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Press Kit

“It’s only rock ‘n’ roll but I like it”: Harnessing the power of the press kit

What do double-platinum rock stars, top government space programs and world-famous doughnut chains all have in common (other than the fact that all kids would die to grow up and become a rock star, astronaut or a professional donut taste-tester)?

The answer is ... they all have mastered the press kit and utilized it for their ultimate gain.

The press kit was originally created to publicize artists, musicians and authors, in order to get their talents and products the attention they deserved. They were the prime marketing tool for the independent entrepreneur and the creative peddler.

And, after some time, this entertaining tool-of-the-trade made the shift over to the business world to become a staple in most organizations’ PR arsenal. Press kits allowed organizations and the media to work together in building business. They became a vital tactic in promotion and new product launching, with new modes and methods of delivery and execution being added from all angles.

However, what used to be a jam-packed folder sent to media contacts for lead generation, has now morphed into a vital online tool for Web sites.

By keeping your information relevant, accessible and media-friendly, press kits – whether old school or new age - will help you stay ahead of the publicity curve.

And, that concept is music to any organization’s ears.

Press kit origins, revealed!

Back in “the day,” musicians would send press kits to area newspapers and radio stations before they traveled through that part of the country as a means of giving contacts a chance to promote their arrival. These kits included press photos, statistics and up-to-date information on tours, albums and awards. They offered angles and topics for newspapers to capitalize on, doing the dirty work of the investigative reporter.



Businesses soon caught on to both the appeal and the functionality of the press kit and altered it to benefit their industries. Instead of tour info and current singles on the charts, businesses shared recent product launches, mergers, new locations and accolades garnered. Press kits became a key tool of the business realm to better connect with news media, provide them with prefab story ideas (and, the information to write them), all in one visually stimulating package.

The general formula for a traditional business press kit evolved to consist of:

- Relevant company or organization statistics
- Current or recent press releases
- Company or organization history
- Biographies of those in leadership roles
- Awards and distinctions
- Location(s) and contact information
- Testimonials from satisfied customers
- Possible story leads for the media



It would be packaged in a large, double-pocket folder, complete with the company logo and photos of key players.

They would then be sent to media contacts or prospective clients and also kept on hand at tradeshows to use as a hand-out. After it was in the hands of others, it hopefully yielded a news blurb in the local newspaper, regional trade magazine or another multi-media news provider.

Press kits were a tried-and-true method for maintaining relationships with the media and assisting in what would be tedious company research mining. "But the times, they are a changin'," as Bob Dylan quite succinctly put it, and with that, the methods for distributing press kits have evolved.

Press kits evolve: The trip from classic to progressive rock

From the moment cable music stations began airing music videos back in 1981, it truly was a fact that, "Video killed the radio star." The entire landscape of music presentation and promotion also changed, and, likewise, the introduction of the internet in 1994 was like a tsunami on both marketers and news media alike.

When the internet became open for business, it was the end of the world as we know it. (R.E.M. for those who didn't catch that lyrical reference.) Information retrieval and advertising processes as a whole seemed to be washed away in the flood of

instantaneous gratification, up-to-the-minute news and multi-media presentations. Suddenly, 8x10" glossies and professional letterhead were lost amidst a surge of streaming video, interactive graphs and complicated charts. Anything printed even a week prior seemed prehistoric.

And yet, businesses continued to send out their carefully crafted, double-breasted folders, complete with all the classy letterhead that any newspaper or magazine could want. Unfortunately though, those hard-copy press kits were either barely sifted through or thrown away without so much as a glance.

Why? Because who would trust information that could be old news, when one could just hop online and check out the very latest on a company?

So what is a PR strategist to do? Evolve or perish, that's what. With the world of internet marketing just waiting to be tapped, marketing firms and PR departments began the transition from hard-copy press kits to today's standard: the **Electronic Press Kit (EPK)**, or otherwise known as a **media kit**. It combines successful old-school press kit components with the utility of the internet, bringing it up to the standards of marketing in today's business economy.

By including an EPK as a downloadable resource on your company's Web site, you're allowing all contacts, not only the press or select clients, access to organizational data, successes and goals. You never know who might come across your Web site as a potential client or customer, so why not live up to your PR potential? Plus, if you wow them with your presentation, they'll most likely be ambassadors of your business to other external clients (even if they don't follow through with a professional relationship with you personally).



Bottom line: Every company and organization needs an EPK on its Web site. It's truly as vital as your contact e-mail or the drop-down menu containing your company's products. And, don't worry – all the effort spent on your hard-copy press kits was not a waste of time or energy, as the components of an EPK are not that drastically different. Simply translate the same information, with a few additions detailed in the next section, onto the computer screen and voila: you're ready to rock 'n' roll!

EPKs done right

In addition to including the traditional press kit staples in your EPK, you can also expand; due to the internet's unlimited storage space (a.k.a. you don't have to worry about cramming folder pockets anymore).

However, we do offer one caveat: Keep in mind the short attention span of the average Web surfer when you constructing your press kit. Don't expect much more than a 10- to 20-second once-over from the average user. Make their sonic-speed summary count!

Consider including these extras with your EPK:

- Photos of your company, chief officers and other key staff members
- Extended presentation and stipulations of your logo for media to reprint in their publications
- More in-depth company history
- Case studies and customer testimonials
- Larger print and higher quality graphics (without having to waste extra ink or paper)



And, while it is popular to have a direct Adobe .pdf file link to your EPK on your Web site for easy access, the trend has evolved to creating an entire "micro site," dedicated to press releases and product launches. Enter your company's "press room".

Press rooms – "There's something happening here"

Think of your virtual, online press room as your company's own PR headquarters ... except, you don't need to rent out the office space. It is where all the action is, as press rooms often house:

- Your company's most recent EPK
- Current and archived press releases
- Daily updates or blog postings on current hot topics
- Fact sheets for online or print viewing
- Sound bites or video clips from company officers or other key team members
- List of contacts for reporters and the media
- PR angles – the who, what, when, where and why of your organization
- RSS feeds of relevant industry articles and newsbytes
- Launches, recalls, additions and retractions in regard to any consumer products



Regardless of your company's size, a press room is a powerful addition to its Web site as it works as a portal for all outgoing and incoming information.

So, while your company may not be on the road to the White House, it's always looking to win the popular vote. Press rooms just may be your ticket to victory in the greater business world.

Although this may initially seem like a lot of work, it's well worth its weight in gold. And by gold, we mean profits, of course.

EPK advantages

It's no industry secret that saving money is perhaps the number one benefit to transferring your traditional press kit to the online world.

Press kits were by their very nature meant to look as high-quality as possible and, therefore, were not cheaply thrown together. Each press kit was created from sweat, tears and individual manpower (okay, maybe not that epic) and then factor in the cost of all the supplies involved. These high combined costs made press kits commodities that were not given away to just anyone.

Talk about a counter-intuitive advertising and distribution tactic. It was a paradox that, before the internet, didn't seem to have a satisfactory solution.

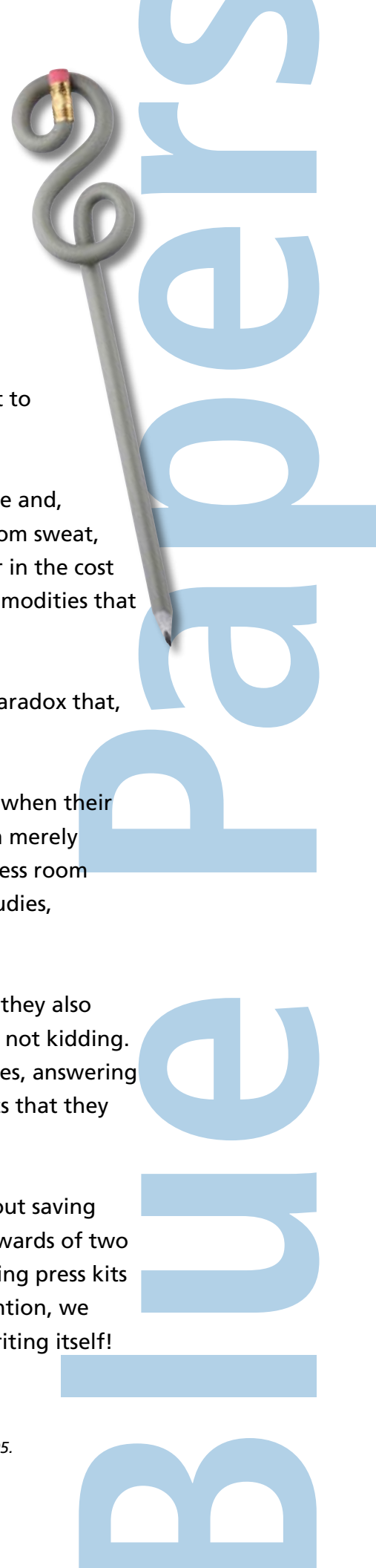
This realization is exactly what Cisco Systems came to about four years ago when their business was lagging behind and PR became a top priority. Cisco went from merely posting press releases on their homepage to creating an entirely distinct press room dedicated to all the media's needs. Their press room included FAQs, case studies, whitepapers, EPKs and information on the CEO and other Cisco executives.

The result? Not only did they drastically improve their media presence, but they also saved an estimated \$51 million dollars in PR costs since the overhaul. We're not kidding. Cisco attributed their savings to the decreased time spent faxing news stories, answering reporter's phone calls and creating and distributing those good ol' press kits that they had previously been using.¹

And, if saving money isn't reason enough to make the EPK switch, how about saving the environment? Did you know that the average office worker creates upwards of two pounds of paper waste per day²? So, as you can imagine, the effects of taking press kits out of the recycling bin and onto the internet are monumental. Not to mention, we think we can hear an environmental preservation initiative press release writing itself!

¹ *Telling the Story Every Day at Cisco*, by Susan Soloman. Clickz network. 27 October 2004. <http://www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3426881> viewed 21 February 2008.

² "Things to Know About Paper Consumption" MDF Systems Go Beyond Tips and Trivia. September 2005. http://www.mdfsystems.com/artman/publish/article_42.shtml Viewed 28 March 2008.



A few other stellar aspects of getting your virtual press room up and running include:

- Accessibility for everyone
- Making a great first impression with a savvy set-up
- User interaction by including multi-media links
- Consistency by creating one online copy, one time, for everyone
- Catering to the 21st century's dependence on easy internet access
- Consistently updated content sharing with no wait to produce hand-made press kits and mailings

An oldie, but a goodie

Old songs don't disappear off the radio waves. You can still hear "Light My Fire" or "I'm A Believer" on any number of classic rock radio stations. They simply got shifted to cater to a different audience than the modern rock stations.

In the same manner, your old-fashioned press kits will not have to slink away in the bottom drawer of some dark storage room in the basement of your business. Au contraire! Their functionality lives on, but just for a far more select audience.

For example, consider the tradeshow opportunities that await you. Even with a state-of-the-art booth that houses laptops for prospective clients to peruse your online press room, some visitors may want something to take away with them. What a perfect parting gift your press kit would make!

Since you will be constructing fewer press kits on the whole, the ones you do create should be twice as nice. Don't do the extremes of skimping on the materials or cramming them chalk-full. Then, for pieces such as pictures, past press releases and logos, include a CD with everything burned onto it. It will keep your press kit slim, while keeping its content heavy.

Finally, consider including a small promotional item with the mix, one that's sure not to be lost or thrown away. Pick something that will fit nicely inside the pockets of your kit, yet is interesting enough to cause a bit of buzz. Our handy logo'd favorites include:

- [Post-it® Super Sticky Pads](#)
- [Orbital Key Light](#)
- [Zippy® Letter Opener Magnet](#)
- [Flat Flexible Stock-Shaped Magnets](#)



Case in point: “Informa” me happy

When Informa, a European telecommunications company, was in desperate need of a tech-upgrade, they turned to marketing analyst’s brands2life to look over their operations. Brands2life in turn came up with some spectacular solutions that would bring Informa into the 21st century.

Initially, brands2life analyzed Informa’s current media relations methods and found that it didn’t have a very good relationship with the press, lacked the power of word-of-mouth advertising and did not have employees trained to respond to media requests in a timely and succinct manner. This was a major detriment to the company, considering it deals primarily with media production and marketing solutions.

Once these major problems were isolated, brands2life installed a few key improvements into the infrastructure that boosted Informa’s visibility in a substantial way.

The methods brands2life employed “ were directly related back to the media in a positive fashion. First, they educated the bulk of the company’s employees, anyone who had any contact with customers, prospective clients and the media. Then, they chose eight “thought leaders” to stand as experts on various aspects of Informa’s industry. Those eight were coached further on how to express the company’s attributes in a media-friendly way, so that when the media contacted them they were received by a knowledgeable and savvy representative.



This coaching and training of key Informa employees led to an increase in both the amount of press that Informa received and over 40 news outlets consistently going to Informa first for their questions on new communications and marketing tactics within the industry. Being the first to be quoted in news articles boosted their standing as an innovative, first-tier telecommunications company.

After laying such groundwork, EPKs were created to coincide with the public releases of major media updates. By having its employees coached on how to deal more proactively with the media, and then having a cutting edge EPK to showcase their knowledge, Informa increased its visibility in the media and began to average over 10 articles per month in top-tier press outlets.

And, most importantly, Informa’s reputation in the field has been more firmly established, as has their ability to remain abreast of new industry releases and be the first to share them with the media at large.

Rock on into infamy

When upgrading to an EPK, it's crucial to remember that just because the internet has become a must-have in relaying information and advertising, it doesn't mean that face-to-face interaction has become outmoded.

When you've set up your EPK and you're ready to take the show on the road, don't forget that your employees are still the rock stars of your company and need to work in tandem with whatever you put on your Web site.



Make sure that before any press releases hit the public, all of your staff has the information on the new product or strategy being unveiled. They're still responsible for knowing the ins and outs of your company and for passing that information onto the public.

Then, when it comes to building your EPK, take advantage of the resources at your fingertips. If your company is large enough to have its own tech department, this would be well within their area of expertise. If you don't have the inside means to build one, have no fear: try turning to a local marketing firm to hammer it out for you.

After your EPK is created, take the time to learn how to update small changes yourself, utilizing user-friendly programs, so that you'll be able to update press releases or new company photos yourself (or train other staff members to do so). Adobe's pdf file format is the best program for creating EPKs, as it is compatible with Macs and PCs, so nothing will be lost in translation.

So, what are you waiting for? Don't waste time if you don't already have an EPK! Take your paper press kit and electrify it to ensure your old standards won't simply be one-hit-wonders. Let them find new life with a new, net-savvy audience.

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