



SaaS PR: Demystifying Modern Public Relations

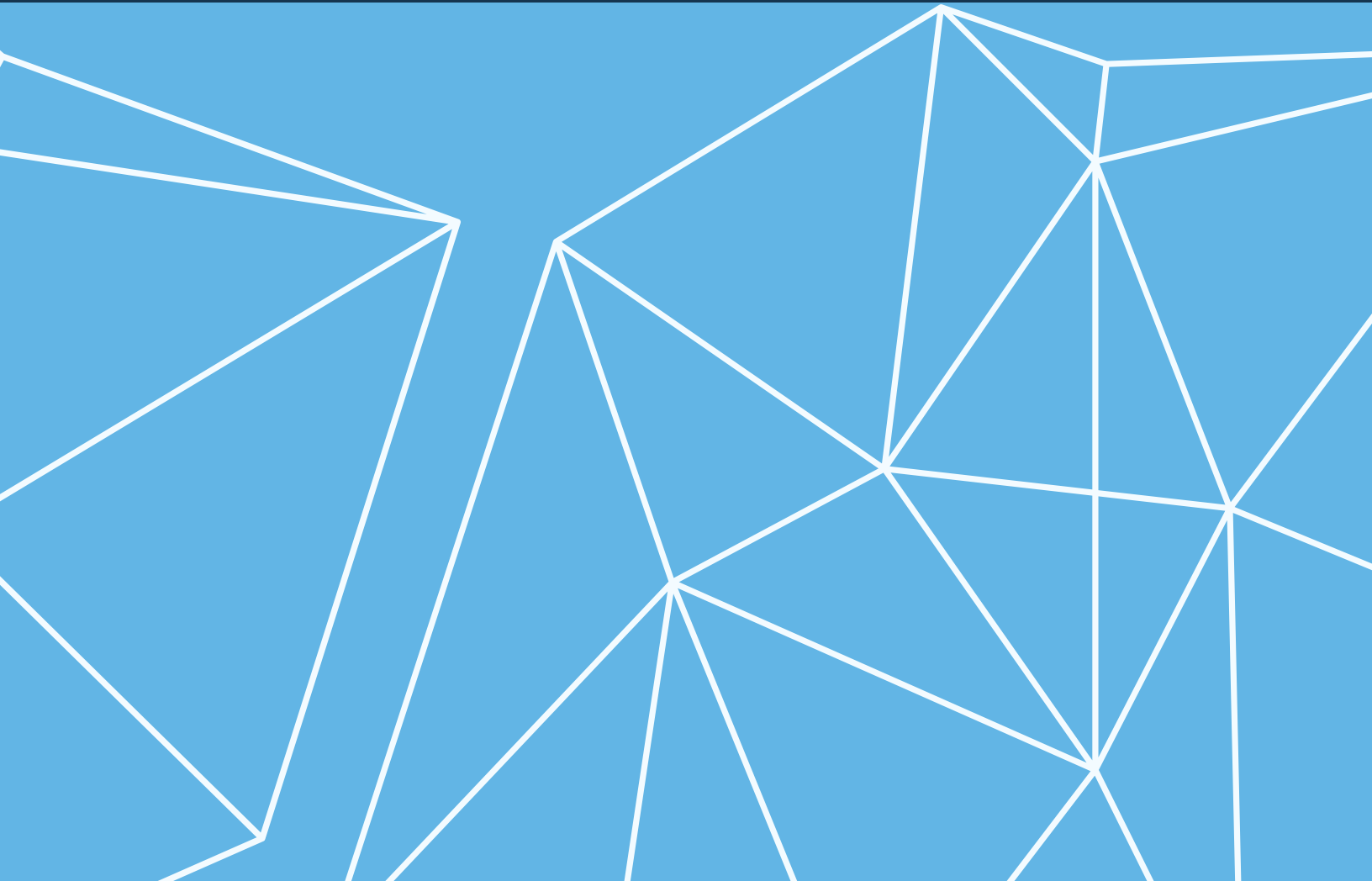


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Introduction

As a PR agency serving B2B SaaS companies, we work with marketers looking for a fresh take on PR. During the onboarding process, clients commonly ask us how we approach “digital” or “nontraditional” PR, which prompted us to consider: What is modern PR?

Despite AI use increasing, niche communities gaining influence and PR pros spending more time on internal communications, some aspects of PR remain the same.

PR is still a brand marketing function designed to communicate a desired message to target audiences like customers, investors, partners, prospects or talent. Editorial endures. We haven’t moved to a pay-to-play-only media mode. Storytelling remains a key strategy for differentiating brands — and messages — in a crowded SaaS market.

So what has changed?

Thanks to the emergence of technology like smartphones, AI, e-commerce, and social media (and yes, BLASTmedia was founded before some of these world-changing technologies burst onto the scene), the short answer is: a lot.

This ebook explores:

- The definition of “modern” PR and why you should get on board.
- The evolution of the buyer-driven corporate narrative.
- The blurred lines between internal comms and PR.
- The changing expectations of PR’s value and measurement, now powered by advances in data and analytics.

What is Modern PR?

Today's PR isn't "modern" — it's evolved. The industry has embraced technological shifts, learned new cultural nuances and kept up with the ever-changing media landscape. **It's simply PR that's rolled with the punches.** Similarly, we don't call today's mobile phones "modern phones." They're phones that have progressed. Uber is a rideshare, but we don't refer to it as "modern transportation." We might use Bumble to find a date, but we wouldn't call it "modern dating."

Marketers' expectations from their PR agency have evolved, too. According to a recent BLASTmedia survey of B2B marketers, today's leaders expect their PR firms to offer media relations, market research, content development, social media management and crisis communications ... and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

So, how exactly has PR evolved — and what role does technology play in its evolution? Glad you asked.

Today's PR is two-way communication.

We engage in dialogues, building relationships with industry influencers, communities and niche audiences rather than relying on one-way messaging. Putting a press release on the wire and crossing your fingers that someone cares? Ain't nobody got time for that.



Today's PR is as broad as it is niche.

Consider *The Wall Street Journal*. It's no longer a newspaper. It's a digital extravaganza living under one brand: podcasts by topic, editors with TikTok profiles, video series, YouTube channels, Instagram accounts and more. Media has moved from one static outlet and many readers to a single outlet with multiple channels accessed by niche subscribers consuming "news" in ways that work best for them.

Today's PR is agile.

In a world of constantly flowing information and evolving sentiments, PR pros are the agile ninjas who shape communications on the fly, adapting to current events and audience interests faster than you can say "crisis management." Consumers expect near real-time responses and reactions, so red tape for messaging approval can kill a brand when things go south. PR helps shape and deliver the message with appropriate urgency.

Today's PR is authentic.

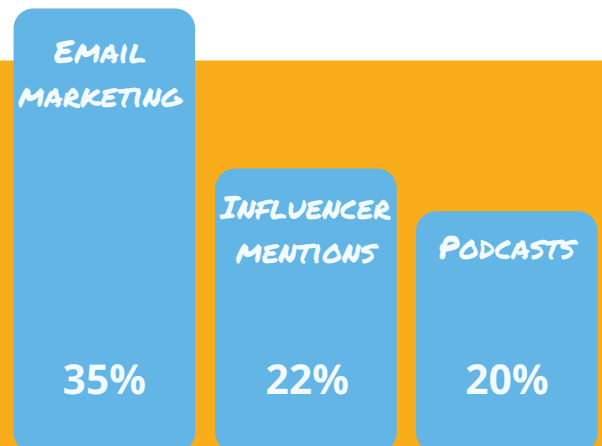
In the fake news era, showcasing real personalities and stories instead of manufactured messages is king.

Audiences are more savvy and skeptical, easily sniffing out dupes and impersonators. The authenticity is presented across mediums — earned, owned and paid — communicating a consistent narrative.

So buckle up because we're diving into the reality of Modern PR — the good, the bad and the downright chaotic. And trust, it's a wild ride.

WHY EMBRACE AGILITY?

Because established channels can and do fizzle. Marketers ranked the top three outputs losing impact with target audiences:



The Modern Corporate Narrative

Influencing today's generation of talent and buyers who value purpose, trust and connection requires a new corporate storytelling approach. When all things are considered equal (features, cost, etc.) between you and category competitors, B2B decision-makers will buy from and invest in the people they feel connected to. **The modern corporate narrative must move beyond CEOs regurgitating numbers and product talk tracks.**

Based on our survey of over 100 marketing leaders, their top priority for 2024 was to build trust. Doing so requires SaaS companies to humanize their brand. So, leaders must get comfortable with being personal about culture, mental health, team management and other impactful subjects.

We've also entered the era of elevating the voices of new subject matter experts (SMEs), like DEI and ESG leaders and CHROs, who can add depth to the corporate narrative. **Elevating diverse voices to reveal a company's humanity is a rising trend in modern media relations and thought leadership programs.**



Millennials make up the bulk of current B2B decision-makers and participate in 73% of all B2B buying decisions. This demographic values purpose and meaning when they choose a vendor. Older B2B purchasers are increasingly adopting their younger counterparts' mindset.

EXPECTATIONS AROUND THE NEW CORPORATE NARRATIVE

1 AUTHENTIC

6 SUSTAINABILITY-MINDED

2 TRANSPARENT

7 COMMUNITY-FOCUSED

3 CONSISTENT

8 DEIB-CENTERED

4 AGILE

9 CONVERSATIONAL

5 DATA PRIVACY FIRST

Evolution of the Comms and PR Function

The business world has typically viewed communications as a marketing function, but its role has evolved into a high-level corporate strategy position. As SaaS companies responded to COVID and then rode the rollercoaster tech economy in the following years, comms leaders have seen more action than ever, being tasked with shaping (and sometimes reacting quickly to) how their organizations handle changes. As a result, we've seen the rise of comms leaders, with many now reporting directly to the CEO.

Executive comms role gaining momentum

Executives are relying more heavily on comms leaders for strategic council. [Enter the chief comms officer role](#), which continues to build momentum and popularity, giving comms (and PR) a vital seat at the table.

Communicators play a critical role in preparing execs for public moments, whether planned or impromptu. In a challenging SaaS economy where marketing budgets are often reallocated to short-term, pipeline-generating strategies, someone must be focused on corporate reputation to help it through rough periods of repositioning, reductions in force, down rounds or C-Suite changes.

Comms function: Operating differently today

There's long been brewing a "situationship" between internal and external comms. Now they've formally entered into a partnership, albeit a little forced. It's now safe to assume internal messaging will become external — often quickly. What's said in company channels can easily end up in the public eye faster than you can say, "Oops." We've all seen it happen — [leaked surveys](#), awkward layoff emails, you name it.

As communications and PR continue delineating themselves from marketing, they demonstrate success differently.

While marketers can track quick wins, comms and PR show ROI by strategizing to win the "long game" via tracking and measuring engagement over time, connecting PR outcomes to business KPIs and collaborating with marketing, CS and sales.

The comms landscape has evolved in complexity, demanding a more sophisticated view of communication and PR as strategic partners — not simply a team executing brand-building initiatives.

It's All About the Data

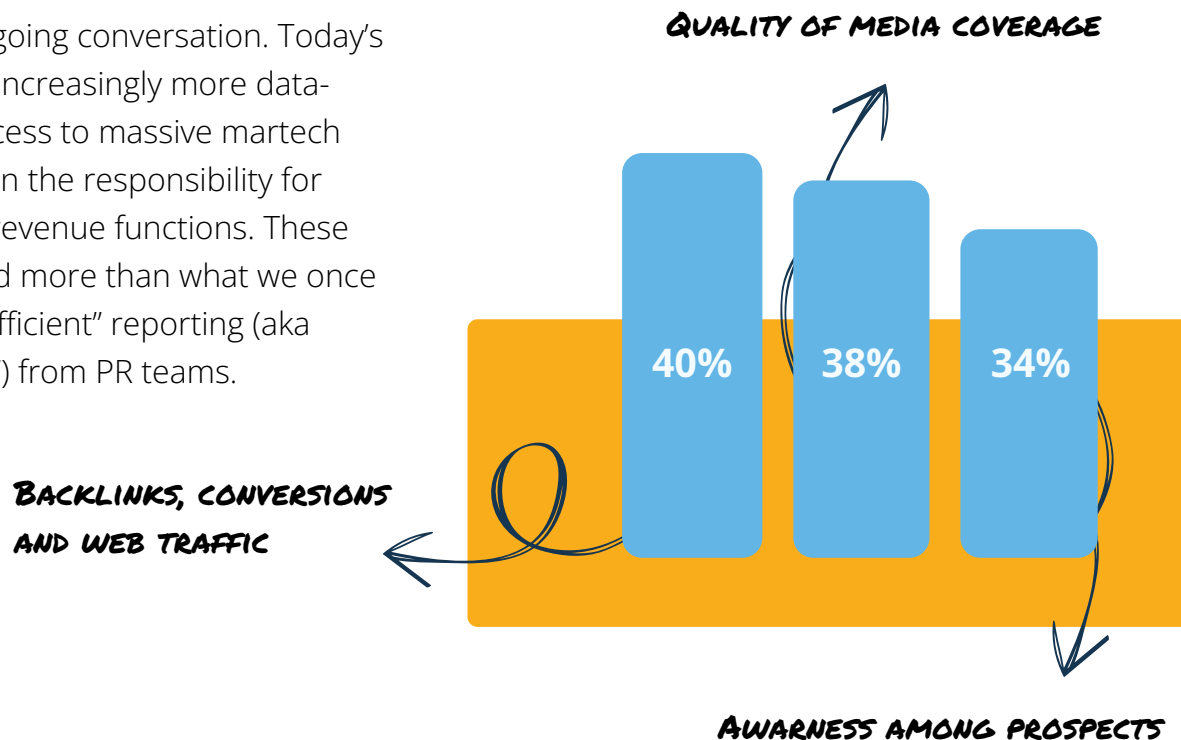
SaaS marketers are agile and invest heavily in their tech stacks for automation, analysis and reporting. They've turned their operations into digital powerhouses, and they expect their partners and agencies to keep up. **Executing modern PR means investing in software to measure and report in the way SaaS marketers prefer.**

Measuring PR

How we measure PR to demonstrate ROI remains an ongoing conversation. Today's marketers are increasingly more data-driven, with access to massive martech stacks and often the responsibility for overseeing all revenue functions. These marketers need more than what we once considered "sufficient" reporting (aka "vanity metrics") from PR teams.

Here's the straight-up truth: Only tracking placements, impressions and sentiment is archaic and marketers should expect more from their PR agency. While we've measured these vanity metrics for over 20 years, they don't show PR's impact on business goals.

The top three ways our survey respondents measure the ROI of brand awareness spend include:



According to [MuckRack's annual survey](#) of in-house and agency professionals, **producing measurable results** (69%) and **tying PR activities to key business initiatives** (62%) top the list of raising PR's value among critical stakeholders.

SUPPORTING ACCOUNT BASED MARKETING (ABM) PROGRAMS

Whether your BDRs have a basic target account list or you're rocking a full-blown ABM platform, most well-oiled SaaS sales and marketing orgs have a clear picture of the people (name, title, company) they are targeting to buy their product. Modern PR strategies can plug into this motion.

How? We're talking about creating direct touchpoints with those prospects by featuring them in contributed content, giving them shoutouts in podcast interviews, and tagging them in social media posts when the coverage hits. It's all about creating positive vibes around the brand and moving prospects to action.

Aligning PR with marketing objectives

Marketers set and measure goals tied to revenue and pipeline generation. Shouldn't PR's goals also align with those objectives? **Yes, PR can impact pipeline.** To deliver on this, PR agencies must understand clients' marketing plans, goals and internal metrics. If the marketing team shares specific objectives with their agency and allows open lines of communication between PR and the sales team, alignment can happen.

Reporting with context and agility

Modern PR means reporting in real-time with campaign transparency. **PR reporting should be customizable, automated and easy to digest.** Why? Because detailed, dynamic reporting demands more than manual recall. To work this magic, PR agencies must implement tech that elevates and contextualizes their reporting — and makes it easily accessible to their clients.

TL;DR

- Modern PR integrates with marketing and sales objectives, developing shared goals and data integration, demonstrating PR's value.
- PR agencies that invest in the right software are more successful at helping their clients prove ROI, lift brands, warm leads and impact pipelines and revenue.
- Intangibles like brand and vibes are crucial, even if unmeasurable.

The Modern PR Infrastructure

Do traditional PR agencies still exist? Yup. But if they are servicing technology companies, they must digitally transform to keep up with client needs and expectations. Modern PR agencies have invested in the technology to execute, monitor and report in real-time, providing data, analytics, dashboards and more to their clients.

Modern PR agencies must keep up with the Joneses (or Patels or Vaynerchuks)

Now, let's chat about keeping up with the cool kids — aka you, the tech marketers. If the agencies who serve you don't keep up, they'll lose you. Tech is advancing at a crazy pace, offering communications pros enough tools and systems for their own marcomms stack. **There's really no excuse for agencies to rely on manual and static practices, and no, graduating to Google Sheets doesn't cut it.** Modern agencies are experimenting with technology like GenAI and creating their own communities for knowledge sharing.

With AI gaining steam, expect its role to keep expanding to:

- Automate routine, time-consuming tasks like media monitoring and report generation.
- Conduct sentiment analysis by analyzing large volumes of text and data to identify trends, track brand sentiment and gauge public opinion for honing targeted messaging and outreach strategies.
- Detect patterns in data to predict potential reputation risks and emergent issues, enabling PR and comms teams to anticipate and stay ahead of problems.
- Assess risks using AI algorithms to digest volumes of information and warn of potential ethical issues and risks associated with campaigns or strategic comms.

Investing in tools helps PR pros focus on high-value, creative work and deepen their understanding of their clients' tech, verticals, messaging and goals. Tech won't replace PR's fundamentals, like well-honed relationships, but it can boost the effectiveness of those principles.

HOW MODERN AGENCIES LEVERAGE AI

We can't not talk about AI. We'd be lost without Grammarly Pro to check mechanics and spelling. We lean on Otter.ai, our faithful scribe who captures conversations and insights. And we're finding different ways to implement generative AI models like ChatGPT, Bard and Claude 2 to build outlines, brainstorm and revise — but NOT replace the human element.

In fact, our EVP, Kim Jefferson, got cozy with ChatGPT to create two in-house chatbots: BLASTmedia's "SaaS PR advisor" — an automated SaaS PR expert focusing on OKRs, plans, reports and effective media pitches — and BLASTmedia's "HR Helper," our friendly HR guide and resource that's connected to the employee handbook.

Finding a balance

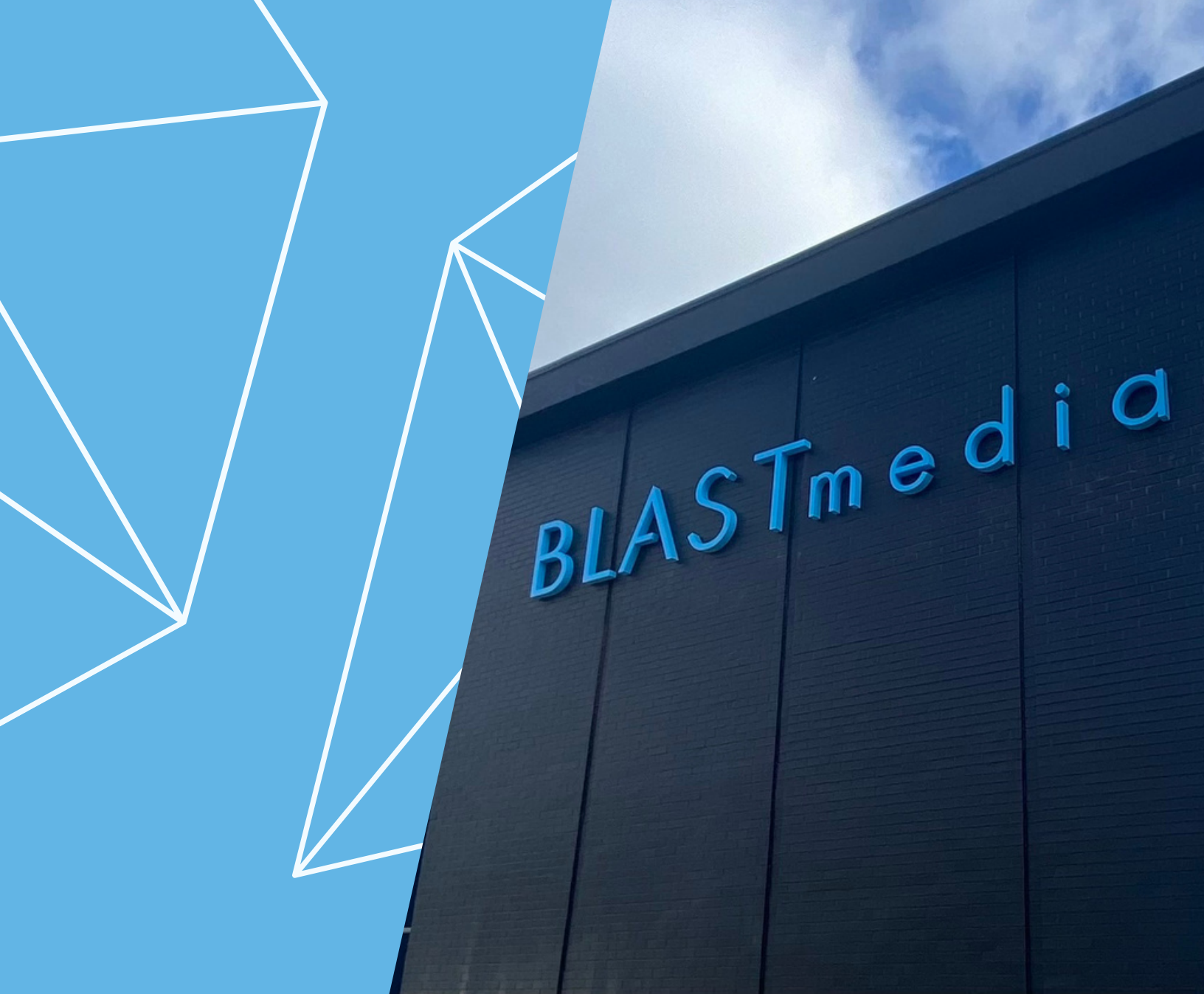
Not every PR agency has the money — or need — for every tool and shiny object. What we see as essential, non-negotiable must-haves for maximizing impact on client PR programs include:

- PR measurement dashboard and contact measurement platform (Propel PRM).
- An inbound reporter request service (HARO/QWOTED).
- A media database (Muck Rack, Cision).
- Project management software (Monday, Asana, Trello, Zapier).
- SEO and web analytics tools (Google Analytics, SEMRush).
- Podcast database (Podchaser).



A final thought

No agency (especially in an RFP) will reveal all the ingredients in its special sauce. But it's worth asking how an agency invests in — and uses — tech to enable better PR outcomes for clients.



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