

How to 10x Your Sales Pipeline with Earned PR

You may already know that a good digital marketing strategy should include paid media, owned media, and earned PR if it's going to be really effective.

The reason? Because these tools are how you get your brand's message out to the world. Paid, owned, and earned PR allow you to:



**Reach
new
audiences**



**Showcase
your brand's
expertise**



**Cultivate
new potential
customers**



**Retain
current
ones**



**Boost
overall
sales**

In other words, paid, owned, and earned PR can have a huge impact on the bottom line.

But what do those terms really mean? And how can you make the most of each one?

In this piece, we're going to focus on that final one—earned PR—but before we dive in, let's define each term and explain how those three elements work together.



PAID, OWNED, AND EARNED PR/PR: WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Paid media is fairly straightforward, right? It means media (or advertising) that you pay for—social ads, print advertising, paid partnerships, PPC campaigns, etc. Owned media consists of the channels that your brand controls, like your brand's social profiles, your website, your blog, etc.

The thing with both paid and owned media is that your brand is the one calling the shots. You decide how much to spend on your social ads, for example, and then you decide what message to include and how to target them. You create blog posts and share them across your social channels. You decide what information to share on your website.

With earned PR, however, your brand isn't in charge. earned PR is just that: earned. It's what third parties,

like media outlets, influencers, and your fans say about your brand—not because they're paid to, but because they are so inspired or interested in your brand's message.

Now, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that if your brand offers a quality product or service, and engages regularly with fans and other brands online, earned PR will simply appear.

That's possible—but unlikely. Earning that coverage takes work, and sometimes, a lot more work than your paid and owned coverage will produce. But here's the good news.

There's a lot you can do to boost your earned PR and make the most of whatever earned PR you secure.

We're going to show you how you can use earned PR to 10X your sales pipeline.

BY THE NUMBERS

25-40% of all traffic and lead generation comes from earned PR.¹

Brands that leverage earned PR can see conversion rates of 5% or more, compared to around 1% for traditional media.²

Earned PR is a crucial element of influencing customers' purchasing decisions—88% of consumers say direct advertisements have little or no influence on their actual purchasing decisions.³

Sources

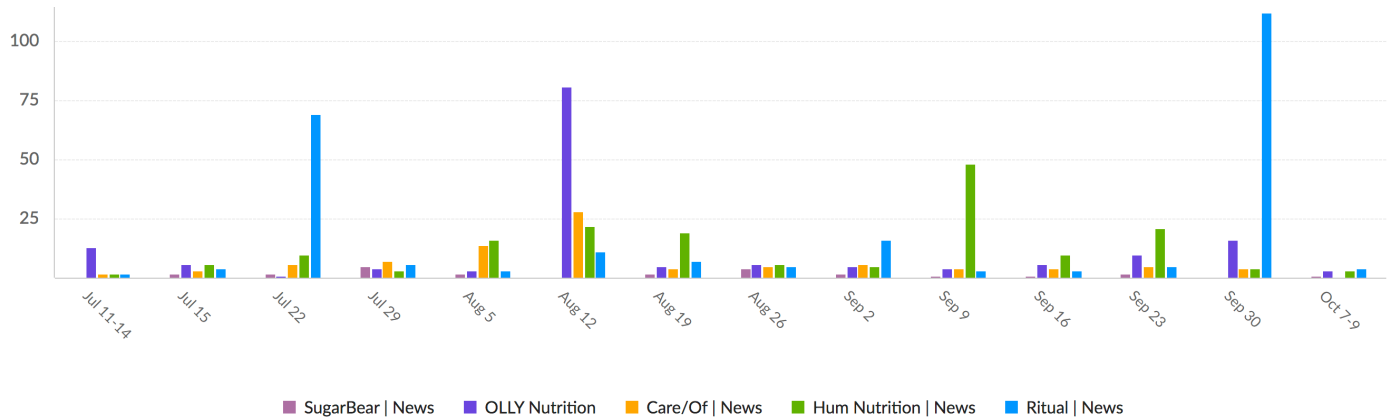
¹ G2 Learning Hub

² G2 Learning Hub

³ PR Daily

OLLY Media Exposure

Source: Meltwater



BUT FIRST: HOW DOES EARNED PR INCREASE YOUR SALES PIPELINE, ESPECIALLY BY THAT MUCH?

Earned PR does this in multiple ways, but not all are easy to immediately measure. If you create a Facebook ad, for example, and you see that 55 people click through your link, and then purchase your product, it’s easy to calculate the ROI.

With PR, the ROI isn’t that direct. However, that certainly doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. By using PR reporting tools, you can see the potential reach, engagement, media exposure over time, advertising equivalent of press, sentiment, and more.

Another benefit is that earned PR creates high-quality backlinks for your brand. This boosts your SEO—and the higher-quality the links, the better for your site rankings and traffic.

This information not only helps your brand understand the impact of earned PR, but can help you better strategize on how and where to focus your efforts.

Likewise, earned PR is instrumental in developing brand trust and organic brand loyalty. As any sales team knows, these are critical elements of driving more sales.



Creating Your Earned PR Strategy

In order to use PR to increase your sales pipeline, you've got to develop a **strategy**.

STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR GOALS.

What results are you hoping earned PR will produce for your business? Are you trying to generate more brand awareness in general? Push a particular product or service? Reach a new target demographic?

Your goals will have a big impact on how you develop your strategy. If, for example, you're trying to sell more of a new product, you'll want to focus on review sites and publications, along with popular bloggers who use and review products like yours.

While these short-term goals are critical to getting strong results, you also need to keep in mind your long-term goals. How do you want your brand to be seen? What do you want to be known as an expert in? One hugely important point: Make sure that your brand voice will support these goals.

It's critical that you and everyone on your team is clear about your brand message. Every piece of content you develop should be in service of that consistent, intentional brand voice—whether that voice is snarky and irreverent, or soothing and professional.

STEP 2: FIGURE OUT WHO YOU'RE TARGETING

This is where your buyer personas come into play. If you haven't developed a buyer persona map before, use our [Ultimate Guide to Buyer Personas](#) to help you. A buyer persona is essentially a hypothetical version of the people your brand targets in the sales cycle. You may have only one or two personas, or you may have as many as 10 or more, depending on what your company offers. The more detailed you can be with these personas, the better—but at its most basic, each persona should have:

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Job title
- Job functions

So how do you find this information? Well, you probably already have a good deal of it. If you use a CRM, then you likely have demographic data on the people you deal with as well as job title information.

[Your digital analytics tools can also offer a great deal of information.](#) Look through Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, and any other third-party tools you use to draw demographic information about the people who are interacting with your site.

**It's critical
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TIPS ON CREATING YOUR EARNED PR STRATEGY



Step 1

DEFINE YOUR SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Short-term goals could include:

- Generate more brand awareness
- Sell more of a new product or service
- Reach a new demographic

Long-term goals could include:

- Develop CEO as a thought leader in an industry
- Become the go-to expert on a particular subject
- Increase brand trust

FIGURE OUT WHO YOU'RE TARGETING

Here's an example of what your buyer persona could look like. We'll call this one "Purchasing Peter."



Step 2

Name: Peter

Age: 34

Gender: Male

Location: Harrisburg, PA

Job title: Owner/purchaser for independent high-end grocery store

Job responsibilities/functions: Manages the day-to-day operations of the store. Decides on and purchases products for the store on a monthly basis.

Requirements for products he carries: Reliable supply. Ability to order small quantities. Excellent, personal customer service. Some payment flexibility. Extremely high-quality product.

Frustrations: Difficulty reaching suppliers. Suppliers who can't offer the small quantities he needs. Suppliers geared only toward large accounts.

A high-performing sales team will be able to answer many of these questions, as well. Once you've gotten these simpler questions out of the way, it's time to start looking at more nuanced information.

For example, what kind of frustrations or obstacles does this person confront in their job? What makes their job easier? What does he or she need from a supplier?

Of course, when you're looking for answers to these sorts of questions, analytics will only get you so far.

A better way to get real information is to interview prospects and current customers, and, if you can, former customers or customers who have had complaints about your product or service in the past.

Doing so may not be that much fun, but it will give you valuable insight into areas that your business needs to improve.

To find people who might be open to being interviewed, start with your sales team. They'll likely have a good feel for customers who would be interested in talking with you, and who would give you candid answers.

Another option is to create an online survey that you place on your website and in customer-facing emails.

Online surveys do have some inherent issues. For one thing, people are self-selecting to take a survey, so you'll likely get people who really like your product or who really hate it, rather than those who feel lukewarm about it.

However, since you're creating buyer personas and not doing strict statistical analysis, you are still extremely likely to get some helpful information from your survey responses.

If you're creating a buyer persona for a customer you don't yet have – if you're entering a new market or launching a brand-new product – you may have to get a little more creative in finding interviewees.

Referrals from current customers, contacts who've signed up for new product notifications or your email newsletter subscriptions, and social media can be a few good sources.

This is why you want to really spend some time learning what kind of content your audience is consuming, so you can craft pitches that will appeal to them.

STEP 3. RESEARCH THE CONTENT THAT IS PERFORMING THE BEST WITH YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE.

Journalists, bloggers, influencers, and other members of the media know what their audiences like. So they're not going to go with your pitch if it's not attuned to that audience's interests and needs. This is why you want to really spend some time learning what kind of content your audience is consuming, so you can craft pitches that will appeal to them (and therefore, to the writers, journalists, and bloggers that speak to those audiences).

Search on Google, use tools like BuzzSumo, and use social listening to tune into trending topics on Twitter and Facebook. It's vital to draft pitches that offer a unique perspective on a topic before blanketing the industry with pitches.

Here's an example.



ONEDINE CASE STUDY

THE CHALLENGE

When COVID-19 put restaurants at risk of closing their doors for good and governmental guidelines begin to emerge dictating the terms of doing business in the “new normal,” OneDine was faced with an unprecedented opportunity: seize the moment as an innovative industry leader with high-tech solutions for helping restaurants overcome disruption, increase resilience, and fortify for the future.

THE STRATEGY

Zen led an internal strategy-pivot designed to demonstrate OneDine’s deep solidarity with an industry in crisis: shift from sales-focus to support-focus that put OneDine’s contactless order and payment solutions in the hands of thousands of restaurant brands and foodservice businesses, for FREE. We built momentum for OneDine’s moment with targeted, customized campaigns deployed across select social channels and media outlets that showcased the brand as an innovative industry leader and premier provider of solutions for the pandemic and rapidly approaching post-COVID world.

THE RESULTS

- Exponentially enhanced brand awareness with an aggressive PR campaign, including 44 media placements garnering 196M in online readership, more than 321k video views, and almost 10k social shares – all in under 60 days.
- Over 400,000 video views on social channels
- Dramatically elevated lead generation with a remarkable boost in qualified prospects from 63 (pre-COVID-19) to 163 in less than seven weeks, representing an increase from 11k to 26k locations.
- An extraordinary spike in closed sales in this same period, with more than 50 accounts signed representing over 3,000 units when fully deployed.



Step 3

REMEMBER TO RESEARCH:

- Content that's performing well within your industry and audiences (via BuzzSumo or **Social Animal**)
- Topics the writers/bloggers/journalists cover
- Trending news on social media within your industry



Step 4

TARGET A VARIETY OF MEDIA, INCLUDING:

- Traditional publications (magazines and newspapers)
- New media outlets like blogs and online publications
- Influencers

Let's say you have a long-term goal of getting your CIO a regular column in a popular industry publication, and a short-term goal of bringing in more leads to your sales pipeline. You send out a pitch (more on how to craft a perfect pitch further on) to one of the journalists who write for the publication offering your CIO as a source to comment on a tech trend in your industry. You think this tech trend is fascinating, so why wouldn't the journalist?

However, it turns out that that journalist actually did a large piece on this exact trend just a few months ago. It's old news, both to the writer and to the readers of the publication.

Your pitch is turned down. If you'd done your research by looking at the publication's archives, using [tools like BuzzSumo](#), searching Google News, and reading back through the journalist's recent work, you could have angled the pitch differently to grab the journalist's attention and begin developing a relationship of value.

STEP 4. RESEARCH THE OUTLETS AND INFLUENCERS YOU WANT TO CONNECT AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH.

Remember, if you're paying someone to write about your brand, it's not earned PR. Instead, you want to find publications, review sites, influencers, and fans who would be likely to partner with you because they actually like and support your brand—perhaps they align with your brand values or have a need for your company's expertise. You may know some of these key media players already, of course, if you're active on social media and stay up-to-date on your industry by reading relevant news, journals, and other publications.

To find additional sources to target, you can use BuzzSumo or Google—when you see the content that's been performing well, you can add these sites and journalists to your list of outlets to pitch.



Step 5

WHEN PITCHING, ENSURE YOUR PITCH IS:

- Specific
- Personalized
- Timely
- Appropriate
- Engaging

When it comes to influencers, that can get a little more involved. To learn more about identifying and approaching influencers for earned PR, use these guides:

- [5 Reasons Huge Brands Are Turning to Micro-Influencers](#)
- [Approaching Influencers: The First Step to Influencer Marketing, Outreach, and PR](#)
- [5 Secrets the Pros Use to Win Over Influencers](#)

STEP 5. REACH OUT TO THOSE OUTLETS AND INFLUENCERS WITH PITCHES.

When you know what outlets and influencers you want to target, you can craft pitches that are designed specifically for them. Specificity and personalization are important—you don't want to pitch a science and tech magazine a profile story on your CEO. Relevance is absolutely key! At the same time, personalization alone won't get you very far. Sending a pitch that is very personalized, but doesn't have anything of value to share still will not perform well.

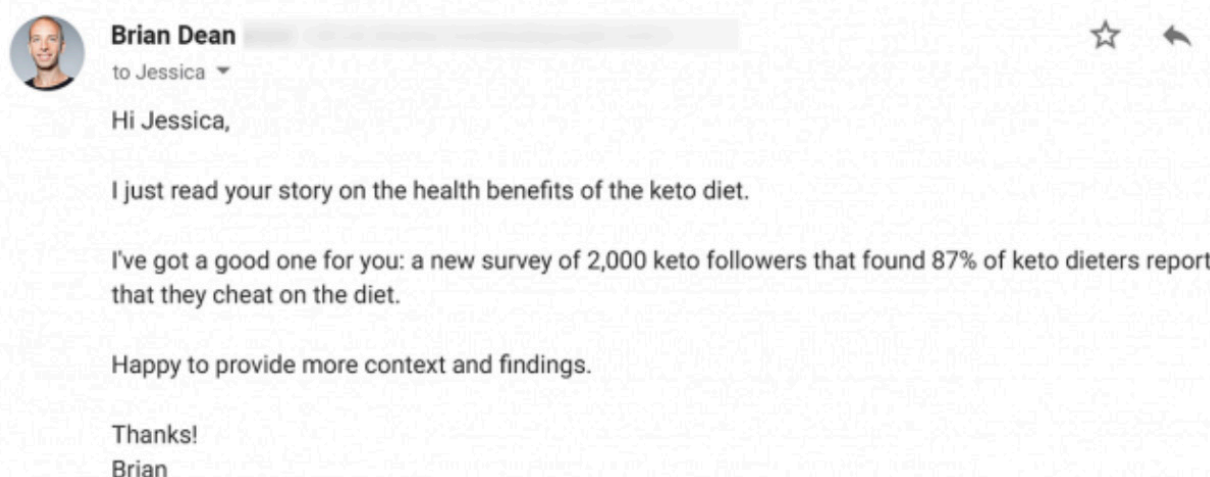
Remember: you're trying to build relationships with these journalists, bloggers, and influencers. To do that, you'll have to be able to share valuable and interesting information. The ultimate goal, beyond getting that one piece of coverage, is to build ongoing, long-term relationships with key media players, so

that your brand becomes a reliable, frequent source of information for them.

Stats, numbers, and data tend to perform very well, but journalists appreciate exclusive information and viewpoints that challenge the norm. This is the time to unleash your inner contrarian!

Make sure you have an actual angle or story to offer, not just information about who you are and what you do. Too often companies get excited about their offerings and believe that those offerings are newsworthy in and of themselves—but they don't realize that their public doesn't necessarily agree. The point of a strong and effective PR campaign is to connect the dots for both the public and the journalist when you reach out with your pitch. Finally, keep it short. How short? In many cases, just a couple of paragraphs will do.

Begin with a sentence introducing yourself and why you're reaching out. Include three to four sentences of "meat"—information about your story, your angle, and why it's valuable to their audience. Then finish with a closing sentence or two thanking them for their time and providing a call to action that compels them to continue the conversation. Below is a great example from Just Reach Out. The bottom line: No matter what topic you're pitching or to whom, a strong, clear message and brand voice is necessary.





CHASE FOR BUSINESS CASE STUDY

THE CHALLENGE

Chase for Business wanted to position itself as a “wingman” for small business owners (SBOs). Chase knew that the most precious and scarce resource for SBOs was time, but that they also needed expert knowledge, tailored to their needs. Zen conferred and conspired with Chase Business’s brilliant marketing team, and realized that what was needed was a fresh, out of the box experiential.

THE STRATEGY

What has four wheels and connects SBOs with the expertise they need to grow their businesses? The Chase Bizmobile.

Once the 28ft trailer and mobile experiential was painstakingly designed and built, Zen and Chase embarked on the ultimate road trip. We kicked off during Detroit start-up week and used a combination of local micro-influencers and national press to make a big splash. Marcus Lemonis even stopped by to invest in a duo of kid-entrepreneurs.

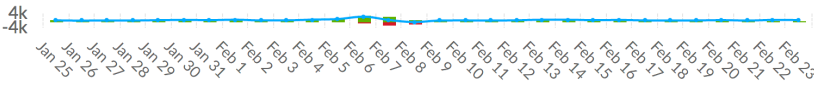
THE RESULTS

The Chase BizMobile has made 50 stops (and counting) at co-working spaces, start-up weeks, and festivals around the country, and helped countless SBO’s with their marketing, access to capital, and expense management. Its virtues have been extolled in Business Journal, Entrepreneur, and Forbes.

Think a bank is just about financial transactions?
Think again. [See case study video here.](#)

Tesla Sentiment

Source: Meltwater



Positive	22.6k
Negative	13.7k

STEP 6. CELEBRATE! AND SHARE YOUR EARNED PR ON YOUR OWN SOCIAL CHANNELS.

Once you’ve achieved that earned PR coverage, make sure you capitalize on it! Celebrate all your hard work—and then make the most of it by sharing it across your social channels, website’s press page and with employees, investors, and any others who have a stake in your business.

Sales teams often include earned coverage in their sales collateral, mentioning where the company has been featured, who’s talking about them, etc. Once you start building up that earned PR, you can easily 10x your sales pipeline. Your brand will start reaching audiences that you’ve never engaged with before,

bringing in potential buyers who are just waiting to be converted into long-term, loyal customers.

How you do that—well, that’s a different story. But here’s a great place to start: [Digital Selling: Close Before You Convince.](#)

Earning PR coverage requires focus, dedication, and a commitment to seeing the process through long-term efforts. And honestly—it’s better left to the pros. That’s why we’re here. To get in touch and start earning your brand the kind of PR that will 10x your sales pipeline, contact Zen Media for a **FREE CONSULTATION!**

GET MY FREE SESSION



Step 6

SHARE YOUR EARNED PR:

- On your social channels
- On your website’s press page
- With employees, investors, and in any others who have a stake in your business

SECURING EARNED PR CHECKLIST

UNDERSTAND EARNED PR: Know the difference between earned PR and paid or owned media

UNDERSTAND IMPORTANCE OF EARNED PR: Know how earned PR will fit into your overall sales and marketing strategy

DEFINE YOUR GOALS: Identify your goals with your earned PR strategy

- Get specific about each goal
- Be clear about how you want to achieve your goals and how you will measure success
- Share your goals with your PR, marketing and sales teams

IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

- Research audiences, customers, pain points, audience needs/desires, etc
- Consider sending out a survey to collect customer data
- Conduct interviews with prospects, existing and former customers
- Create buyer personas based on your research
- Get buy-in on personas from the sales team

RESEARCH CONTENT, TOPICS, AND STORIES: Know what is performing best with your audience

- Understand what content is being consumed and why
- Search on Google for trending articles, blog posts, etc.
- Use content and social listening tools for trending topics on social channels

IDENTIFY OUTLETS, INFLUENCERS, PARTNERS AND MEDIA CONTACTS

- Using a media database tool, you can find some relevant media contacts and outlets

- Read industry publications to identify potential media connections
- Review social media channels to uncover journalists and influencers who are discussing industry topics and competitors
- Follow competitors and review competitor sites to see who has covered them
- Develop a comprehensive list of relevant media contacts and influencers

REACH OUT TO MEDIA: Send valuable, newsworthy pitches that highlight your company, services or products

- Identify and develop compelling pitch angles
- Use SEO to inform which topics are driving the most website traffic
- Craft well thought-out pitches that provide valuable, informative, or contrarian takes
- Pitches should be personalized to each media contact
- Keep the momentum going with continued follow-up with media contacts and share any and all relevant information that applies to their audiences

TRACK OUTREACH

- Analyze responses and feedback
- Search and capture all media coverage
- Share all media coverage on your social channels, on your website and in marketing assets
- Gather metrics about your PR success. It may include information on the amount of coverage, sentiment, potential reach, advertising and equivalency and more
- Develop a report and share your findings, metrics and success with all relevant shareholders