SA's first social media press release

By Melissa Attree   11 Apr 2008

The decision by Standard Bank to use a social media press release (SMPR) as part of the Standard Bank Pro20 Series is a bold one. This South African communication first is part of a campaign that has seen one of our most established brands get involved in the online conversation while simultaneously freeing the brand from the shackles of tradition and conformity.

Was this decision taken lightly? No. However, just as the format of the Pro20 series shook up the world of cricket, so the SMPR has opened up possibilities as to how brands and the media can communicate.

The specific detail on what social media tools the Standard Bank Pro20 campaign used can be viewed on the SMPR. But what makes an SMPR and how did the development take place?

Does not replace

I need to preface this by stating that in my opinion the SMPR does not replace the standard press release. As Journalists, bloggers and opinion piece writers are exposed to so much more information than before, the SMPR collects and packages the information neatly and coherently to streamline the process of story creation. Think of the SMPR as a press release on steroids; it is designed to make information accessibility and retrieval smarter and easier.

If we had taken a decision to place the SMPR online but send a text attachment or email in addition, it would have defeated the objective. The SMPR is an online development that forms part of a bigger online marketing campaign and, as with any social media campaign, it is not suited to every brand.

Save for some US examples and templates, globally the area of SMPR creation is largely untouched and the Standard Bank Pro20 series SMPR is the first in South Africa. It's true that people have raved about SMPR templates over the past year and called for the 'death of the press release', yet no SA brand has had the guts or drive to implement a true online SMPR.

I'd like to share our experiences by using the Standard Bank Pro20 series SMPR as an example. So what basic steps are required to create an SMPR?

Research:

1. Assess what has been done previously. We looked at previous SMPRs from the US (there are not many) and also assessed a SMPR template that had been created by SHIFT communications. The basic ingredients were clear and it

goes without saying that there are only so many ways of presenting information so that it looks accessible and flows logically.

2. Gather opinions and examples. Who are the global opinion leaders and what are they saying? Find them, read their blogs, investigate their sites, download their case studies, read the criticism and opinions. Compare notes and then scribble your own.

Planning:

- To execute a comprehensive SMPR, you need to have full knowledge of any other social media elements that are being included in the campaign. Each of these tools ([Facebook](), [YouTube](), [Twitter](), [blogs]() etc) serves as critical online brand touchpoints.

- In essence, social media promotes the sharing of content - don't go into planning an SMPR with a blinkered selfish 'old brand' approach. Understand that link-building is king in the online environment and that people need the tools to be able to share your content. In this case, we built a list of recent news stories had been released by Standard Bank, as well as general Pro20 commentary that had been made by online sports writers or bloggers. This thinking adds honest context and perspective to a story.

  Link to other associated sites; the SMPR lists several unrelated cricket websites where journalists can catch up on the latest news. Traditional brand custodians will balk at the thought of having perceived competitor information in close proximity - don't; it adds context and sincerity.

Implementation

Forward thinking and a bigger picture perspective is key, the technical gurus from [Brandsh]() (which had conceptualised the overall awesome social media strategy) were in control of building a platform for the SMPR. This SMPR is not built on a flat traditional web page but is a customised content management system based on Drupal technology. It means that it has created a platform that can grow with what future SMPR's demand; the SMPR could also develop into a comprehensive social media room offering - nice!

An SMPR needs to have the following basics (this list is not exhaustive and as time goes by and new developments occur, it's likely that new tools will be added to the SMPR 'guidelines'):

Content detail:

- Quick, upfront headline facts that encapsulate the content (it's the WWWWWH of a standard opening paragraph.)
- Hyperlink rich content that points to the other social media brand efforts or related sites.
- Keyword rich copy, mention important words, brand names and industry terms as often as possible in an attempt to build good search engine rankings.
- Pre-approved quotations from industry/brand spokespeople (pre-approved pictures of these spokespeople would lend a nice touch.)
- Links to 'Other brand news' - in this case we linked directly to the four most recent Standard Bank press releases.

Multimedia content:

- Videos: link to a customised online video sharing site, eg a YouTube channel, where the recipient can explore brand related videos and select how to use.
- Photos/graphics: provide pre-approved photos or graphics by using an online [Flickr account]() or similar. Do not forget

the importance of including logos and other visual brand elements. (Of added benefit is to provide print ready material to accommodate offline journalists with story prep.)

Social media elements/links

- Brand/company representatives contact details, where possible include online contact details such as email, skype and instant messengers (IM).
- RSS/ email subscription button for news updates. Unlike a standard press release, the SMPR is dynamic and changes can be made at any time. If breaking news or updates occur and the SMPR is updated, then subscribed journalists will receive that info as it happens (an invaluable time-saver).
- Insert recommended tags after the main story (tags allow for easier social bookmarking, blogging and online discovery of related material).
- Link to a brand customised social bookmarking site such as del.icio.us or ma.gnolia (this social bookmark space should be pre-populated with other relevant news or articles.)
- Links to all branded online spaces (website, blog, Facebook, YouTube, twitter, MXit details etc.)
- Insert sharing icons (Muti, Facebook, del.icio.us, Digg, Reddit etc). These icons allow people to share content quickly and virally spread it out on the web.
- Links to industry/brand-related websites that are not linked to your brand - quality journalism has always been about objective fact reporting, so why not make that easier?

In conclusion, the SMPR does not replace the traditional press release; a few years back some of us were seen as 'progressive' because we prepared press releases that use hyperlinks. Think of the SMPR as the evolution of that: it's a new benchmark in online communication, which is set to change the way that brands and journalists exchange information.

Any social media strategy requires a transparent, 'non-clingy' attitude. Online branding and marketing should not happen in isolation of traditional communication efforts; assess how the SMPR fits into your existing strategy and develop the concept from there. Maintain a sense of openness and accountability and face the fact that the information that journalists and bloggers require to create stories is out there (something that some PR professionals have ignored for years). All the SMPR does is package it in a way that makes information accessibility and retrieval smarter and easier.

This example is by no means complete. There is room for improvement and some productive suggestions have been made which will be incorporated into further projects. If you have suggestions, please let us know by commenting here or by emailing us at or .

See also:

- MediaShift: The Social Press Release: Multimedia, Two-Way, Direct to the Public
- MIA Solutions blog: Are you dead yet?

ABOUT MELISSA ATTREE

Melissa Attree is a social media strategist, blogger and WebPR professional. Brandsh used her services to research, write and plan the SMPR as part of its bigger Standard Bank Pro20 social media campaign. Read Melissa's blog at http://melissaattree.wordpress.com.

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