

50 Shades of Public Relations ROI

By Katie Delahaye Paine, CEO of Paine Publishing

Here's the PR person's ultimate dream sequence:

You're sitting in an office of the senior leadership team at a Fortune 500 company. The new VP of Corporate Communications is questioning the value of some great publicity the company has received from a recent announcement. He stands up, his shirt collar expands, his worsted suit morphs into polyester, and a microphone magically appears in his hand. From his mouth emerges [the voice of Edwin Starr](#), but instead of "War" he is singing: "PR, Huh! What is it good for?"



In response, you leap up on the desk wielding a microphone of your own, and respond with so many examples of what PR is good for that the VP concedes and gives you a raise and budget increase.

Admit it, we've all had more or less this fantasy at least once. It popped into my head a month ago, when this exact circumstance happened to me. The difference in my case is that, after nearly three decades in this business, I knew I had the answers. I just had to put them all in one place. Which is what we've done in this document.

Note: Not all the examples listed below can demonstrate Return on Investment (ROI) in a way that your Chief Financial Officer will accept. They all do, however, demonstrate incremental business value in terms of increased revenue or reduced costs.



Here are 50 examples of what PR in all of its forms—social, external, internal, publicity—can and has done:

1. Turn an unknown business into a rock star.

Back in the '80s there was [a little-known Boston brewer](#) by the name of Jim Koch. He wanted to take his new Sam Adams beer to a national level, but had no money for advertising. To find new distributors he relied on selling door-to-door. One day he made the decision to turn to PR, specifically a local woman named [Carol Cone](#). Carol, according to a story she told in a speech to The Boston Publicity Club, entered his Samuel Adams Boston Lager® into a taste test. The unknown American beer beat out the top German beers of its time. Today, the Boston Beer Company is the U.S.'s leading brewer of handcrafted, full-flavored beers.



2. Enable you to charge more money for your products.

Apple is always held up as the perfect example of a company that can charge more money because of its branding. But that isn't really fair. Apple spends a fortune on its engineering, designing, and advertising. What if you don't have a fortune to spend? Consider the following example of a large and successful florist in my region of the country. It has built its impeccable reputation through great PR, and sponsoring lots of local events and National Public Radio. It's the florist the Kennedys call when their daughters are getting married.

Recently, a friend of mind brought me a gift from this florist. It came in an elegant black box and it was lovely. I just didn't know *how* lovely until I turned it over and saw the price tag: \$150. Let me clarify: it was a basic candle in a simple glass jar that I might have spent \$10 on at T.J.Maxx. But, because it came from this particular floral shop, people were regularly paying \$150 for that lovely jar of wax. That's called brand value, and in this case, almost entirely PR (as in both public and personal relationships)—driven brand value.

3. Sell holiday vacation bookings more efficiently.

If you want evidence of how major brands incorporate marketing mix modeling into their plans to identify the most cost-effective strategies (of which PR is generally on top), read [this](#)

[paper](#). In it the authors explain how Center Parcs U.K. holiday villages were able to accurately attribute increases in bookings to PR. Among other results, the data showed that if Center Parcs were to receive no PR-related editorial coverage, the number of bookings would decrease by approximately 16% within the first year, resulting in a loss in sales in the tens of millions of Euros.

4. Improve rankings on *Fortune's Most Admired list*.

[Fortune's Most Admired](#) list is compiled from a survey of industry executives, directors, and analysts to rate companies in their industry on the following nine criteria:

1. Ability to attract & retain talented people
2. Quality of management
3. Social responsibility to the community & the environment
4. Innovativeness
5. Quality of products/services
6. Wise use of corporate assets
7. Financial soundness
8. Long-term investment value
9. Effectiveness in doing business globally

Between 2010 and 2011, a Fortune 500 defense company saw rankings on each of the 9 key metrics decline, and its overall category ranking slip from 3rd to 6th. Senior management requested a review to understand why this had occurred and what could be improved.

In order to determine the impact earned media had on the results, my company was hired to conduct an in-depth media analysis. The study reviewed coverage of the client company and all the other companies in its category that appeared in top-tier business and trade publications. The Most Admired surveys are sent out in October each year and are returned by mid-December, so we assumed the concurrent news coverage would have the greatest impact on the opinions of survey respondents. We therefore focused on coverage that appeared between September and December.

We discovered the following:

- There is a strong correlation between CEO visibility and rank. There is also a correlation between effective messaging in the media and rank.
- There is no correlation between sheer volume of coverage or exposure and ranking.
- Tone of exposure was relevant, but only during the timeframe just before surveys are conducted.

5. Reduce volatility of your stock price.

Professor Ernest Martin [used Wave Theory](#) to correlate media coverage and stock price, demonstrating that good PR helps keep your stock up longer in a down market and also recover faster from that down market. He found that while PR does little to change institutional investors' minds, it does have a major impact on individual investors, who are generally the last to sell off stock in a down market and the first to buy in a rising one.



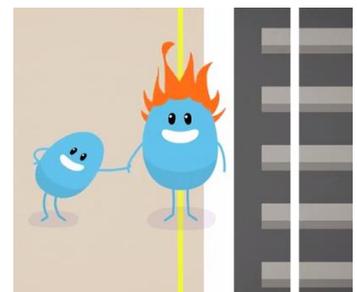
6. Improve perceptions of your financial strength.

Professor Sandra Duhé conducted an exhaustive [study](#) of 23 years of data from *Fortune's* Most Admired list. Her research showed that corporate reputation score—a proxy for corporate social responsibility—made a significant contribution to six measures of firm financial performance, including:

- Earnings per share
- Stockholder equity
- Rate of return on property, plant, and equipment
- Quick ratio/acid test
- Market value of common stock, and
- Income before extraordinary items.

7. Save lives.

In an effort to reduce local train accidents, Melbourne, Australia, produced the adorable YouTube video [Dumb Ways to Die](#). Nearly 100 million people have watched it, that's almost one thousand times the population of Melbourne. It was created on a shoestring budget and distributed primarily through PR. Within two months of the PR and social media campaign's launch, Melbourne Metro Trains experienced a [20% drop](#) in safety near-misses at train stations.



8. Raise efficiency and reduce legal and transaction costs.

[Research](#) by Vince Hazleton and a team of researchers at Radford University demonstrated the impact of good communications on tangible business expenses, including legal costs, efficiency, and transaction costs.

9. Cut your IT budget by \$3.4 million.

A 2002 JPMorgan Chase communications audit revealed that internal communications efforts were ineffective and contributed to employee dissatisfaction. Thus, in 2003, as part of a Six Sigma project, internal communications manager Jerry Mikorenda led a team that dug into their communications efforts and identified clear metrics for success. It turns out that Chase employees were saving all their emails because they either didn't understand them or didn't know what to do with them. Net net, if Chase made their communications more meaningful and useful, they would save \$3.4 million in IT costs. Read the full story [here](#).



10. Mitigate damage and make your budget go farther.

In the summer of 2014, Atlantic City, New Jersey, was experiencing a veritable tsunami of bad press. For example:

- [Ray Rice](#), a leading American football quarterback, had been filmed punching his girlfriend in an elevator in an Atlantic City hotel.
- Many of the city's formerly vaunted casinos were closing and or going through bankruptcy.
- Headlines were screaming of the famous city's demise.



But the Atlantic City Alliance (ACA), a business booster organization, had anticipated much of the bad news and was prepared to act. It began organizing events, including free concerts on the beach and spectacular fireworks displays.

Measurement had always been a priority for ACA, and was regularly used to allocate resources and make decisions. [Analysis showed](#) that ACA's proactive PR efforts significantly mitigated the damage of the bad press by ensuring that there were many days when there

was at least as much positive news as negative. More importantly, survey research showed that, rather than an overall decline in intent to visit, preference and likelihood to visit stayed flat or in some markets increased. At some points during the course of the campaign, PR was shown to be more effective than paid advertising at generating intent to visit, enabling ACA to better target the paid media where it was needed most.

11. Sell \$2.5 million in airline tickets.

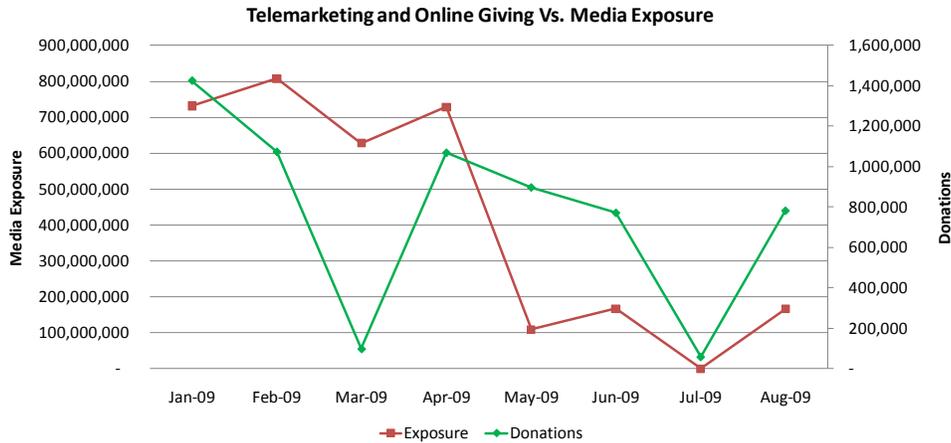
Southwest Airlines was one of the first companies to embrace PR measurement. In 2005 they started search-engine optimizing the wording of press releases and tagging them with unique URLs to identify subsequent ticket sales. In the first year of measuring the effectiveness of these tactics, [they identified](#) \$2.5 million in incremental ticket sales thanks to PR. Today, sales attributed to press releases is how they measure PR on the corporate dashboard.

12. Win business contracts.

At a major defense contracting firm, the use of spokespeople as part of a campaign to win a large contract was highly controversial. Traditionally, the company's spokespeople had been media-shy engineers. However, a competitive media content analysis of the leading business and trade press, coupled with an investigation of contract outcomes, showed a correlation between the frequency and visibility of a company's spokespeople in media articles and contract wins. By looking at the media content and visibility of each of the various players in the industry, it became clear that the more the company's spokespeople were quoted, the more likely they were to win the bid. As a result, the PR team had no trouble convincing its spokespeople to meet with the media. Better yet, the company embraced a proactive PR program.

13. Grow your donor base... or not.

A major national charitable organization had been tracking its media coverage for some time, yet its board of directors constantly questioned the outreach's value. In April 2009 the



naysayers won and the PR budget was slashed. Within several months, online giving had dropped just as precipitously as their media exposure.

14. Grow donations and your database.

When the PR team at The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) first expanded PR to include social media, they decided to experiment with a Spay Day Pet Photo Contest on Flickr. They asked people to donate one dollar to HSUS to nominate their dog. After six weeks, they had raised \$650,000. A second photo contest, "[LOLseals](#)" resulted in about 3,000 submissions and captured about 2,000 new email addresses.



15. Reduce recruitment and salary costs.

According to [research](#) conducted on behalf of *Corporate Responsibility Magazine*, companies with bad reputations face increased recruiting costs due to their greater difficulty in sourcing, offering, and onboarding new hires. Nearly one-half (48%) of those surveyed would require more than a 50% pay increase to take a job with a company with a bad reputation. This is especially true when recruiting females: For women it would take 60% pay increase to work for a company with a bad reputation, versus the 53% pay increase that males would

require. 76% of those surveyed would not take a job with a company with a bad reputation, even if they were unemployed.

Companies with good reputations enjoy lower recruitment costs and potentially greater retention among employees. To leave their current employer and take a job to work with a company with a good reputation, both males and females would require an average of about a 33% pay increase. Only 18% would require an increase of 50% or more. Think about it: Without good PR, not only do companies have to pay more in recruitment costs, but they have to factor in the greater salary for all the years that they want to retain an employee.

16. Save \$300,000 in recruitment costs.

The food service company Sodexo began experimenting with building social media relationships in the early days of Twitter. They decided to [experiment](#) with using Twitter to identify likely job candidates who expressed a love for cooking. They invested approximately \$50K in people time to develop relationships. At the end of six months, they'd filled enough open jobs to be able to cancel their \$350,000 Monster ad campaign. Net return to the company was \$300,000, for an ROI of about 600%:

$$R = \$350,000$$

$$I = \$50,000$$

$$ROI = (R - I)/I = (\$350,000 - \$50,000)/\$50,000 = 6$$

or, expressed as a percentage, 600%

17. Increase loyalty and customer acquisition in a competitive market.

Back in the '90s, AT&T braided together three sets of data: Years of media content analysis, decades of customer brand loyalty studies, and reams of data on new customer acquisitions. They analyzed the data and used correlation and factor analysis to [show](#) PR's positive impact on customer loyalty and likelihood to switch brands. The data not only demonstrated that media coverage was in some situations more effective than paid advertising in generating loyalty, but it further showed that presence in the media of their positive price/value message was highly correlated to acquisition of new customers.

18. Grow support among your stakeholders, raise money, and increase efficiencies in your outreach.

In 2009, the [United Service Organization](#) (USO), was facing a problem familiar to many large legacy charities. Their donor base was dying off, literally. To better reach the people they serve—actively serving members of the military and their families—they hired [Emily Hall](#) to manage their social media. She began outreach on Facebook and a Support USO Friday campaign which included a Donate button. The first measurable impact was a distinct shift in the nature of the conversations related to the USO. For months, conversations had been mostly observational, for instance, “I’m near the USO table at the airport,” or “Just noticed that XYZ was at the USO last night.” Shortly after Hall began her social media efforts the majority of conversations began to express support for the USO.

But the big question leadership raised was, “So what?” While it was great that people were expressing more support, did that translate into meaningful benefits to the organization? They matched donations to the overall visibility of the organization, and found a clear correlation between exposure and donations. Furthermore, one event for which Hall was particularly active generated some \$65,000 an hour and actually crashed the USO server! What the USO learned was that, on a cost-per-donor basis, Hall’s social media efforts weren’t just productive, they were far more cost-effective than traditional fundraising techniques.

19. Increase contributions to your nonprofit.

In 2007 the [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#) (ASPCA) began a rigorous measurement program that tracked the volume, sentiment, message content, and topics of its media coverage. That year they were presented with a number of media opportunities, including the death of dogs from [contaminated Chinese pet food](#) and the investigation into dog fighting that led to the much-publicized [arrest](#) of football superstar Michael Vick. Initial research showed that the proactive positioning of ASPCA as the “animal welfare experts” led to increased message communication and traffic to their website. Subsequent survey research showed a positive correlation between their message-rich media coverage and both intent and likelihood to contribute to the organization, as well as increased levels of trust in and commitment to the ASPCA. Ultimately, the data showed that not only were people saying they were more likely to contribute; they actually contributed more in the wake of the proactive media coverage. Read the research methodology [here](#).

20. Make your organization more cost efficient.

Before it became part of IBM, Lotus Development introduced roughly 20 products during the course of a year. When it came time to plan for the next year's product launches, the Director of Corporate Communications would demand to see tangible results from the previous year before allocating budgets.

One particular year, the goal for the previous twelve months had been to get across Lotus' somewhat complicated messages. To determine what had worked and what hadn't, the PR staff gathered the 2,400 or so articles that mentioned Lotus during the previous year. Each article was analyzed to determine whether it left a reader more or less likely to purchase Lotus software, and whether it contained one or more of the company's key messages. All articles were analyzed by a recent college graduate who was in the market for software. Results revealed that the \$350,000 launch of a word-processing product, complete with tons of shrimp and a very fancy party, generated a lot of coverage, but very few of the resulting articles contained key messages. However, a \$15,000 press tour yielded just as much coverage, but with far greater inclusion of key messages. On a cost-per-message communicated basis, the press tour delivered about ten times the value.

21. Increase theater ticket sales by 25%.

[Elisa Camahort](#), the founder of *BlogHer*, launched a blog for [42nd Street Moon](#) theatre in 2004 and encouraged visiting actors to share their backstage and onstage experiences. Within a few months of starting the blog, and with no other marketing efforts, ticket sales increased by 25%.

22. Sell consumer products more efficiently than advertising.

Procter & Gamble (P&G) is fortunate that they have 50 years' worth of sales and marketing data. They know exactly how many bottles of shampoo or bars of soap they will sell when they expose a percentage of their target audience to three critical elements:

1. A brand mention
2. A brand recommendation, and
3. A desirable visual.

Their media analysis was able to identify exactly which stories contained those elements, and what percentage of their audience was exposed to those messages. Ultimately, the

research showed that earned media from targeted PR efforts was six times more effective than paid advertising. Read all about it [here](#).

23. Increase sales.

More recently, P&G used PR to [expand the reach](#) of its Old Spice campaign, "Smell Like a Man, Man." While the Old Spice "[man](#)" started as an ad campaign, its reach was greatly expanded through PR and social media efforts. In the three months after the buzz peaked, sales were up by 55%, reaching 107% in the final month of the social media campaign. Old Spice became the best selling brand of men's body wash.

24. Sell more prescription drugs.

In 2007, Porter Novelli conducted research on behalf of Watson Pharmaceuticals to see if there was a connection between media coverage and prescription volume. [It turns out there was](#). Porter Novelli analyzed the content of 3000 articles mentioning Watson's drug Oxytrol to determine sentiment and message content. They then used prescription sales data provided by Watson to demonstrate that the more message-rich desirable coverage Oxytrol received, the higher the prescription sales volume.

25. Increase in-store traffic.

When Goodwill Industries expanded its PR department to include social media they were initially happy with the increase of followers and use of its [freshly developed](#) "Goodwill Locator" app. However, they soon realized the power of visuals of their clothes, so they created a crossover campaign to promote fashion shows online and stage them in stores. Since in-store traffic is a key metric throughout the organization, they asked individual stores to provide data to track the success of these events. Sure enough, the campaign increased in-store traffic dramatically.

26. Increase school applications and lower recruitment costs.

Amey Hempel, webmaster of the McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento, California, hired [SEO-PR](#) to increase the search engine ranking of a newly established area of the mcgeorge.edu site and to increase search engine traffic to a specific URL. As a result their

search engine rank improved. There also was an increase in application downloads (a proxy for new applications). These downloads came at a fraction of the cost of traditional recruitment and outreach efforts, providing McGeorge School of Law with [a healthy return on its investment](#).

27. Get more people vaccinated.

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control in Vancouver, Canada, experimented with PR and social media as part of its effort to increase the percentage of its population who were immunized. They conducted pre-post research using web statistics, surveys, and provider data to determine to what extent they had been effective. Results showed that PR and social media were effective not only in increasing the number of people who *said* they were going to be or had been vaccinated, but had produced a measurable increase in the number of vaccines actually administered.

28. Increase trust in your company.

There have been several studies, including one of a major oil company, that found increased awareness and knowledge of their pipelines correlated with increased trust, and, [presumably, reduced opposition](#). Another [study](#) by Brad Rawlins clearly demonstrated that increased transparency with employees increased trust levels within the organization.

29. Increase market share and ratings for media companies.

When social media graduated from being “nice to have” to a “must have” for media companies, one major cable company commissioned a study to determine social media’s impact on its key performance drivers, specifically market share and ratings. Preliminary research showed that high levels of social engagement had a high correlation with both market share and ratings.

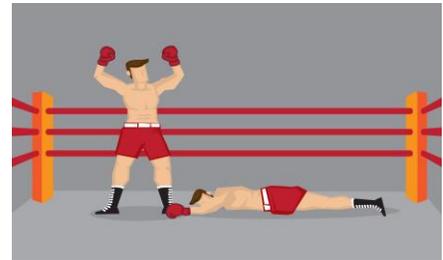
30. Win a Supreme Court case.

A private school with a very large endowment and very specific charter was being sued by someone who thought he'd been discriminated against. There was little the school could do about these charges, other than to release as much information as possible about its charter,

history, and position on the case. At first, negative coverage was overwhelming and very discouraging. But the school learned through an integrated measurement program that whenever the media ran stories about the case, traffic to its informational site spiked. This action occurred regardless of whether the media coverage was negative or positive. Over time, the media and others began to understand the context of the school's argument. While there are obviously many reasons for winning a case before the Supreme Court, the fact that the national media was explaining the school's side of the story didn't hurt.

31. Win a battle with a union.

In the very early days of social media, Paul Levy, the CEO of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, [started a blog](#). He told the world that his mission was to make healthcare safer in Boston, told a story about how his hospital had just botched a surgery, and only *then* told his legal department what he was doing.



His blog went on to deepen his relationship with hospital employees, community members, and the media. The media learned they could go to his blog for honest, transparent information on what was happening at the hospital. Which is just what it did when labor issues arose with the powerful [Service Employees Industrial Union](#). The media was able to access his side of the story at 6 a.m., but the union wasn't returning phone calls until the afternoon. Guess whose side of the story got out first? Ultimately the hospital won. Levy [tells the story here](#).

32. Boost retail sales.

When JCPenney Company remodeled its leading stores in 31 major markets to attract more upscale shoppers, all markets were provided with the same advertising, promotion, and PR press packages. However, the Dallas/Fort Worth market produced a unique and unprecedented PR campaign called "Art Sunday at JCPenney." It comprised four arts festivals, each benefiting performing arts charities in the stores' local areas. The goal was to increase sales from higher-income shoppers. With help from the accounting department, the staff was able to compare sales results for the three months following the grand re-openings for all other JCPenney remodeled markets against Dallas/Fort Worth. The [campaign](#) yielded

better-heeled customers and increased sales compared with other JCPenney markets, and won Silver Anvil and Gold Quill awards.

33. Create greater shareholder return.

According to numerous [studies](#) by Towers Watson, companies with the highest levels of effective communications enjoy 57% higher return to shareholders. Their research shows that companies with highly effective communications programs are three-and-a-half times more likely to significantly outperform their industry peers.

(Image courtesy of Towers Watson.)



34. Get more museum visitors in the door.

[Winterthur](#), the U.S.'s answer to Downton Abbey, was created by Henry Francis du Pont in the early 20th century. They decided to capitalize on the popularity of the British television show and leverage their unrivaled collection of American decorative arts to put together an exhibit called "The Costumes of Downton Abbey." Winterthur issued the typical press release, reached out to their usual key contacts, and hoped that they'd make their lofty annual goal of bringing in 500,000 visitors in 2014. Two stories in the [Wall Street Journal](#) and the [Washington Post](#) ran shortly thereafter, and in two months they blew through their goals for the entire year. They attribute those half million visitors—at \$20 apiece—to that WSJ article. I have no idea how much the PR effort cost, but let's assume it took one staff member six months to prepare for the announcement. A rough estimate of the ROI of the first two months after the exhibit opened, assuming that the PR effort cost \$50,000, looks like this:

$$R = \$10,000,000$$

$$I = \$50,000$$

$$ROI = (R - I)/I = (\$10,000,000 - \$50,000)/\$50,000 = 9,950,000/50,000 = 199$$

or, expressed as a percentage, 19,900%

35. Regain lost nonprofit funding.

Many people assume the crisis that The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation suffered after their Planned Parenthood defunding was, if not self-inflicted, at least exacerbated by deplorable handling. While this is somewhat true, the crisis was also in large part the result of a [highly strategic and well-planned PR campaign](#) on the part of Planned Parenthood.

When Planned Parenthood found out that Komen was going to cut all ties and funding, the organization worked with its PR firm to take control of the situation. They reframed their reputation and the conversation, highlighting the unmet medical needs of their patients. Their outreach targeted patients, policymakers, donors, and influential third parties, redirecting the conversation to focus on breast health, rather than the political implications of the situation. Within minutes of the Komen de-funding announcement, Planned Parenthood launched a breast-health landing page on its website. Planned Parenthood quickly more than replaced the lost Komen funding, raising \$3 million in the first four days. In addition, Komen restored the withheld \$680,000 that caused the crisis to erupt.

36. Then there's the negative ROI.

Although we are focusing on positive ROI, we can't ignore the other side of the Planned Parenthood/Komen crisis. By ignoring standard best practices in crisis communications, and the advice of its PR team, Komen lost millions in donations and saw a [20+% drop-off in participants](#) in its key funding events. Komen's *The Race for the Cure* was forced to cancel many of its events, and saw its brand health score fall by 21%.

37. Generate \$2.6 million in incremental revenue.

Back in 2007, to [generate awareness](#) of its new *Journey to Atlantis* ride, SeaWorld launched an innovative outreach program to the roller coaster community. The theme park identified a select group of coaster bloggers and treated them to a VIP opening, allowing them to be among the first to ride the new feature. The immediate result was an increase in engagement with SeaWorld's websites and in social media, accompanied by numerous positive comments. But a few months later the ROI was clearly apparent when a survey of park visitors revealed the number of people who had



heard of the ride and come to the park as a result of the online and social coverage. SeaWorld calculated that those visitors represented more than \$2.6 million in revenue.

On the other side of the ROI equation, a PR campaign for a [documentary](#) critical of SeaWorld has recently resulted in a 4.7% decline in SeaWorld's revenue, a 30% drop in their stock price, and a lowered credit rating.

38. Get a 150% raise.

When a Human Rights Watch [report](#) revealed that workers in South Africa's Western Cape wine region were subject to "exploitative conditions and human rights abuses," their union began a campaign to increase worker's wages. By using media outreach to appeal to wine consumers, the union was able to put sufficient pressure on the industry to secure a wage increase from \$8 to \$12 an hour.

39. Increase sales by 14%.

When Schick® came up with an innovative new men's shaving product in 2012, they [turned to PR](#) to launch it. Rather than going with the usual men's grooming outlets, they set up [a barber shop](#) at the Consumer Electronics Show, shaving thousands of attendees and media influencers. As a result they grew sales by 14% and product trials by more than 7%.

40. Raise \$2.1 million for flood victims.

Two weeks before the 2013 Calgary Stampede was scheduled to begin, the downtown area of Alberta, Canada was inundated with 12 feet of water, the result of massive storms in nearby mountains. Despite the near destruction of its grounds and the closing of most downtown hotels, Stampede [organizers huddled](#) with city and province tourism groups and determined that the show must go on.

Moments after the decision to move ahead was announced, someone tweeted that, "Come Hell or High Water" the show would go on. Another Twitter user quickly sketched a t-shirt and offered the design to the Stampede organizers as a fundraising vehicle. Organizers made up what they thought were enough for the event and sold them to



raise money for flood victims. They quickly sold out, and subsequent reorders emptied every warehouse in North America of black t-shirts.

The program raised \$2.1 million for the Canadian Red Cross Alberta Flood Relief Fund and drew 1.1 million visitors to that year's Stampede, fewer than normal, but many more than expected. A year later, Stampede attendance broke all records.

41. Win customers from your competition.

GoDaddy has a long history of controversial Super Bowl ads, and has always justified its use of female-denigrating themes by claiming that the ads generate new customers. But in 2009, Twitter told a different story. One woman tweeted, "If there was a 'GoMommy' female-friendly hosting company, I'd switch in a heartbeat." Within seconds, Shashi Bellamkonda, the social media guy at [competitor Network Solutions](#), had responded, offering reasons why his company was more female-friendly than GoDaddy. Soon, Network Solutions offered a discount coupon that made its services slightly cheaper than the competition. Within a week over 300 people had switched their domains from GoDaddy to Network Solutions. The ROI calculation looks like this:

$R = \text{At an average of } \$20 \text{ per domain} \times 300 \text{ new domains} = \$6,000.$

$I = 2 \text{ hours of Shashi's time} = \text{approximately } \200

$ROI = (R - I)/I = (\$6000 - \$200)/\$200 = 5,800/200 = 29$

or, expressed as a percentage, 2,900%

42. Sell more phones.

In 2011, Amazon launched its *AmazonWireless* blog to increase its search rankings in the wireless market. At the same time, Sprint realized that reviews on Amazon were critical to the brand's credibility and sales. Sprint reached out to Amazon to offer them high quality content for the blog. The goal was to build a stronger relationship with the reseller in hopes that the team would reference Sprint in their new blog.



To ensure credibility, Sprint enlisted Chris Jenista, an employee volunteer who was already trained to be an online product advocate. Most importantly, he was not already an official

spokesperson, instead, his day job was working in corporate security at Sprint. But he was passionate about the product and had a long history of posting interesting content about the brand. Amazon accepted Sprint's offer of expertise. After four month's of blogging, sales for Sprint devices in the Amazon channel quadrupled compared to the same quarter of the prior year. [Read more at SNCR.org.](#)

43. Sell more car insurance.

[Comparethemarket.com](#) is a U.K. website that allows insurance buyers to easily compare different insurance plans. Early in the days of social media, it noticed a tendency among social media users to mistype its URL: Instead of "market," people were typing "meerkat." This habitual typo inspired one of the most successful communications campaigns in history.

Rather than trying to correct the market, they allowed the market to create a campaign for them. They put up their own [spoof website](#) which was very clear about informing visitors: "If you are looking to compare insurance rates you are in the wrong place." It also presented viewers with a fun game that literally compared meerkats of different professions. The game went viral and so did awareness of the brand and sales. Within months they experienced an 80% increase in insurance quotes, a 59% increase in brand awareness, and a 73% reduction in cost-per-action for new leads.

44. Sell more software.

When Holly Allison became Vice President of Marketing at Vico Software, it was a 10-person startup in Boston, Massachusetts that made software for commercial construction management. Equipped with no budget yet an analytical mind, Allison knew that her only true measure of success was leads. She sat down with her team to put together a very specific definition of success. While driving traffic to the website was the initial goal, she soon incorporated data from Salesforce to identify which activities yielded the most qualified leads. She [discovered](#) that creating smart, useful content and posting it on LinkedIn was the biggest contributor to sales.

45. Find more volunteers for less money.

The [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) (CNCS) is the U.S.'s leading coordinator of volunteer efforts. They run programs like AmeriCorps and Senior Corps, as well as coordinating volunteers for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance. Some 5 million American volunteers find opportunities through the CNCS [serve.gov](#) website.

CNCS' primary goal is to get more Americans to volunteer, so when its PR team defined its own goals it was clear that a key metric would be to increase traffic and registrations on [serve.gov](#). They were able to identify the specific programs that were most and least effective at engaging volunteers, enabling them to conserve resources by deploying them where they'd be most effective.

46. Sell more beer at a fraction of the cost of television ads.

In 2003 Miller Beer, one of the nation's largest brewing companies, learned that PR has a significant impact on product sales relative to other forms of marketing, especially T.V. advertising. Based on [analysis](#) of two-and-a-half years of data, Miller discovered that its PR efforts generated roughly 4 percent of incremental product sales, compared to 5.3 percent for T.V., but at significantly lower cost. Ranjit Choudhary, the marketing mix modeling specialist for Miller at the time, [said](#), "In this study we found that PR was much more efficient than other promotions for the brand." Miller changed its marketing strategy by shifting budgets out of T.V. advertising and into public relations.

47. Help deal with a crisis.

By establishing a human presence on Facebook in the early days of social media, paper company Georgia-Pacific was able to avoid significant personnel and potential legal costs by letting its good relationships do the work for them. A Democratic legislator from Wisconsin had introduced a bill advocating a boycott of Georgia-Pacific's products because of ownership by Koch Industries. Before the communications team had a chance to formulate a response, more than 50 fans responded on Facebook, suggesting a political boycott, that is, impeachment of the legislator. Georgia-Pacific's Facebook fans turned into advocates on the company's behalf by presenting evidence of the lengths to which the company had gone to preserve jobs in the state.

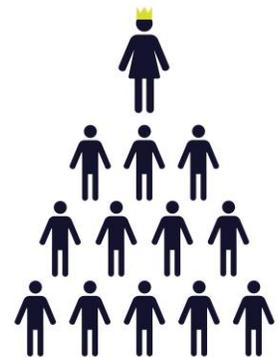
48. Win control of your company.

In the summer of 2014, external, internal, and social media communications all played a role in one of the food industry's most epic battles. A long-brewing family feud erupted into a regional boycott when the much-beloved CEO of Demoulas Market Basket supermarket chain was deposed by the board. Within weeks, employees had walked off the job, customers and suppliers were boycotting the stores, shelves were empty, and the company was losing a reported \$10 million a week.

Arthur T. Demoulas, the ousted CEO, excelled in building strong relationships with employees, suppliers, and customers. He paid employees well and went out of his way to help them out when then they needed it. He paid suppliers in cash to keep costs down, and the customers felt the love every time they walked into the store. His attention to his employees paid off in higher profits and loyalty, enabling him to win back his company—and more importantly, win back his customers in record time. Read the [full story here](#) or watch the movie “[Food Fight](#)” coming to theaters in the summer of 2015.

49. Enhance employee loyalty and reduce product launch costs.

When PepsiCo first waded into social media it followed the lead of Dell, offering in-depth training, a solid set of social media policies, and executive support for employee use of social media. Within a few months, the beverage conglomerate had identified employees who were not only engaged in social media, but also helped spread the company's messages. Internal research showed that these people were also far more engaged with the company as a whole. On that foundation, PepsiCo began a brand ambassador program by identifying employees who would become part of new product launch teams. These teams spread the company's messages in their local communities and networks, thereby lowering the cost of product launches and increasing employee engagement at the same time.



50. Raise enough money to start your company.

[Kickstarter](#), [Indiegogo](#), and other crowd-funding sources are the ultimate proof of the ROI of PR. More than 200,000 people have used these and similar organizations to raise enough money to get their projects off the ground. Given the limitations of most startup's budgets, PR, social media, and personal relationships are generally the *only* way they can get their messages out there.



Conclusion

Now, put on your best polyester suit, grab a microphone, and the next time someone says “PR, huh, what is it good for?” you’ve got at least 50 examples of the tangible value it’s brought to countless organizations. *Yours may be next.*

