



INTEGRATING EARNED MEDIA INTO PAID & OWNED

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
THE BREAKDOWN	4
FROM PAID TO EARNED	7
EARNED MEDIA MANAGEMENT	8
TARGET	9
ENGAGE.....	12
MEASURE	13
INTEGRATE	15
CONCLUSION	17

INTRODUCTION

In our current overwhelming and fractured media landscape, earned media has proven to be the most valuable type of media. And you don't just have to take our word for it:

"A recent Northeastern study found that on average, increasing a brand's social media output of owned media by 10% saw a 7% increase in brand awareness, a 4% increase in customer satisfaction, but only a 3% decrease in purchase intent. The same percentage increase in earned social media output led to significant increases across all three categories." [PR Daily](#)



While this doesn't mean paid and owned media should be discounted in their own importance, it's clear that it's more important than ever that you and your team are using an integrated approach to your strategy: **Earned media can't be ignored, kept by itself, or considered immeasurable.** It should work next to and with your paid and owned media strategies, both of which have been easier to measure — until now.

The age of Earned Media Management is here, and we aim to show you how you can make the most of yours. **Let's get into it.**

THE BREAKDOWN

EARNED MEDIA + EARNED MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Earned media is, of course, all of the media attention around a brand that hasn't been paid for or created for and distributed on your own channels.

It has typically fallen to the PR and comms pros to produce earned media opportunities for their organization and/or roster of clients, and then attempt to measure those results. Historically it has been a murky business.

Now technology has improved to the point that we can measure earned media efforts on par with paid and owned media, providing opportunities for these strategies to be integrated for maximum effect.

This whole process — of producing earned media opportunities and subsequently measuring them as accurately as possible in order to know how much actual business they're producing for your brand or clients — is known as **Earned Media Management**.

Earned Media Management combines technology, data, processes, and analysis to modernize the comms function from an expense into a business driver. Our definition here at Cision includes four tenets that we've created to help expand on and explain the process:

INFLUENCER GRAPHS

Not a tool, but means of mapping out who the actual audiences of influencers is, in order to better understand them and be sure you're working with the best possible influencer for a campaign or partnership. It's how to target most effectively.

SMART ENGAGEMENT

Not just a periodic press release, but sustained, smarter engagement.

TRUE MEASUREMENT

Are you measuring real numbers that matter to your brand?

COMMS TRANSFORMATION

This is the overall integration of your strategies we're talking about; transforming the way your PR and comms team is working, to bring in real, measurable results. As you'll see, it isn't easy, but it is worth it.

[🔗 Earned Media Management: The Evolution of PR & Comms, Cision](#)

PAID MEDIA

Whether or not you personally handle the paid strategy for your brand, you're aware of what it is: Things like sponsored, branded content, PPC (pay-per-click), search and display ads, and even promoted social posts.

While no two paid strategies look alike, paid media has typically been the part of the marketing strategy with the most budget behind it.

Many teams have been reevaluating their budget allocations, however, and putting some of what used to be behind paid behind other media types now that measurement has improved. Every team has to decide what their best approach will be, based on the resources — including budget — that are available to them.

But we'll talk more about that in a minute.

OWNED MEDIA

Owned media is all of the media that your brand actually creates and manages themselves.

This is any content you're creating that isn't sponsored — your blog, whitepapers, ebooks, infographics, toolkits, or the content for your social posts.

This is where brands can best shape their own messaging, and putting some budget behind promoting this content pulls it into the paid media strategy.

Which brings us to our next point.





HOW THESE MEDIA WORK TOGETHER

From these brief explanations, it's easy to see how these different types of media would work best in an integrated way: Putting some budget behind owned content that's organically performing well would be a smart use of your paid strategy. But what about your earned media? Are you making sure that's also getting maximized?

You want to be sure you're setting aside enough of your resources — not just budget, but also time — to track your earned media and boost it where you can. Someone reading an article on your blog (owned content) already knows that it's coming from your brand. While that means it's a great resource for learning about your brand, it obviously has a bias. Sponsored content is regarded even more skeptically, and if it isn't transparent it can feel like a trick and turn its audience against the brand who sponsored it.

Earned media, on the other hand, comes from sources unconnected to the brand, which naturally makes it the most trusted type of media. A strategic team will track its earned media in order to know not only what is being said about them, but will also work to spread that earned media message in places it can capture the right audience. When executed well, this can even move those target audiences further along in a sales or marketing cycle.

Makes sense, right? We're all just trying to work smarter, not harder. Emphasizing the importance of earned media is one way to do that, provided you have the right tracking system in place (and that's going to be different for every brand and team, depending on the resources available to you and the scope of your brand).

Before we get into the how, let's look at the industry-wide shift that's been happening, as the focus moves from paid-heavy strategies to earned media-based strategies.

FROM PAID TO EARNED

Like everything else, advertising has evolved. Where once the ad man could put out the message and be confident in largely controlling it, consumers not only have increasing control over brand perception, but are also incredibly jaded by advertising. When you combine that with the sheer unrelenting, ever-increasing volume of content that exists, it's easy to see why advertising messages have become less effective.

Add to this the advent of ad blockers, the evolution of word-of-mouth marketing and the rise of influencer marketing to include the inevitable fake influencers, and you have trust in advertising at an all-time low. (That's not to say that influencer marketing is dead — it's far from it — but that it's more important than ever to put the work into vetting the right influencer(s) for your brand.)

Consumers know that content that comes directly from a brand was created to serve a purpose for that organization. But if a respected third party — like a journalist or established blogger — were to discuss a brand of their own accord (#notsponsored), it's potentially a much more influential message that could reach many more possible customers as a result.

These don't have to be people with huge audiences either; smaller influencers dubbed "[micro-influencers](#)" and even "[nanoinfluencers](#)" often have much smaller, niche audiences that are still extremely highly engaged.

This all combines into the larger shift that the industry is seeing, from a more "traditional" paid-heavy model to an increasing focus on an earned media model.

Not only is earned media a more highly trusted form of media, but it's now also possible to track and measure it in the way comms pros have been able to track and measure paid and owned media for years.

The key now is for each team of comms pros to decide the right mix of paid, earned and owned in their overall strategy.

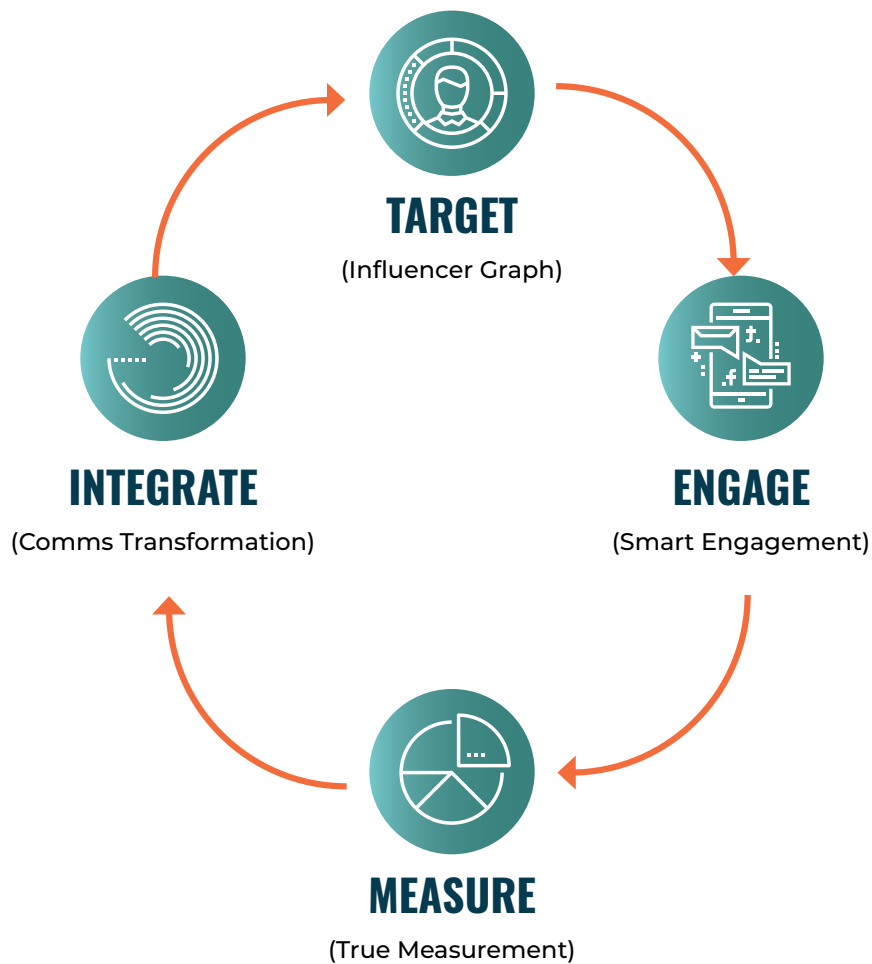
Here's how.



EARNED MEDIA MANAGEMENT

Managing your earned media means that you're turning it into a business driver rather than an expense—but not at the expense of storytelling. The more you understand your target audience and the influencers that reach and affect them, the more you can create compelling stories for them (and ultimately drive more business).

We've put together a framework for how to do just that:



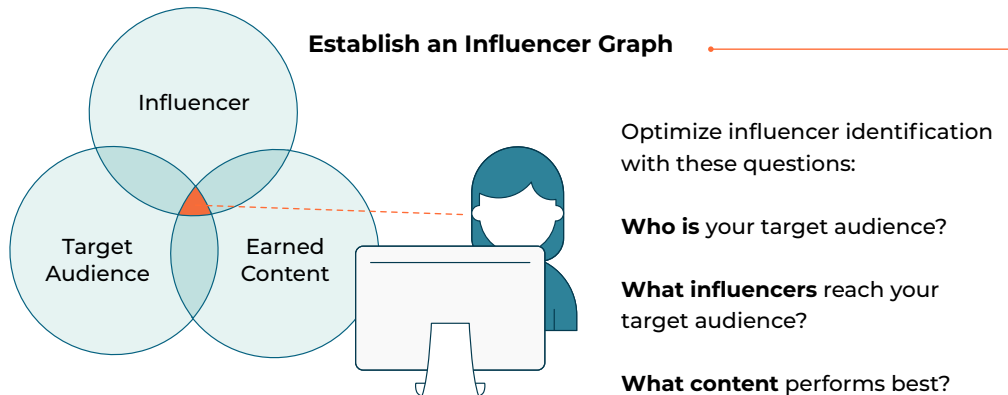
The parenthesis hold the names of Cision's tenets we briefly listed and discussed earlier and we obviously offer related products, but you don't have to use our products to make this system work for you and your team. Consider this framework a guide, not a mandate.



TARGET

The first step in any good integrated comms strategy is knowing your audience so that you can effectively target them. This includes targeting the influencers they find the most interesting and, well, influential.

To be the most effective at this we've created the concept of an [Influencer Graph](#).



HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

STEP 1: PROFILE YOUR IDEAL AUDIENCE

Hopefully this is the target audience you've been working to reach, but if that hasn't been refreshed by your team in a while there's no time like the present.

Do you have existing personas? Be sure to review them and update or expand them as necessary; while they might be extremely up-to-date for your target audience in some aspects of your business or sales pipeline, they could be different elsewhere (on social media for example).

Be as detailed as possible with the resources your team has available. You want to

be sure this information is accessible to anyone it could be helpful to in your organization, from marketing and sales to developers building out products, to UX. Truly understanding your audience means keeping them in mind through every step of not only the sales cycle, but also their customer lifecycle.

How does what they need change over time? Who is influential to them will also change over time and might vary in different places. Later in the cycle might be a good time to tap internal brand advocates as influencers, for example.

STEP 2: MAP OUT THE INFLUENCERS

You can do this manually, of course, or you can engage the right technology and/or partners to make this easier. (We are biased, but we suggest ourselves if you're looking for a place to start.)

If you're putting in the work to get to know your audience, chances are you'll have a good idea of who they're most influenced by. The key is to map out their influence, more than simply creating a list of influencers who might be good to tap for your campaign or partnership.

Where are these influencers most impactful? Is it just on one platform, or across several? Does their audience differ between platforms? Do they have strong relationships with other influencers, and if so, how do their respective audiences overlap? How much does your target audience overlap with those audiences?

It's important to do this work to understand the true potential of an influencer. A lot of overlap between their audience and your target audience means it's a good idea to move forward with a campaign or partnership.



If not, don't engage them simply because they have a large following. You'll be wasting the potential your campaign or partnership could find in a better matched influencer.

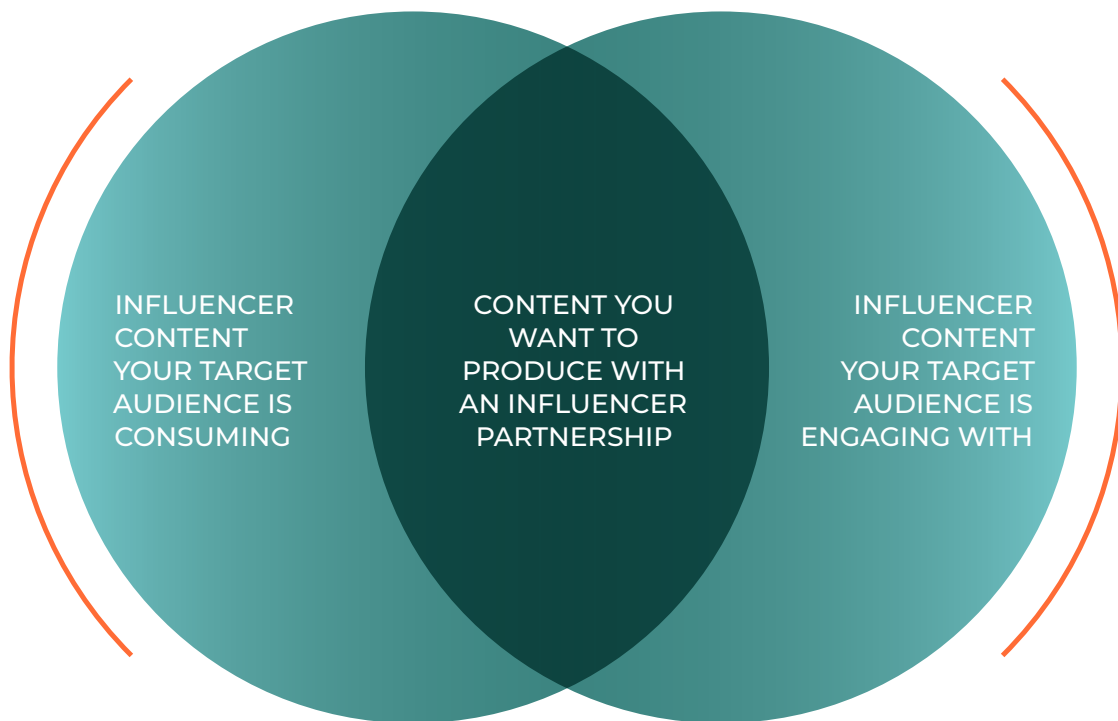
STEP 3: MAP OUT THE CONTENT THESE INFLUENCERS CREATE

This will give you your graphical overlap; which content is your target audience consuming from these influencers? Which content is getting the highest level of engagement from your target audience?

This approach gives you a game plan when you approach an influencer about working with them. It lets you know which metrics you should focus on for success during

a campaign. It lets the influencer better refine their content for any campaigns or partnerships you're working on.

All of these factors will mean you're set up for maximum possible success in your working relationship with the influencer or influencers you want to tap for your campaign or partnership.





ENGAGE

Now that you've mapped out the influencers you want to target, it's time to engage them strategically. Generic, episodic press releases won't cut it; you need to create a consistent, targeted approach across the board. (Press releases of course still have their place in a comprehensive comms strategy. They're just not the *whole* strategy they once were.)

You know your audience. You've mapped them out. You know what they like, content-wise, where they like to spend their time, and therefore how they would best like to receive any messaging from you.

As you plan how to engage your audience, fully consider not only how best to tell each story, but how to deliver it. What makes sense for one project won't make sense for all.

Consider the format, asking questions like:

- Should one include images?
- Video?
- A podcast?
- Another form of interactive content?

Also consider the method of delivery:

- Community-based (a Facebook Group or other established community, or one you have access to by working with an influencer)
- Other social media based
- Email based
- A combination of digital and real world that makes sense for a specific project

Obviously we can't cover the full scope of ideas possible for how to strategically engage unique audiences, but this is meant to get you started.

All of these — and more — can and should be considered for each pitch and press release, keeping the end target journalist or social media influencer in mind. Putting in a lot of work at this stage means you'll get better results in the long run, even if it's tedious. Balance your resources (time is a resource!) with your stretch goals.



MEASURE

Completely accurate measurement of earned media is an emerging technology and one that we're proud to be spearheading at Cision. It's now possible to demonstrate how the work of PR pros impacts the top and bottom line business objectives. We can directly track the actual reach of a message to any specific business outcomes. For example, did someone click through a CTA and eventually become a customer we have valuable demographic and firmographic data on?

We are able to apply attribution analysis to the quality of the coverage that resulted from a campaign or project, but also — and most importantly — the business outcomes it's driving. How does it work?

“Attribution analysis applies an invisible watermark to every digital news item covering your company, brand and product. The watermark is indelible, so the technology follows an individual reader (anonymously) from the news page to your website (or your competitors’). Once on the website, the technology identifies every level of interaction: the reader focused on the ‘About Us’ section, or they downloaded an order form or application. For e-commerce sites, one can attribute a sale to an individual news or feature item whether that story was planned or not.

Besides confirming with 100% accuracy that someone clicked on your news or feature story and engaged with your website, the underlying technology allows for another layer of demographic and firmographic information based on a user’s IP address. As such, the communicator can describe the interested party by age, gender, annual income, net worth, education level and more.

And for B2B communicators, there’s a layer of firmographic data to help you categorize the type of company employing the individual. Criteria include the industry (food services, manufacturing, telecom, etc.), size and role within the company (C-suite, SVP, manager, etc.)”

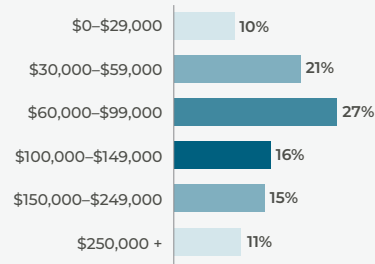
[!\[\]\(830769b31eeeaca920791081939ff8ba_img.jpg\) Implementing True Measurement: An Earned Media Management Strategy, Cision](#)

Demographic Data Example:

Adams Morgan can determine the annual income of those who read their story

In this example, 26% of readers earned more than \$150,000 annually. If the company sells luxury houses, this may represent an opportunity for better targeting and messaging. If the company sells more modest homes, 64% of readers match the optimal target which provides affirmation that the targeting and messaging worked.

Readership by income

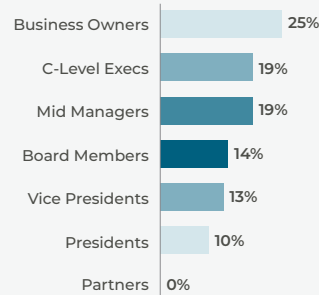


Firmographic Data Example:

Adams Morgan can review firmographic readership and other data for their earnings report.

If this campaign intended to reach upper management, more than half of the people who read campaign content were on-target and on-message.

Readership by position



To get more technical, these are the steps you'll need to take (you don't necessarily have to use Cision products, but here is what you'll need to combine to get the kind of results that are possible with our products):

1. Interface with MarTech and AdTech platforms:

You need to be able to track behavior across the internet, including everything from Google Analytics to marketing automation systems and more

2. Use tech with pixel tracking:

You need to know which specific earned media articles audience members consumed

3. Integrated media monitoring:

You've got to go beyond clips to the actual number of people who saw an article

4. Impact reports for audience:

Like the examples of demographic and firmographic data above

5. Impact reports for web conversions:

What do people do on your website after they consume earned media?

Now let's bring it all together.



INTEGRATE

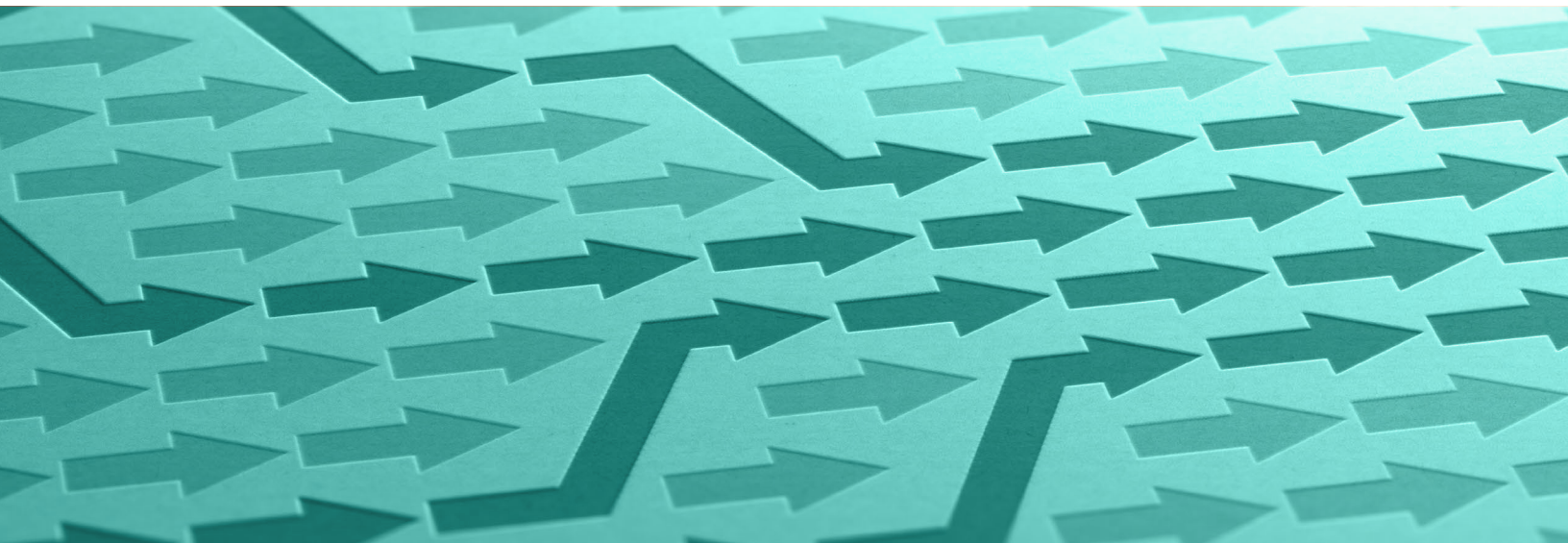
While it's not easy to achieve, integration of your comms strategy should be the ultimate goal. A lot of work goes into creating an integrated strategy, not to mention maintaining it. The approach we've been discussing throughout this ebook is truly a transformation of how many teams have been approaching their strategies up to this point; we want teams to pull earned media forward in their paid and owned media strategies now that we know its value *and can accurately measure and integrate it.*

We've discussed all the different pieces of how this process works, but it's up to you and your team to decide how it's going to look for you specifically. Ultimately you're transforming people, processes and systems (technology).

PEOPLE

What does your team look like? What kind of roles do team members have? For this process to work best, we recommend you have identified a leader, a strategist, a storyteller, and an analyst. Your leader might be your VP, your strategist might be your head of demand gen, your storyteller your content marketing head, and your analyst a data scientist or even a whip-smart intern.

Obviously smaller teams might have one or two people covering multiple roles, while larger teams with better resources will be able to diversify. The important thing is that your team is able to tackle your new integrated Earned Media Management strategy, filling in any important gaps with technology (which we'll touch on after processes).



PROCESSES

Audit your process: What are you doing now that works that can feed into and help your new, more integrated approach? What needs to change? The ultimate goal is to create an always-on campaign lifecycle, like this one:



- 01 Define Target Audience:**
This is the customer or end-user a comms team wants to reach with their earned media coverage.
- 02 Discover Relevant Influencers:**
Utilizing data about end-customers in step one, use a media database, augmented with artificial intelligence, to generate a set of influencers to target as part of an influencer graph.
- 03 Develop Individualized Content:**
Create a content strategy that will individualize messages to the target audience and the influencers that reach them.
- 04 Distribute Content:**
Use smart engagement techniques, including utilizing multimedia, to share messages with relevant influencers identified in step two.
- 05 Monitor Impact on End-Customer:**
How did this impact the people identified in step one? How did they interact with earned media? And did it cause them to take a desired action?
- 06 Tie to Business Results:**
How did customer behaviors impact overall business outcomes, such as corporate reputation, conversion, lead gen, or advocacy.
- 07 Predictive Analytics:**
Use media monitoring and campaign results to inform the next campaign.

You might notice it includes everything we've discussed in more detail in all of the other sections up to this point.

TECHNOLOGY

Also audit the tech stack you're currently using, and see what's truly working and not working for your team and brand. Free up any budget you might need as you decide to reorganize your approach and reallocate resources.

If you're starting from scratch or starting over, consider:

- MarTech and AdTech platforms that can work well together
- An influencer database
- Media monitoring
- Multimedia distribution
- Analytics
- Impact reporting
- Integrations to paid and owned channels
- APIs

That's a lot to do manually, so consider what technological options are available that work for your resources. (And of course, we're always happy to discuss the options we can offer.)





CONCLUSION

Hopefully Earned Media Management not only makes sense to you as a strategy, but you're ready to tackle it for your brand or the brands you work for, with your team fully committed and execs on board.

If you don't have the latter yet, a little bit of this work might just prove out to them how valuable earned media and savvy comms pros really are.

Want more from us?

Check out our [Resources page](#). And you can always find us on [Twitter](#) with questions, comments, or concerns.

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