



Communications.  
Public Policy.  
Digital & Marketing.

# Driving up the business value of communications in the logistics sector

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# Introduction

**The communications landscape has changed beyond recognition in recent years, with implications for how businesses communicate and engage with those who are key to their future growth, whether that be customers, suppliers, strategic partners, investors, employees, the communities in which they operate, regulators and policy makers. And the logistics industry is no exception.**



**Chris Lawrance** has been working in logistics communications for more than 30 years advising major players across the supply chain on their PR strategies, including the likes of CHEP, C.H. Robinson, Culina Group, Linde Material Handling, NFT, Palletways and Wincanton Logistics. Here, Lawrance challenges the sector as to whether it is delivering maximum business value from the fast-changing world of communications.

If you haven't reviewed the direction of your communications strategy in the last couple of years, then there's every chance it's behind the times, given the significant pace of change we are seeing in how companies communicate and engage with their stakeholders. That's because communications and engagement programmes have an increasingly integral and tangible role to play in driving business performance in the digital and automated environment we now operate in.

Communications has certainly moved at a breathless speed. First, we had the internet which spawned the growth of online media channels and democratised information access. Then we saw the entry of smartphones and emergence of social media as a powerhouse, revolutionising communications, democratising content creation and opening up new stakeholder insights and significant opportunities for engagement. More recently we've seen the universal growth of videocommunications in response to Covid, and in the last year the emergence of artificial intelligence as a force to be reckoned with in future marketing communications strategies.

Consequently, today public relations is very much more than just traditional media relations, getting press releases published in the mainstream press and broadcast media. Although, it still has a role to play in the communications mix, what we've witnessed particularly in the last 10-15 years is a seismic shift from a one-way broadcast model to a multifaceted environment enabled by B2B social media platforms and the likes of zoom and Teams which supports more meaningful, more measurable, more targeted multi-stakeholder engagement.

The figures speak for themselves. Fewer people are reading physical newspapers than ever before, with national paid-for news circulation dropping some 60% over the past decade. And the picture is as gloomy for regional media, whose circulations fell by an average of 21% year-on-year in the first six months of 2023. Their online editions are not faring much better. Trade media titles have also been disappearing at a fast rate of knots for some time as advertising revenues are not there to make them viable.

The fact is, for many years we have been consuming our daily intake of news and information from different channels and in different ways. Whilst traditional B2B media channels have been in decline, the opposite is true of the likes of LinkedIn and online video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom and Teams, which have become highly popular business communication channels.



**Maximising business  
impacts of PR in the new  
communications landscape**

So how do logistics companies make the most of this new digital-led communications landscape – how do they make sense of it and fully optimise its potential to achieve positive business impacts in support of their growth plans. Below, are six priority actions I would strongly urge logistics services providers to consider to maximise the value that their stakeholder communications and engagement programmes deliver to the business in 2024.

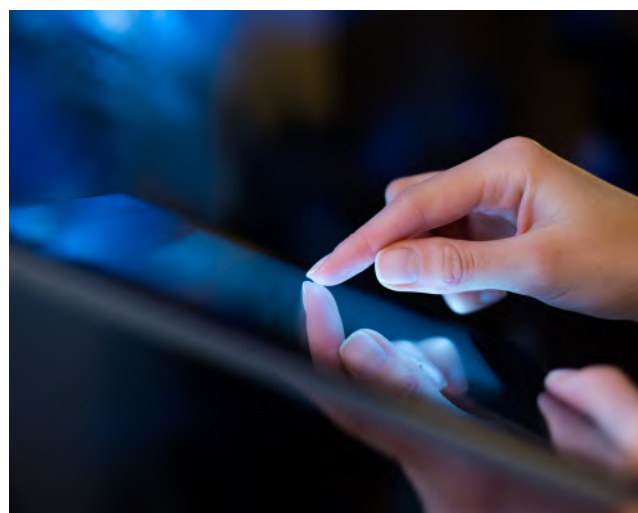
## 1. Start with a clear understanding of the full potential of what can be achieved business wise as a result of the broader than ever communications landscape

Whilst clear and focussed goal setting has always been key to the success of any PR programme, the fast changing, digital-led communications environment allows companies to do much more to support the growth of a business, making the whole discipline so much more commercially tangible. And what better time to have a dust down of your existing strategy than at the beginning of a new year.

Rewinding, PR has, until recent times, faced the challenge of demonstrating its true ROI. This has been due to the fact that prior to the digital age, it's been very difficult to measure the correlation between PR drivers, such as growth in profile and positive perceptions, with the top line, unless internal systems have been put in place specifically for this purpose, which unfortunately is rarely the case. Whilst PR undoubtedly provides many benefits, its lack of a commercial connection, means it can be seen as a 'nice to have' and not a necessity. Digitisation of communications and engagement is rapidly changing this position and, as one industry commentator argued, PR should no longer be viewed just as a brand enhancer, but a business driver.

For this to happen, requires a changing mindset by logistics companies and their PR teams – one which thinks commercially when it comes to communications.

At JBP we have been redefining the way we do B2B PR as changes in the communications landscape continue unabated. We have created a model for maximising the business value that can be derived from the new highly interactive, multi-channel and multi format communications environment. We've termed this value as the 'business capital' that PR and other communications activities can generate for the business. It comes in many forms as set out in the chart below.

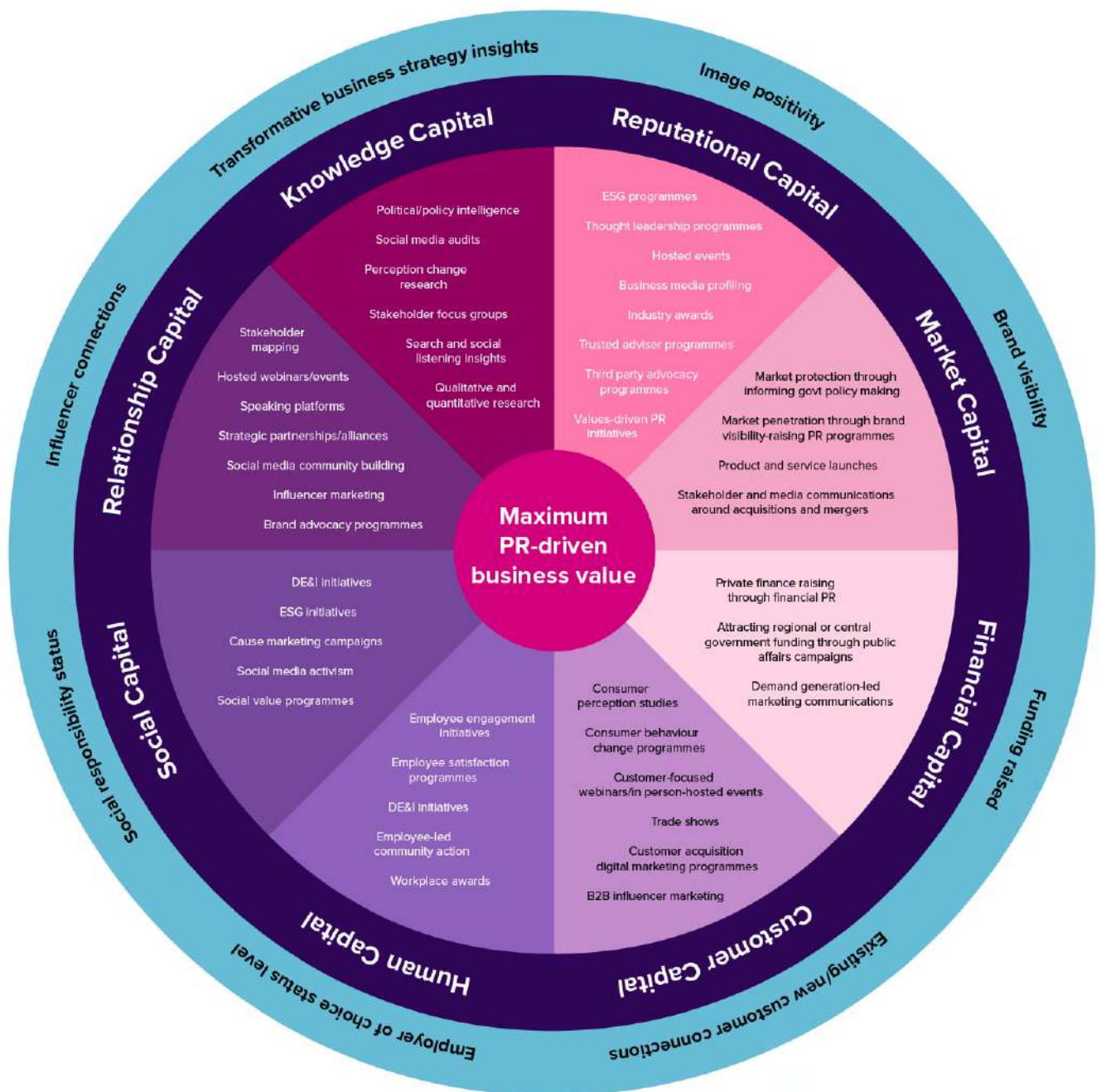


Communications & Engagement Goal	Business Capital Category
Build, manage and protect the company's/brand's reputation	Reputational capital
Grow and protect market share	Market capital
Attract investment and funding	Financial capital
Support customer acquisition and loyalty	Customer capital
Establish high performance teams	Human capital
Generate new insights and knowledge to act and capitalise upon	Knowledge capital
Demonstrate the business as a responsible and caring player across everything it does	Social capital
Develop new business critical networks and 'friends'	Relationship capital

By adopting such a business impact-led approach, harnessing the power of communications mediums and technologies that exist today, companies can really shift the dial when it comes to the value of their B2B PR.

Our **business capital dial** below highlights a variety of PR activities that can be put in place to generate the different forms of business capital and how they can be measured through both traditional and digital means.

Such a model requires a close relationship between commercial and c-suite executives and the communications teams (whether in-house and/or outsourced), whereby it is clearly set out what needs to be put in place to ensure all business-impact analytics are captured and reported on, as well as who is responsible for leading on such data collection. So, for example, if a logistics company runs a webinar on a topic designed to reflect its expertise, the communications team may be responsible for feeding back on data relating to registrations, actual attendees and downloads of recordings of the webinars; whilst the commercial team would have a key role to play in providing information on the quality of the audience in terms of future prospects, partners and influencers; as well as relaying any follow up impacts such as new business secured, new strategic partnerships established, and intermediary connections who could open up new business opportunities in time.





## **2. Do digital well: B2B digital PR needs to be front and centre of future communications and engagement plans. It's the way of the world so logistics businesses need to understand its full potential and invest in it.**

Coverage in national broadcast media and in broadsheets can still do wonders for a company's reputation and credibility. But so too can content delivered on LinkedIn, shared by a customer and supported with targeted paid for social marketing. And it's becoming ever more critical as traditional media continues to decline, making it increasingly difficult to gain cut through earned media.

It's fair to say B2B businesses have in the past been slower to adapt to the new digital communications environment than their B2C counterparts, but they can ill-afford to do so any longer.

Digital PR done well allows brands, companies and employees to build strong rapport with audiences, from sharing the value of their expertise and experience, to fostering a sense of shared values through storytelling which brings to life their human side and values.

But it needs to be done well. Whilst everyone should be encouraged to be content creators, for it to deliver desired business impacts demands a level of communications know how and sophistication as to what really engages the people you want to connect with, whilst ensuring that it is aligned to the strategic focus of the business. It's why many companies are now deploying former journalists as part of their media teams and creating corporate newsrooms which function like a traditional media newsroom. Good journalists are curious by nature and critical thinkers and therefore a great fit for content creation and storytelling in the new media world. As businesses increasingly become publishers, and with so much competing content out there, they need to aspire to offer sources of information that are on par with the likes of the leading broadsheets and business media, and create paid for promotions that can appeal to a given audience like a TV advert does. It's why our head of content was a former news editor of the Sun newspaper.

Whilst consumers flock to social media giants like Facebook and Instagram, B2B communicators rely on LinkedIn as their top social media channel for reaching key business stakeholders.

For those companies who are not proactive on LinkedIn, they will become conspicuous by their lack of use of the medium as it continues to grow in its influence in the global business world.

Indeed, the business social media channel is set to come into its own in 2024 as more and more companies realise they need to invest time to ensure they get the best out of it. Today the channel has some 930m members worldwide, adding some 60m new members in just the last year. Compare this to the FT, a global news channel, which reaches 24.4m readers through its print and online channels – just 2.6% of LinkedIn's business reach.

**Alessandro Bogliari**, CEO of The Influencer Marketing Factory, predicts that LinkedIn is going to become more popular as a platform for content creators. She says: "LinkedIn has long been a known platform for thought leadership, and with its continuing rapid growth, I predict more leaders and creators will turn to the platform."

LinkedIn has proven to be much more than just a hiring channel which it was originally best known for. Today it provides an ideal platform for thought leadership, brand storytelling, establishing new business connections, identifying and forming business-critical strategic partnerships, peer to peer influencing and for brand advocacy, all of which can be measured. Heightened engagement can be achieved through webinars and podcasts, whilst brand videos can be created to humanise and give personality to a brand, making your company attractive for others to do business with it.

LinkedIn can also be used to support relationships between your senior executives and leading journalists by providing a connection opportunity and acting as a showcase for the opinions of the experts within your business. Once a connection is made, a journalist's account handle can be added to the bottom of future content posted by a senior executive, increasing the chances it will be seen by the media contact.

If your company has not already invested in training on LinkedIn for PR team members and others who are likely to be contributing most to content going forward, then it should do so as soon as possible to optimise their profiles and understanding of the functionality of the social media channel and the business opportunities this can open up.

To maximise LinkedIn's capability as a content creator, all users should turn on the 'Creator mode'. This is designed to help members of the network to grow their influence on the channel by highlighting their content in the 'Featured' and 'Activity' sections that appear first on your profile section.

The creator mode setting, which also comes with access to the LinkedIn Live and LinkedIn Newsletter features the platform offers, increases users' chances of appearing in searches or on members' newsfeeds, thereby helping to expand your network. Since it was first introduced, over nine million users have turned this feature on, converting their profile into a showcase of their content rather than just a user profile.

In addition, LinkedIn offers various analytics to help creator mode users gauge how their content is performing.

The LinkedIn newsletter has proven to be extremely successful since it was launched. As of last year they had generated some 365m newsletter sign ups. Publishing a LinkedIn newsletter provides discipline in creating regular content and helps companies to keep in contact with connections and provide information that is relevant and of high value.

When a LinkedIn member subscribes to your newsletter, they will automatically become a follower. It also comes with an automatic announcement feature so when you produce your first issue, all your existing followers are notified. Subscribers will then receive notifications everytime a new edition is published. In addition, you can also have up to 5 LinkedIn newsletters providing the opportunity to customise them for different stakeholders or markets.

JBP is a member of the [Worldcom Group](#), an international PR network, and I lead their global marketing team. We have leveraged the expertise within agencies across the network to create a high impact LinkedIn newsletter. In just over a year this now has more than 3,200 subscribers. All contributors are also raising their own personal and business brands by having their LinkedIn account handles tagged.



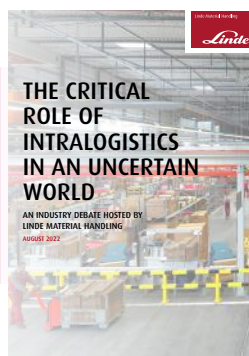
# Case Study: Winning with webinars

Covid gave rise to a huge growth in business webinars as professionals became familiar with online video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Teams. As businesspeople have grown accustomed to working digitally, webinars have continued to be a very useful way to engage with business connections and to grow influence in target markets.

Not surprising when research shows that:

- **73%** of B2B marketers consider webinars as the most effective method for generating high quality leads;
- **52%** of marketers say that the quality of leads obtained from webinars was rated 'above average' or 'excellent';
- **64%** of B2B marketers have actively organised online events;
- **54%** of B2B professionals actively participate in webinars on a weekly or even daily basis.

JBP has been running a webinar series for material handling specialists Linde Material Handling over the last twelve months, which has involved creating a range of highly topical themes for industry experts to debate. The Intralogistics Live series has proved a great success, with 4 webinars being held in 2023 including a 'greenprint' for sustainable warehousing; the critical role of intralogistics in an uncertain world; a smarter approach to safety in a high tech warehouse; and automation – can you afford not to?



The webinars each attracted on average up to 100 plus registrations; and participants in the various debates featured Linde's own experts, management consultants and influential industry figures. Key participants included:

- A Chief Executive of a leading logistics trade association
- The Principal Director of Physical Logistics and Fulfilment Practice Lead at a household-name management consultancy
- The Environmental, Social and Governance Project Manager at a leading manufacturer of well-known lager and cider brands
- The Associate Director of one of the major soft drinks manufacturers in the world
- The Managing Director of the leading standards setting body for workplace transport training
- The Occupational Health & Safety Manager at a global soft drinks manufacturer
- The Chief Automation Officer at a manufacturing technology body
- The Programme Director at a leading 3D modular housebuilder
- The Secretary of a leading trade body representing automated material handling systems

All webinars were marketed through email marketing and promotions on LinkedIn. Post event, content including posts/clips from the webinar, a downloadable white paper featuring key discussion points from the debate, and a full recording of the event were shared via Linde's own social media channels. External participants were also equipped with social media content to share via their own channels to support peer-to-peer influencing.



### 3. Optimise the business capital ROI of your communications and engagement activities by ensuring PR and Search Engine Optimisation are 'talking' to each other

A big impact digital PR programme requires a highly effective search strategy and vice versa so logistics communications professionals need to have a strong appreciation of the relationship between the two and how they can best work together. Whilst one is about building image and profile (PR) and the other about rankings on a search engine results page (SEO), pairing them can optimise business capital ROI as both are about building authority. By working in tandem they will enable the creation of content that hits a nerve with target audiences, put the business high up in Google's 'shop window', drive organic traffic to your website and support the development of online business networks.

So how can you ensure that you're maximising the business capital ROI potential through an integrated PR and search strategy?

1

Firstly, use keyword search tools such as [Semrush](#) and [Google Keyword Planner](#) (part of Google Adwords) to identify what your clients are most interested in and through which channels they prefer to engage with companies. This helps logistics providers to search optimise their content around points of most interest to their target audience, boost their rankings on the main search engines and focus on channels where they are getting best engagement.



Keywords need to be relatable to your business and market sector and therefore should be appropriate to hot industry topics as well as your company's products and services. They also need to be keywords that you have a realistic chance of ranking for. Long tail keywords will normally have lower search volumes but provide better ranking opportunities as the competition is reduced.

Also, see what keywords your competitors are using and identify gaps to enhance your share of search. Again, a tool like Semrush can help provide these valuable insights.

2

Maximise the use of backlinks in PR content to your website. This means creating highly valuable and therefore desirable content, and building strong links with B2B influencers that are keen to act as messengers for your content. As one commentator says "backlinks to your website are essentially 'popularity votes' and the more votes you get, the more popular you are with Google".

Backlinks that point to your website from high domain authority websites will be the most impactful in terms of rankings on Google as they signal trust to the search engine. You can check out which high domain authority websites are a good fit with your business by using [Semrush's Domain Authority Checker](#).

Content is king when it comes to achieving backlinks – create content that is useful, relevant, captivating and therefore highly desirable and shareable.

**Types of content that will attract most traction and generate natural (not paid-for) backlinks are:**

- **Resource lists** – these could be compilations of valuable information and tools and present the opportunity to gain the support of those that you reference
- **How to guides** for resolving pain points or helping businesses to capitalise on developments and trends in their sector.

- **White papers** covering your own perspectives and those of external experts – those you have drawn upon for the authoritative report should be encouraged to share it and include backlinks in their posts.
- **Third party research** – teaming up with a reputable third party research company to publish a study on a highly topical or current industry development is of particular interest to the media and industry analysts and backlinks to the findings can prove successful.
- **Webinars and podcasts**, as highlighted earlier in this document, are extremely shareable and again invited guests can be encouraged to share content relating to the webinar or podcast with a backlink to your website where the broadcast content can be accessed.
- **Strong case studies** showing how a business has benefitted from your service or solution. These should always be produced from the perspective of the client and how you have helped them capitalise on a market opportunity or circumnavigate a challenge to the business. Again, well-crafted case studies supported by visual content can create interest amongst online media channels as well as backlinks being shared by the companies featured, as well as their personnel.
- **Checklists** are very popular and shareable – for example 5 things you need to put in place as a result of new government policy/legislation; or 6 priority actions to optimise the sustainability of your supply chain. Practical and reliable checklists present trusted sources of content for third parties to reference through backlinks to your website where the lists are accessed.
- **Entertaining and engaging content**, including content which has a strong emotional pull, puts a smile on people's faces or tells a behind the scenes story about your business.
- **Expert interviews** – consider establishing a series of podcast or video interviews with influential figures from within your industry and your target sectors. These figures could be c-suite level client executives, heads of industry bodies, leading management consultants and industry analysts, top journalists/ bloggers covering your sector, experts on certain areas of your industry – eg sustainability, digitisation and safety. All the experts featured can be encouraged to post backlinks to your website which includes content from the interview.
- **Collaborative content** – partner with other individuals and businesses from complementary sectors and disciplines, to curate highly valuable content which can be shared by all those involved in its creation.
- **Infographics** – strong infographics on trends and developments within sectors are extremely shareable both by influencers and online media outlets.





**Taking on board the search facilities of tomorrow**

As part of any search strategy, logistics companies will need to take on board the rise of artificial intelligence. That's because sites such as ChatGPT are being used instead of search engines we have been using up to this point such as Google and Bing.

According to a recent report in Forbes, one survey found that some **70%** of respondents believe that [ChatGPT will surpass Google](#) as the go-to search engine. Therefore, logistics communications professionals need to consider optimising in the future not only for the likes of Google but also for the AI-powered chatbots.

In addition, Google's recent launch of the Search Generative Experience (SGE), is [the search engine's latest innovation](#). It has implications for achieving high search rankings and driving organic traffic to your website. Utilising generative AI technology, SGE embellishes search results by presenting users with dynamic content directly on the search engine results page. This unique approach allows audiences to interact with information more efficiently, reducing the need for additional clicks and offering immediate answers. Therefore, there is a need to create content in a way that addresses common questions related to your industry or niche comprehensively. By delivering valuable and concise information, you increase the chances of appearing in SGE results as a trusted source. This also calls for a focus on long-tail keywords that reflect user intent and align with conversational queries rather than isolated keywords. Incorporate these phrases naturally within your content while ensuring its relevance and value.

#### **4. Influence the influencers - we've all heard of the significant effect that online influential voices have on B2C brands. Those operating in B2B markets have as much to gain through a B2B influencer programme with the digitisation of PR.**

We've already touched upon this in section 2 above but getting to influential intermediaries and optimising their influence for your organisation's benefit is one of the best ways digital can take your communications and engagement to the next level and truly demonstrate the business value you can gain from PR.

Businesses in any sector rely on intermediaries, aka influencers, to open up new market opportunities and make new high business value introductions. Businesses look up to them, turn to them for advice, ask their opinions and get them to give their recommendations on who they should be working with, investing in or partnering for example. Networking, speaking at events, getting business contacts to set up meetings for you to meet their acquaintances and attending trade shows have traditionally been the main ways to make new influential connections in the physical world. And whilst all these activities remain important to do, they can now be complemented in the digital environment, providing opportunities to gain exposure to new audiences, thereby significantly extending your sphere of influence and brand visibility.

In today's digital world, B2B influencers are essential partners in helping your business and brands spread their messages, adding their authority and credibility to your brand and fostering new relationships. And remember that B2B influencers are your own team as well as those on the outside.

When developing a B2B influencer programme, map out those who come with a strong reputation and have lots of credibility in your marketplace. Identify how connected they are on LinkedIn, as well as their level of proactivity on their feeds and the engagement they are attracting with their content. Also, use digital listening tools to understand what they are saying and whether their perspectives are unique, helping them to stand out from the crowd.

B2B influencers could be industry figureheads and trade body leaders; clients and prospects; strategic partners; independent consultants and industry analysts; leading specialists and experts within your own businesses; academics; central, local and regional government executives; journalists and bloggers. They could even be retired and respected professionals who were at the top of their industries and therefore well placed to impart their wisdom drawn from years of experience.

And unlike B2C influencer relations, B2B influencer marketing does not come with a big price tag. many B2B influencers are attracted by the benefits of working with businesses to showcase their own expertise and to grow their own online networks.

Use tools such as [Semrush](#) or ask an AI tool such as ChatGPT to identify key B2B influencers in your sector. Scan offline and online industry events and identify speakers who are a good profile match for your influencer programme. Also ask your employees about their most authoritative and connected clients, as well as other connections they will have that represent a good fit for your business to leverage as B2B influencers.

Create a shortlist of top targets to prioritise in terms of building strong relationships based on their respective authority and connectivity. Make sure that they are fit for your brand and your business goals.

You can utilise the digital environment in many ways to build relationships and extend your visibility and credibility using social media, email campaigns and your website. Invite the influencers that you have prioritised to:

- Publish an article for your regular LinkedIn newsletter or e-bulletin as a guest contributor
- Participate in a webinar or podcast to give their perspectives on a highly topical theme within the logistics industry
- Take part in a research study that you are conducting around a major industry issue or sector trends

By becoming the digital source and conduit for third party and internal expert insights, industry trends and insider knowledge will support the credibility of your business, increase brand visibility and with it demand generation.

**5. Be human and responsible – companies have been, and are still guilty of, being too corporate and impersonal, as well as concentrating on promoting what they do and not what they stand for. Tomorrow’s business winners will be those that embrace humanity and responsibility, harnessing the power of digital communications to convey their personality, values and sense of purpose to their target audiences.**

Being human and responsible are two key attributes of a business operating in the 21st century. We all know that people do business with those they like and that business chemistry is a pre-requisite for strong business relations.

The digital environment now facilitates the communication of these two business-critical elements, albeit companies still need to ensure they live and breathe them behind the scenes.

So how can logistics companies build a genuine human connection and responsible profile online to reinforce what they are doing in the physical world in terms of their values and underpinning behaviours, and in doing so create an authentic image of the business that others will want to work with.

- **Brainstorm content ideas that convey your values** – from team members sharing their genuine inside view of the business, including how their ideas and thoughts for being a better business have been taken on board by the company; to how they have got involved in community action initiatives that have had a positive effect on their career development and local communities. Get clients involved in two-way online debates with your company on progressive developments in business-critical areas such as mental wellbeing; business ethics; diversity, equity and inclusion; climate and social change.
- **Talk openly about your failures and mistakes** and show how you have learnt from them and become a better business as a consequence – this could involve telling the story of the company’s evolution, including the hiccups along the way that has helped it get to where it is now, giving it a sense of genuineness that makes it endearing and interesting to those you are connected with.
- **Respond with humanity** when dealing with a crisis, show that you care a damn for your employees, clients, suppliers, investors or other third parties affected. Convey thoughtfulness and empathy so that you come over as decent and responsible.

- **Show off the people behind your brand** to highlight what makes your company what it is. That could be your own employees: from reception to R&D, from shop floor to the supply chain. Also bring suppliers into play as it highlights how you treat them as an integral part of your company making for a seamless business operation.
- **Utilise user generated content** from your clients, strategic partners, investors and suppliers. Get them to tell your wider audiences why they work with you, which is more powerful than your business asserting how wonderful it is.

## 6. Understand how AI can best support and add value to your existing communications activities

AI has been hitting all the headlines over the last year and its deployment in PR is gathering pace, supporting insight gathering for developing communications approaches, content creation, ideation and output efficiency and productivity.

PR professionals have been quick to recognise its capabilities to create initial draft content that can be worked upon and customised so that it aligns with business goals and messages; initial ideas to support development of communications campaigns that complement the internal brainstorming process; and the creation of brand identities and slogans for services, products and PR initiatives that stimulate further discussion and creativity.

AI has also been present for a few years in media monitoring, social media listening and influencer identification tools, some of which have been referenced already in this paper and support PR reporting and audience insight gathering.

However, there are a number of new, exciting and perhaps lesser known and utilised tools that can greatly benefit the impact of communications amongst target audiences and markets. Below are some examples.

- [PRophet](#) which has been developed to equip PRs with a data driven media pitching story, maximising opportunities to get your content idea covered and opening up introductions to new media contacts. The tool tests your pitch, predicts media interest in it, perfects it and suggest journalists who would be appropriate targets based on their interests and articles they have written. It also presents guest opportunities on podcasts.
- [PressPal](#) from Muck Rack which speeds up the identification of relevant mainstream and online media contacts based on your press release or pitch.
- [Propel](#) which, amongst other AI-driven communications capabilities, automates ROI measurement of PR campaigns through its business outcomes dashboard. This creates shareable reports that convert earned media to the bottom line. The dashboard shows the exact impact of campaigns through direct attribution and general correlation metrics, which connect the dots between the web and PR.
- [DALLE-3](#), which creates images from text prompts supporting the development of highly creative and unique visual content.
- [Runway](#), which promises no lights, no camera but all action. Runway realistically synthesizes new videos with nothing but text.

AI will continue to evolve and PRs will need to keep a close eye on developments in the future to ensure they are harnessing its full potential to engage those that they want to engage with.

# In summary

These are exciting times for B2B communications in the logistics industry. However, the fast evolving, digital-enabled environment and the opportunities that come with it require the PR function to:

- Keep abreast of all the technological developments taking place that will enhance the communications process and outcomes
- Embrace new ways of communicating and engaging with audiences and markets
- Identify what works best for the business in the digital and physical worlds
- Apply a commercial mindset to communications to demonstrate its business value

By doing so your PR will stay ahead of the game and so will the business performance.

