audiences—or your prospects. Average content to the Internet is like sand to the desert: Completely unremarkable. Put maximum effort into creating remarkable content that really stands out, and it will earn media placements and be shared socially.

It's also important to note that the creative process costs must be managed closely to maximize an earned media campaign's return. Many times, the design and development costs can mean the difference between hitting a grand slam and barely sliding into first. There are several steps that a marketing team can take in the design and development phase to manage costs.



DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CENTERPIECE CONTENT

Document and plan content design by whiteboarding ideas in a mind map format. A mind map allows a marketing team to focus on the central theme, while organizing ideas in a non-linear fashion and grouping topics by subject, rather than chronologically.

Team members may find that this spatial organization of ideas is much more intuitive than an outline or traditional note-taking. The final mind map should contain a high-level view of all of the components necessary to create remarkable content.

Content for earned media is meant to be shared by specific online properties. The best way to ensure this happens is to solicit input from high-ranking community influencers into the design and development process. This will generate buy-in from these influencers, as they become real stakeholders in the process.



DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CENTERPIECE CONTENT (continued)

Influencers are usually experts who will help keep design on-track with what their community members really want. Involving community influencers in the design process takes a lot of networking, but this investment will pay off down the road when influencers help with promotion.

It's important to keep lines of communication open between the team members and the selected online community influencers. However, it's also important to keep the process efficient. Make sure the influencers understand that their comments and input are valued but team members will make final decisions about content. These key stakeholders should be involved only in design ideation and first drafts.

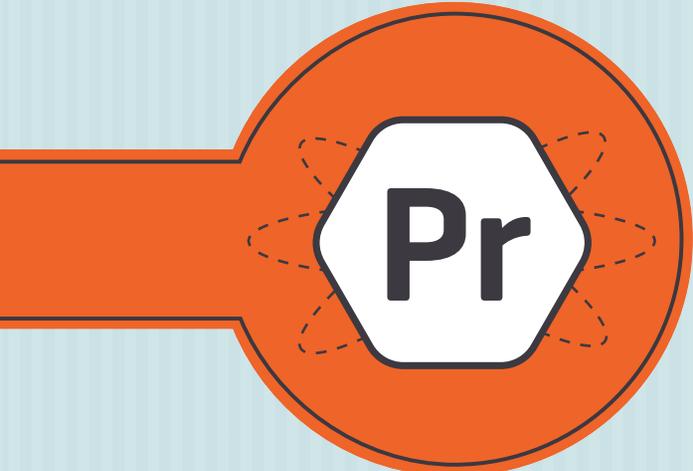
The final draft sign-off should be approved by a team leader. This will avoid the problem of trying to “please everyone.”

WHERE THE
RUBBER
MEETS THE
ROAD



PROMOTION

If relevant content is the engine, then promotion is the gasoline. Having an “if you build it, they will come” mentality is great for the design phase, but the earned media process is about maximizing marketing ROI. The best way to propel a project off the ground like a rocket is to place teasers, guest blogs and interviews promoting centerpiece content in front of target personas.

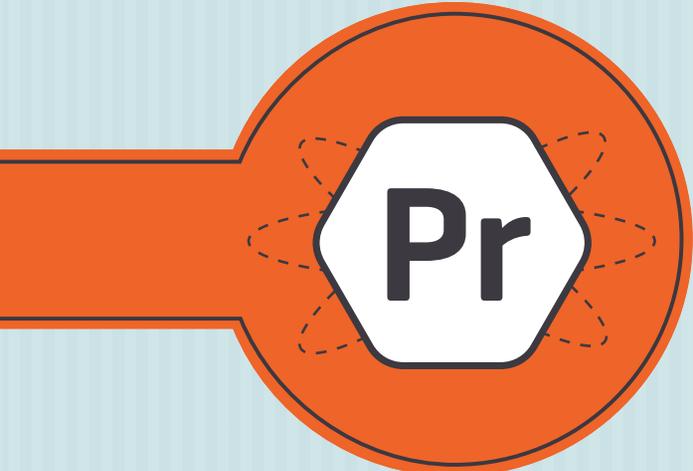


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BUILD THE TEASER ARTICLE

Before promoting content, a general ‘teaser’ article should be built that will serve as the delivery mechanism that explains to media outlets, communities and influencers the importance of the centerpiece content. In some cases, media outlets prefer to write the articles themselves. If this happens you don’t necessarily need a teaser article. However, offering media outlets something to start with in the form of a teaser article may help to communicate the most important points about the content centerpiece.

The teaser article may also include a few highlights from the content. Don’t be afraid to share the best highlights, as this will drive users to want to find out more by downloading the centerpiece. Finally, never submit the same article to multiple media outlets. Duplicating content on the web will not only fail to specifically speak to each target community on an individual basis, it’s also bad Internet citizenship.



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INFLUENCER AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Start promotional outreach by reaching out to the key stakeholders that were involved in the design and development process. These online influencers will kick off promotion by sharing the centerpiece content within their online communities. Next, team members can reach out to industry associations. Contact key industry partners and request that the content be featured in the blog or news section of their websites. Involve your PR team for a coordinated effort announcing the centerpiece content's release.

Finally, reach out to and network with all of the influencers and owners of online communities identified in the research process. These communities will find the content familiar and valuable. Online influencers will share relevant, remarkable content with their online communities.

**THIS IS
WHAT
WE'VE ALL BEEN
WAITING FOR**



CONVERSION

Achieving marketing goals is the primary function of an earned media campaign. This is the fun part: Marketing teams get to reap the rewards from a successful earned media campaign. Conversion goals, such as opt-in email list generation and purchases, are met in the short run, while traffic goals like keyword portfolio growth and organic search traffic are met over the long term. The immediate conversion goals focus on converting users with a targeted landing page.

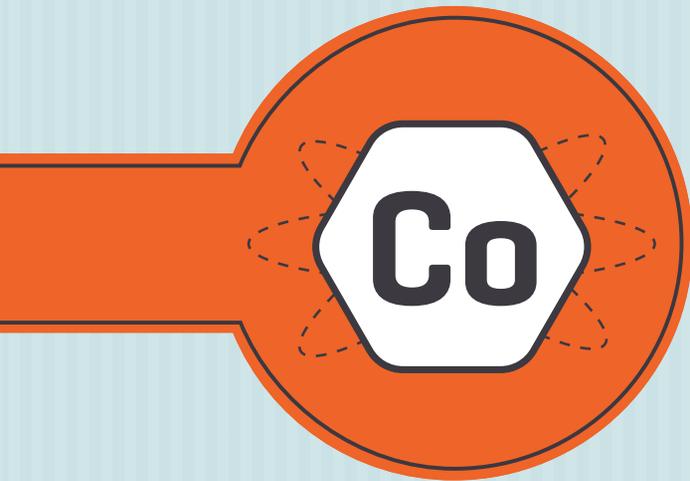


BUILDING THE LANDING PAGE

A targeted landing page is necessary to provide a structured gateway that requires prospects to submit personal information, such as their email address and company name, to access the centerpiece content. This data will be used by marketing to fuel lead-nurturing campaigns, grow online communities or achieve other online marketing goals using a highly targeted audience interested in consuming company content.

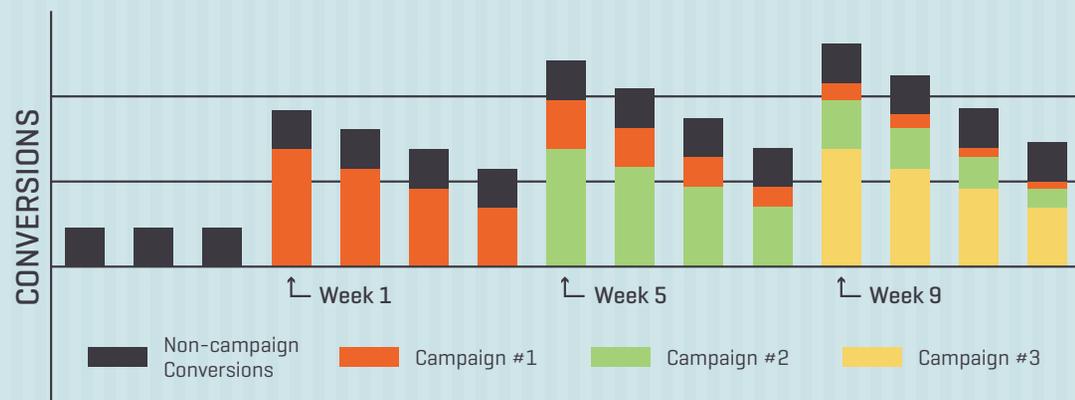
Start with the knowledge gathered from the research process to build a landing page with relevant value propositions. Include some of the main highlights that were featured in the teaser article, as well as graphics, videos or other media highlights from the centerpiece content. Keep all of the landing page content above the fold or within 625 vertical pixels. This will ensure that most users will see all offers, and contact and submission areas without having to scroll down the page.

It's also important to work with a reactive design that is optimized for multiple device types. Mobile and tablet versions of both the landing page and the centerpiece content can help reach more prospects.



CAMPAIGN STACKING METHOD

The earned media strategy is an ongoing effort that builds upon itself. Consistently deploying earned media campaigns can accelerate the timeline to reaching your web traffic and conversion goals. Due to the evergreen nature of earned media campaigns, it's easy to see how “stacking” these campaigns accelerates the accumulation of online conversions over the long term.



KEY #1 TAKEAWAY

EARNED MEDIA ACHIEVES MANY ONLINE MARKETING GOALS

The earned media strategy is a multi-step process that drives a diverse set of online marketing returns. A well-executed earned media campaign will drive website traffic and conversions from search engines and referral websites, energize social media buzz, grow email and lead lists, fuel retargeting campaigns, build online communities and generate a tremendous amount of online brand awareness.

This strategy earns placement rather than buying placement through advertising. This principle is what drives the diverse set of online marketing returns.

KEY #2 TAKEAWAY

EVEN THE BEST CONTENT WON'T PROMOTE ITSELF

Sure, it's possible great content will attract some visitors on its own, but the earned media strategy is all about maximizing the online marketing return from the online content. An organic promotional effort that leverages industry influencers and thought leaders instead of advertising will lead members of the target demographic to discover online content.

KEY #3 TAKEAWAY

RESEARCH SETS THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

The earned media strategy foundation is the same across the wide variety of campaign possibilities. It's the research phase that fills the entire earned media strategy with the information necessary to carry out each part of the process. Rushing through this stage will result in "flying blind" in one or more areas of the earned media process. Alternatively, executing a solid research phase based on relevant data will set the stage for success across the entire earned media campaign.

KEY #4 TAKEAWAY

LET MARKETING PERSONAS BE THE GUIDE

Remember that niche content performs the best in terms of driving traffic and conversions from potential customers online. A central focus on marketing personas will guide decision-making in key areas such as content ideation, online influencer outreach and landing page design [among many others]. Keeping personas in mind simplifies the earned media process and drives a relevant set of visitors from referral websites and search engines.



LOOKING FORWARD

Due to the vast potential for success, organizations from every industry vertical will continue to adopt and refine the earned media strategy and process. Organizations that stack earned media campaigns develop an investment that will drive short-term results—such as referral traffic and social media buzz—as well as long-term results from search engine traffic and additional referral traffic due to the evergreen nature of earned media.

Earned media campaigns create additional influence, authority and budget across other online marketing channels. The most efficient marketing teams that drive the highest ROI will lead the competition across most, if not all, online marketing channels. Use this guide to be among the first in your industry to drive enhanced marketing returns through an earned media strategy.



DISCOVER WHAT EARNED MEDIA CAN DO FOR YOUR MARKETING EFFORTS

Get a **FREE EARNED MEDIA OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT**.

This report will give you a snapshot of the potential marketing opportunity your brand can realize through strategic content marketing and online PR.

CLICK HERE FOR A
FREE ASSESSMENT

bit.ly/earned-media-assessment

INTERESTED IN MORE?

Contact Aaron Aders, Market Research Director and Co-founder at digital**relevance**™, to discover how your company can execute earned media campaigns.

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