PR and Online Branding

Corporate Perceptions in a Digital Space:

Branding Goodyear Engineered Products in the Automotive Aftermarket Online

A thesis submitted to the College of Communication and Information of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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May, 2012
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories on Web Branding</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Way Symmetrical Elements</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Changes 2WS PR</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESULTS</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Presence Comparative Analysis</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Monitoring Grid</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Communication Plan</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Online Presence Comparative Analysis</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social Media Monitoring Summary</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Media Monitoring Catalogue</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Veyance Business Objectives</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strategy and Tactic Recommendations</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the countless individuals who’ve touched this thesis before it’s final submission and those who contributed without even knowing of its existence including mentors from my undergraduate program, the faculty and my classmates at Kent State University, my coworkers and superiors during my time with Veynace Technologies, Inc. and those in touch via social media. Thanks especially to my committee members and advisors as well as the handful of editors who let me borrow their eyes and wit on my quest for perfection. Mostly, thanks to my parents for pushing me to complete this – and making it possible in the first place.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The automotive aftermarket business of Veyance Technologies is at a crossroads. Despite being the exclusive manufacturer of a household brand name in Goodyear Engineered Products, the recent loss of a major retail distributor and other market factors have left the company at an “inflection point.” Along with bringing on a new public relations and advertising agency, the company is looking at new ways to illustrate and promote its brand in the market – a market that is experiencing a shift in how information is consumed. As a standalone company and former division of Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Veyance is licensed to use Goodyear trademarks including the well-known Gatorback brand used by all NASCAR teams.

While the business has historically relied on traditional media to maintain its brand presence in the marketplace, there is a key opportunity to generate increased demand at the consumer level. In other words, messages have historically been crafted for warehouse distributors and fall short of reaching, let alone influencing, installers or end-users of Veyance’s products who heavily influence purchasing decisions. Researching these audiences, as well as the distributors, demands a fresh look at the methods of communication and channels used.

The following project includes a plan to capitalize on this key point in time (defined as a 6-month window between June 2010 and January 2011) when Veyance is more receptive to ideas about brand exposure. The business communication plan uses online public relations strategies to implement a web site that supports a stronger online brand presence for the Goodyear Engineered Products and Gatorback brands. It consists of a business
communication plan for implementing online tactics that will build the Goodyear Engineered Products brand online. The plan will be supported by a conglomeration of sources including academic-, commercial- and industry-sponsored research studies, but is also applicable to the business world with suggestions that are immediately applicable.

Three main components will be included:

1) Literature review of online branding from public relations sources
2) Content analysis of best practices and competition
3) Communication plan detailing strategies and tactics

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review focuses on articles from notable public relations and business journals that discuss how perceptions are formed in online mediums. My research begins as early as the mid-90s, showcasing the foundational theories behind building an organization’s web site (or single web page, as it often was at the time) and its role in forming overall brand perception. My research then follows the evolution of the Internet along with society’s use of it, highlighting some of the major points as the media landscape changed.

Despite the challenges of publishing print resources that discuss trends of the much more dynamic online world, this literature review will try to give a detailed background specific to the my primary research and the business and communications plans I’m developing for Veyance Technologies’ aftermarket automotive business. In essence, it will cover the basics on how perceptions are shaped by Internet-based medium, starting
with well established academic work on organizational web sites and moving to less established best-practice guides for operating in today’s online world. This mesh of solidly founded academic research and progressive, yet less-tested, thinking will help support the academic nature of the project while positioning the ideas for implementation in today’s business setting.

To justify my knowledge of the subject and due diligence in research in the field of online brand perceptions, my literature review will focus on three main aspects:

1) Foundational theories of branding on an organizational web site
   - Articles from PR and new media journals on how web design shapes perceptions
   - Key texts from the PR, information architecture (IA) and usability fields
   - Discussion of audience groups commonly targeted in online mediums

2) Cultivating two-way communication elements online
   - PR and new media journals articles on interactivity on organizational web sites
   - Outline of elements commonly used to establish two-way communication online

3) Social media impact on brand perceptions (and what’s next?)
   - Review of PR and business articles on social media branding
   - Interviews of industry experts on what’s next

Theories on Web Branding – Web Site Design for Multiple Publics

Since the World Wide Web was commercialized in the mid 1990s (Duke, 2002), it has been increasingly important for corporations and non-profit organizations to have some type of web presence. The most fundamental element of representation on the Internet is an organizational web site or home page (Smith, 2007). Organizational web sites (both
corporate and non-profit) serve multiple functions, many of which can be tied directly to public relations. Features consistently found on homepages even during the “early years” of the Internet include press releases, financial information and company overviews – which are all traditionally linked to PR (Vattyam, 1999).

Web sites have also been used as a tool to carry out an organizational function innate to PR -- research of stakeholder publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998). A study of Fortune 100 companies in 1999 found that ninety percent of the sites examined links to PR-related materials directly from the companies’ homepage (Vattyam, 1999). Results from similar subsequent studies have reinforced that an organizational web site serves functions that are both inherent to, and crucial for the practice of Public Relations (Capriotti, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Kent, 1998; Kent, Taylor & White, 2003; Smith, 2007; Kang, 2004).

Since nearly a decade ago, scholars, researchers and practitioners have recognized the fact that the Internet is not just another medium for communication with key publics, but that it has the potential to “revolutionize and reform the interaction between organizations and their publics” (Esrock, 2000, p.328). The unique nature of the web as a communication platform hinges on the fact that the web allows for direct communication to publics, bypassing the gatekeeper function of traditional mass media. The result is a managed communication directly between organizations and audiences (Duke, 2002). Though it is likely that a “revolution” is already occurring, studies have proven that PR practitioners are not taking an active role in how their organizations are being represented in the online world (Duke, 2002; Esrock, 2000; Kent, 2003). In one study, sixty-one
percent of PR professionals from a professional society (Public Relations Society of America, PRSA) said that they help in web page maintenance within their organizations, but that, in general, “PR practitioners assign a low priority to working on their companies’ web site” (Duke, 2002, p.321).

The trend of organizational web sites to serve a bottom-line function (e.g. e-commerce, donations, etc.) is growing, but web sites still serve the main function of providing information to key publics (Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 2000). Investor relations, employment information, and media resources are among the most prominent features on a corporate web page (Esrock, 2000). The structure and design of non-profits are similar with donation and volunteer information replacing investor and employment information (Yeon, Choi & Kiousis, 2005). For an organizational web site (both corporate and non-profit) to be effective it must function properly. This means providing information to a variety of users in accordance with the communication and overall goal of the organization while facilitating a user to complete a task. The web site must provide quick, easy access to different types of information in a visually stimulating environment that entices users continued interest (Kensicki, 2003). Users must have access to interactive features on a web site that serve a split function of enticing users to return while providing value feedback to the PR practitioner (Yeon, 2005). More information on interactive features can be found in section 2) of the literature review.

This literature review examines the use of organizational web sites over the past decade and a half. A combination of academic research papers and scholarly works combine to show how good web site design can help an organization reach its public relations goals.
Many of the academic studies used content analysis and surveys to get a better understanding of how the corporate and non-profit web sites serve the PR function of an organization. Literature was selected based on its relevancy to PR, its specific discussion of web design principles and its timeliness (given the dynamic nature of technology and online communication, recent articles and studies with timelessness were given preference in selection). This section of the literature review does not attempt to cover the entire scope of the web’s influence on public relations, but focuses specifically on how web site design affects public relations goals. Specifically, this section is broken up into two main sub-sections, using the frame of an organizational web site to discuss:

- the web site’s function of serving multiple key publics and
- how effective web design helps an organization reach it’s communication goals.

**Serving Multiple Publics**

Just as a PR department must attend to various groups of key publics, a web site must be designed to fulfill the needs of various target users. Kent and Taylor have published numerous articles on how web sites serve PR functions and mention that, “from a stakeholder perspective, organizational web sites are important tools for creating strong, mutually beneficial ties with publics” (Kent, 2003, p.73). An organization must identify its key stakeholders so that it can provide appropriate information on its web site. The site should be designed so that stakeholders have ready access to the information they need to make informed decisions (Kent, 2003).

Depending on the type of organization, a web site should include different features. For instance, a non-profit organization has the need for a donations page, a consumer
company needs a customer service section, and a highly technical company/organization may need a FAQ page. These different sections within a web site should all represent responses to the informational needs of an organization’s stakeholder publics (Kent, 1998) working to facilitate users who come to the web site generally looking to complete a specific task (McGovern, 2010).

The web is a blend of real-time communication that enables an organization to disseminate messages to specific groups (Vattyam, 1999). A web site reaches multiple publics at once, enabling organizations to communicate with investors, customers, volunteers, donors, journalists, employees, and other potential publics at the same time. Each of these publics approaches an organization with distinct needs, and the web is the only medium that can handle all of them (Yeon, 2005). Multiple sections of a web site target different audience members, thus “an organization can simultaneously tailor messages to address the concerns and interests of a diverse set of people” (Esrock, 2000, p.328).

Studies have found that most corporate and non-profit web sites address the informational concerns of three to five main audiences (Esrock, 2000; Yeon 2005). Investors (donors), prospective employees (volunteers), journalists and customers are often identified as the main target audience, or users. Much of the information on an organizational web site is appropriate for more than just one public and content can be used to fulfill the information concerns of multiple publics (Esrock, 2000).
According to Kent and Taylor (1998), unlike some types of traditional media, “Internet communication can include the ‘personal touch’ that makes public relations effective” (p.323). The authors describe the Internet as a “convivial tool” that naturally attracts publics because of four key elements. The Internet: 1) respects the dignity of human work, 2) needs little specialized training to operate, 3) is generally accessible to publics, 4) empathizes personal satisfaction and ingenuity (Kent 1998).

An organizational web site can be used to strengthen ties with existing internal publics and establish a connection with latent or aware external publics (Smith, 2007). Web sites may elicit participation from “cyber-publics” who have no other access to the organization then through the web (typically due to geographical separation). These traditionally isolated, former “non-publics” would not be reached through any other medium (Kent, 1998).

Additionally, online communication allows access to new and established publics without a huge financial burden. The same tool (the web site) allows an organization to focus on all different types of publics, whereas, most traditional communication mediums limit an organization to reaching only one or two publics (Kang & Norton, 2004). This financial relief is especially of concern to non-profit groups, who are able to reach key publics across the country and throughout the world via the web (Smith, 2007).

**Which publics are web sites targeting?** Although the web allows great potential for accessing multiple publics using the same tool, it is often difficult to know exactly who is using the site, and how they are using the site (Kang, 2004) – critical pieces of
information for a web site to be effective. This information often can only be ascertained by tracking the usage of the site and conducting research of how key publics are using it (Smith, 2007); however, a general core group of publics is shared by most organizations. Although specific key publics differ depending on the organization, certain key publics have been identified as important in both corporations and non-profit groups. Main content on homepages helps us identify these common core groups (Smith, 2007; Vattyam, 1999). Press releases, financial information (donation pages), company overviews, product lists and job postings (volunteer information), signify the use of organizational web sites by journalists, investors (donors), customers and perspective employees (volunteers), respectively. An organizational overview is useful to all of these publics, and individualized content is made available for each interest group (Esrock, 2000; Vattyam, 1999).

A major area of public relations that has improved directly because of the web is media relations. Although email is likely a big proponent of this, organizational web sites help build and enhance relationships with media contacts. A 2002 survey found that the web allows practitioners in science PR to better relate to the journalists covering topics in their field. The study reported that the prominence of computer-assisted reporting has made having a web site with clear and detailed information a must for organizations (Duke, 2002).

While early studies found that organizations featured financially-related content more prominently than content for journalists on their web sites (Esrock, 2000), later studies showed a shift by organizations to cater more to this traditionally important key public (Yeon, 2005; Smith, 2007). The investor community is a highly prioritized audience in
corporate web sites, as is the donor community on non-profit web sites (Esrock, 2000; Yeon, 2005). Publics with financial benefits tend to be treated as a priority in terms of content, prominence, and features. This includes both investors and customers in the corporate world and donors for non-profit organizations (Esrock, 2000; Kang, 2004).

**Balancing the needs of multiple publics.** Because an organization is using one tool to target multiple specific audiences, it must be careful to balance the informational needs and concerns of each public against the other. An organization subtly displays how committed it is to its various publics based on how the web site is organized; this commitment is also seen through the amount of content that is available on (and sometimes missing from) a web site (Esrock, 2000). There is a distinct difference between these two elements, which will be discussed later, but an organization must be aware that preferential treatment of its publics can be shown through both web site content and web site structure (Esrock, 2000).

A content analysis of the top 100 non-profit organizations found that specific publics are treated as more important than others by how a web site is designed: certain parts of the web site work better than others, have more content than others, include more features than others, or are displayed more predominantly than other parts. This study found that information intended for primary publics is given more “prominence” and generally appears on the homepage (Yeon, 2005). Researchers stress that a web site must be able to meet the needs of specific audiences without playing favorites and alienating secondary publics; a multi-faceted web site that plays equally to all key publics is needed (Esrock, 2000; Yeon, 2005). This is a much different dynamic than traditional media because
users are seeking specific information and “each public has its own goals and purposes” that they bring to the web site (Esrock, 2000, p.330).

Another important study regarding the use of web sites by multiple publics came in the form of an experimental survey. Kensicki (2003) – which will be discussed in more detail later – showed through a series of surveys and an elaborate experimental process that users’ attitudes prior to their viewing of a web site affects how they initially perceive the site and the organization as a whole. Balancing content, structure and prominence issues in web design must also be complemented by attention to how visual design affects initial perceptions of the site as well as taking into account pre-existing perceptions of the organization (Kensicki, 2003).

**Using theory to accommodate multiple publics.** Some of the academic literature in public relations uses theory to help explain strategic decisions in web design. Kent and Taylor (2003) focus on a specific set of theories to describe the organizational web sites role in a mediated communication environment. Stakeholder theory, for instance, demands that a web site be used strategically to communicate with publics that can influence the organization. Prescribing a good relationship with influential publics demands that a web site is defined to fulfill the stakeholders’ informational needs (Grunig, 1992, as cited in Kent, 2003). Situational theory helps show how a web site can be used to help form publics. The Internet unites publics by helping them recognize that they share similar interests with others (Grunig 1989, as cited in Kent, 2003). Kang (2004) also recognizes the benefit an organization can realize from connecting publics
with each other through that organization’s web site. This social aspect of the web site will be discussed more in the third section of the literature review.

Resource dependency theory is also applied to Internet-mediated relationships, positing that “social relations commonly entail ties of mutual dependence” (Emerson, 1962, as cited in Kent, 2003, p.66). Co-dependence is shown through the prominent display of certain types of content applicable to key stakeholders on organizational homepages as well as the tendency to treat financially-related publics more favorably through web design (Esrock, 2000; Kent, 2003).

**Web Design in Public Relations**

The previous section outlined ways that organizational web sites help build relationships with multiple publics. Unfortunately, research shows a disconnect between what PR practitioners believe web sites can accomplish and how web design actually facilitates building relationships (Kent, 2003). Since the earlier days of corporate and non-profit web sites, organizations have used their online presence to promote company image/brand, improve public relations, and provide company background, including information related to products and services (Vattyam, 1999). But as Esrock (2000) points out, “web sites are more than a sum of their contents. Sites are designed to highlight some information and place in the background other information” (p.331). Important information like investor relations and corporate citizenship are often buried to the detriment of relationship building. Much like a logo that has both obvious meaning and underlaying symbolism, a web site should be designed to both intentionally and subtly communicate based on the type of information offered and how it’s organized. (Esrock, 2000).
Communicating with web design features is a broad category that Internet PR research has focused on (Kent, 2003). According to Esrock (2000), “research suggests that both content and organization need to be employed as corporate web typologies are developed and that practitioners should think about exactly where navigational and interactive features are employed as a site is created” (p.327). Other research has shown that “organizations should be strategic in the design of their web sites to improve responsiveness to stakeholder information needs” (Kent, 2003, p.64). The design of a web site reflects the web strategy and thus the overarching communication strategy. How the site is structured, what web pages are called and where links are placed are all strategic decisions that have a significant impact on public relations goals for an organization (Smith, 2007).

When building or redesigning a web site, organizations need to take a few extra steps once they identify their main target publics. Organizations must determine the site’s purpose, understand the technical considerations, and incorporate two-way communication features in web design (Kent, 2003). A study of Fortune 100 companies in 1999 fleshed out four specific purposes for the web sites it examined and rated them on a ten-point scale. Business purposes, promotion, communication, and sensationalism were the only significant purposes of the web sites cited in the study (business purpose had over twice the score of communication purposes) (Vattyam, 1999). Regardless of the specific purpose, a web page must be more than just a representational “status symbol” promoting web presence; it must function as a relationship building tool (Kent, 2003).
The characteristics and design of an effective relationship building web site varies on the nature of the site itself. The context of the site plays an important role in web design. A web site must be both graphically and functionally effective to suit the needs and expectations of the typical users from target publics (Kensicki, 2003). According to Kent (2003), this is an ongoing process that doesn’t just stop with the initial design: “adaptation is necessary because if an organization in a highly competitive area does not meet the needs of its member publics, then another organization is always available to do so” (p.72). Issues with information overload born from the Web 2.0 phenomenon have only emphasized this point (McGovern, 2010). A web site must include the features needed and desired by key publics as well as have the information organized appropriately to cater to the publics’ use of the site (Kent, 2003). A web page has the ability to attract and maintain new and existent publics to an organization, but it also has the potential to ruin an individual’s perspective of the organization as a whole (Kensicki, 2003; Kent 2003). The next portion of the literature review discusses how a web site affects the credibility of an organization and specific elements of web design that effect a web sites success or failure in reaching public relations goals.

Building Organizational Credibility through Effective Web Design

Web design has a significant effect on the perception of an organization, causing a web site to be either an opportunity or a threat for the organization. A better understanding of how web design impacts perceptions can help an organization capitalize on the positive results of an effective web site. One study actually framed web design as a limitation to communication, saying that “The limitation of webbed communication is that the actual design of a web site can dramatically influence a visitor’s perception of an organization”
Another acknowledged that “a well-designed and effective web site can reflect positively on the organization thereby increasing its credibility” leading to increased participation and activity (Smith, 2007, p.287).

But the burden of creating a positive user response from key publics is on the PR practitioner. Web sites are seen as a more credible and empowered source of information if they are well designed and organized in a professional manner that meets the needs of key publics (Smith, 2007). In a survey of a significant sample of college students, results showed that a majority of respondents said that “about half” of the information on the World Wide Web is reliable and accurate. Not included in this majority was another population that thought “most” of the information on the Internet was reliable and accurate (Kensicki, 2003). But these findings aren’t just limited to college students. Another survey showed that journalists display trust in information they find on organizational web sites, ranking university, science-related, and government sites as the most trustworthy sources (Duke, 2002).

The idea that “credibility equals believability” is nothing new to mass communications, but according to research, trustworthiness and expertise can be ascertained by web users based on the simplest and most superficial elements (Kensiscki, 2003). “Visual imagery instantaneously affects how we perceive the message and the messenger …. Information must be attractive to be seen as credible” (Kensicki, 2003, p.142). Color tones, balanced layout and professional appearance are specific design elements needed to make a web site graphically effective at portraying a public relations message. As the Internet evolves, so do the expectations of key publics, putting the onus on organizations to
upgrade their web pages to meet stakeholder needs both in terms of information and design congruent with competing or comparable web sites.

Visual communication on the web plays into how web users view an organization. Quality design and available content add to the publics’ perception of an organization’s credibility. Web design, including organization, graphics and color, influence how users view organizational credibility – both corporate and non-profit are affected by how their online presence affects their credibility. Alignment and balance of content are two major elements that affect audience perception in a visual media such as a web site. In order for an organization to effectively garner credibility through its web site, it must present content in a manner that is appropriate to the context of the target public and the nature of the content itself (Kensicki, 2003).

**Elements of Web Design**

A number of different elements play into an effective web site design. Unlike the graphic elements discussed above, which have an initial and superficial impact on users, how the web site is structured and labeled can affect users ability to access content (Weinberger, 2007). The discrepancy over which is more important (visual appearance or functionality) is irrelevant, as both must work hand-in-hand for web design to be effective (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2007). The sections below divide web design elements into specific areas and give detail on effective web design by drawing from the field of information architecture (IA). IA is commonly defined as “the combination of organization, labeling, search, and navigation systems within web sites and intranets,” and, “the art and science of shaping information products and experiences to support usability” (Morville, 2007, p.4).
In the context of web design in public relations, drawing from the fundamental principles of IA is helpful for understanding how humans interface with the web, and how PR messages are received through this medium as it continues to evolve (Weinberger, 2007). Many of the basic principles of usability and IA can be applied to how organizations represent themselves in the Web 2.0 world. Not only do these principles play into how the organization should represent itself in the social media space, but also what portions of the social media space it should be present in. Likewise, the Internet is more increasingly accessed via mobile platforms, information presented by organizations must adapt to fit new user behaviors (McGovern, 2010).

**Home page.** A first impression on the web is as important as it is in real life. An organizational homepage needs to provide clear directional clues (and cues) to content so users can have quick and direct access to what it is they are looking for (even if they don’t know what they’re looking for) (Morville, 2007). The homepage strongly influences whether or not a user will stay and investigate – it acts as a “content gateway” to other cyberspace destinations within an organization’s web site (Esrock, 2000). Because users commonly find a web site via a search engine, it has come increasingly important to have global navigation elements from the homepage appear throughout the site as well (McGovern, 2010).

Links to specific sections directly off the homepage represent the audiences that web designers see as the main publics of the web site, and the organization. For instance, links to a press room off the homepage are considered essential by PR texts but are not always present; people who include these links see journalists as a key public (Yeon, 2005).
Good organization and navigation will place other important elements – such as information about corporate citizenship – on this second tier by including links on the homepage. Providing links on the homepage to corporate citizenship, for instance, reflects a high priority of communicating this information on behalf of an organization (Capriotti, 2007).

**Organization.** A major part of information architecture, and thus web design, is designing a web site with content organized for its main users. Organization allows people to find the right answers to their questions and complete tasks that brought them to your site in the first place. It also supports casual browsing and directed searching. It puts related things together in a manner that makes sense to multiple publics (Morville, 2007). An examination of how a web site is structured is equally as important as the content itself (Esrock, 2000). Web sites must include the features their key publics actually need and will use. Sites must have organized content to suit the needs of specific groups of publics (Kent, 2003). Corporations and non-profits, in the past, have not focused enough on providing easy access to their customers or investors at the expense of other information. The organization of a homepage and its subsequent second-tiered pages strongly suggests which key publics and issues a company thinks are important (Esrock, 2000). Similarly, in a Web 2.0 world, organizations use SEO and SEM to make important information easier to find (McGovern, 2010).

While the previous section stressed the importance of homepages, the second and third tier pages are in a prominent position in the grand scheme of web site hierarchy. Placing
PR related material in these two levels helps users find what they are looking for more easily (Capriotti, 2007).

Evidential support materials must also be available within these second and third tier pages. Organization of supplemental information is crucial to aligning publics’ views with the views of the organization (Kensicki, 2003). Content prominence within the structure of a single web page, as well as within the structure of an entire website is important (Esrock, 2000; Morville, 2007). Often important elements are not given enough prominence on web sites. For instance, research has shown that journalists, a major key public, are viewed as less important than other publics in the mind of web designers (Esrock, 2000). It’s important that public relations work closely with the web designers during construction to make sure that it is organized in a way that is suitable for all varieties of user, and caters specifically to the most important audiences (McGovern, 2010).

**Labeling.** Labeling hyperlinks and sub-pages are just the beginning of a web design feature that most users take for granted. A consistent and obvious labeling system on a website communicates information efficiently and consistently. It conveys meaning quickly to a variety of users at a glance. Good web design incorporates conventional labels that are adopted widely by multiple sites across the web and relies on a combination of minimal text and icons. A good example of this is the convention “Home” as a hyperlink to return to the homepage, instead of the formerly used “main” or “front page” (Morville, 2007). The importance of hyperlinks on homepages as the
introduction of a labeling system and convenience for main stakeholders cannot be emphasized enough (Esrock, 2000).

Clearly identified content labels are often overlooked and become a flaw in the design of many corporate web sites (Esrock, 2000). There are issues, for instance, with how to label a section on corporate citizenship. A study showed that the labels “Corporate Social Responsibility,” “Corporate Citizenship,” “Sustainable Development,” and other terms were all used to describe the same collection of content – sometimes differentiating between terms within the same site (Capriotti, 2007). This type of poor web design leads user to become confused, frustrated and upset with both the web site and the organization (Morville, 2007).

According to other studies, clear and consistent labels are also lacking on non-profit organizations’ web sites. Especially in regards to media-related information, an organization benefits from a centrally located and organized collection of well labeled information. “Clearly labeled online press rooms dedicated to journalists were infrequent,” in the content analysis of top 100 NPOs conducted by Yeon (2005, p.62). The study found that the majority of organizational web sites in the study failed to group and label materials that may be of interest to the media. The study also discovered that there is no convention for labeling information for journalists, and that less than fifty percent of web sites used standard labels for “News Room” or “Press Room” (Yeon, 2005).
**Navigation.** The demand for information on an organization’s web site grows as the collection of key publics and key issues related to the organization expands with time. This makes it easier for a user to get lost in a large clutter of information and increases the possibility of stakeholders feeling confused and frustrated when attempting to communicate with the organization via its web site. A user-centered designed of the site that pairs logical organization with conventional labeling will help users find the information they are seeking on a specific site, but complementary tools for navigation are “often needed to provide context and allow for greater flexibility” (Morville, 2007 p.115) As Morville (2007) says, if “structure and organization are about building rooms, (then)… navigation design is about adding doors and windows” (p.115).

Esrock’s (2000) structural analysis of Fortune 500 companies shows that there has been an increasing emphasis on making web content for PR easily accessible and navigable for some time. It has also been noted that NPOs need to conduct “ease of interface” research to make sure that their sites are functional and provide the right types of information to fulfill user needs, thus reaching their communications goals (Yeon, 2005).

Convenient usability determines if a user will revisit a web site and greatly impacts a person’s attitude about the company. Often, usability and navigation throughout a site is a hurdle to finding information – elements that often add to usability include ease of interface and navigational features (Kang, 2004; Morville, 2007). Web sites must provide users with timely and adequate information. Links to related information and how easy the site is to use will affect how successful a web site is at fulfilling communication goals (Kang, 2004). Research has shown, in the past, that corporate web sites fail to make
navigation features and feedback tools a prominent part of web design. There’s a gap between acknowledging the importance of public concerns and engaging these publics with pertinent, interactive information that is easy to find (Esrock, 2000). Another study notes that “interface design appears to be dependent upon the design itself,” and must incorporate all elements of graphic design, web site structure, and audience attitudes (Kensicki, 2003, p.156).

Studies have shown that having a search function on the homepage of the web site (and in subsequent pages via a persistent global navigation) can greatly increase ease of access to content throughout the site across multiple key publics (Esrock, 2000; Morville, 2007). Due to information overload in the post-Web 2.0 world and users’ dependence on search algorithms to find pertinent information, an internal search box is now a must (McGovern, 2010). This can, for instance, assist a journalist in finding pertinent information that may not be organized where the user thinks it should be. Because the web is used as a research tool, including a search function in web design to help journalists navigate a site directly adds to the PR function of media relations (Yeon, 2005).

**Web Design and PR recap**

The books and articles examined for this literature review give an exemplary view of the best studies relating to web site design in public relations. It covers some of the foundation pieces of literature highlighting current web design practices (Kent, 1998), to the more recent (Caprotti, 2007 and Smith, 2007), and also includes some of the most influential and most frequently cited scholarly articles (Esrock, 2000 and Kent, 2003).
Nonetheless, as noted by Kent nearly decade ago (2003), “our understanding of the relationship between web site design and the accomplishment of PR goals” will continue to expand overtime in congruence with the evolution of the web (p.64).

Current public relations research of web sites use a superficial measure of usability and navigation. The methods are not likely to represent how an actual user would typically experience the site (Kang, 2004). Research is limited by the PR practitioners’ lack of understanding of how a web site is built and how users generally use the Internet (Kent, 2003; Morville, 2007). By not adopting the jargon of web designers or referencing established literature in web design and information architecture, research in web design for public relations is falling short of capturing the information it is truly seeking (Esrock, 2000; Kent, 1998; Kent, 2003, Morville, 2007). This quote from an important study, though it carries a good message, is an example of how the lack of an accepted jargon can make collaborating and continuing research difficult (Morville, 2007):

“Web site differentiation (the diversity of content present on the web site) and web site complexity (the degrees to which web site content is hierarchically structured) are two concepts that should be develop in future studies” (Esrock, 2000, p.341).

But as use of the web by corporations and NPOs continues to grow, the understanding of how to approach effective web design from a PR perspective will grow as well -- amongst PR practitioners, researchers, and scholars.
“The challenge is to move the tasks associated with the web site design and maintenance away from being a “B-list” job to being an imperative for the survival of … organizations. When this happens, then public relations will gain influence in organizational decision-making, and publics will gain the information that they need to make informed choices” (Kent, 2003, p.75).

Despite increased prominence of user-generated content in the Web 2.0 world, an organization’s web site remains the most important component of shaping public perceptions in the online world. It is the foundation for which other communication depends, and the central resource for more information. Regardless of a company’s business or communication goals, its web site must function to connect its key publics to the information they need. Ultimately though, there is a lot more to public relations online than an organization’s web site.

The last two major sections of this literature review examine these considerations by looking at how organizations are using two-way communication elements online. The first takes a detailed look at interactive features incorporated in an organization’s web site, by reviewing scholarly articles on the subject. The final section of the literature review focuses on how organizations are using social media to help build and maintain relationships with lay publics online.
Two-Way Symmetrical Elements– the value of interactivity on web sites

The web functions as a dialogical tool that maintains an open-ended conversation with publics (Kent, 1998). Established web sites make a commitment to providing and updating valuable information for a variety of publics or stakeholders. Organizations must compliment this commitment by offering a way for users to request more information thus sparking a dialogue between the organization and its publics (Kent, 2003). According to Capriotti (2007), multiple groups of target publics are now beginning to demand that corporations include interactive aspects in their web sites. This is a broad topic covered in much of the literature regarding the role of web design in public relations (Capriotti, 2007; Esrock, 2000; Yeon, 2005; Kent, 1998; Kent, 2003; Levine, 2000; Kang, 2004, Sundar, Kalyanaraman & Brown, 2003).

Over a decade ago, academic studies were using theoretical models such as the two-way symmetrical (2WS) and dialogic theory to study and develop ways organizations could use the Internet to communicate with their stakeholders (Kent, 1998). Since then, the role of a web site as a tool for one-way communication started to fade as organizations looked to better tend to their key publics (Kent, 2003). Public relations professionals began to see that incorporating 2WS features on a web site allowed their companies to align corporate policy with public opinion while building dialogic relationships where all members of the communication process were contributing equally (Cooley, 1999).

As technology and the use of the Internet evolved, organizations started to see the power of using 2WS features: “Interactive communication features on web sites, which pursue two-way communication and mutual discourse might facilitate the practice of excellent
public relations (Yeon, 2005, p. 63).” The Excellence Theory of public relations was
developed by the Grunigs on the basis that successful PR is dependent on establishing
mutually beneficial organization-public relationships (Grunig, 1992). Two-way
symmetrical features on a web site serve to meet the needs of publics and enhance the
reciprocal communication approach, thus increasing the likelihood of establishing such a
relationship. It also creates a dialogic loop with audiences to gauge the types of content
that are successful and gives an organization a better understanding of how to best utilize
online resources. And maybe most important of all, the web offers a dynamic medium for
reaching multiple publics interactively without great financial burden (Kang, 2004).

Overall, scholarly research on the matter has shown that the Internet is an excellent
medium for establishing bidirectional communication, allowing dialogue between an
organization and its publics (Capriotti, 2007). This paper will talk specifically about the
benefits of different types of 2WS features on web sites including comment fields, polls,
feedback features, chat rooms, blogs and more. It will also discuss how to balance the use
of these interactive features with the overall objectives of an organizational web site and
lead into social media elements and user-generated content can both add to and detract
from an organization’s online communication goals.

**Forming online relationships with 2WS elements**

Overall, the goal of utilizing 2WS features on a web site should be to form a relationship
with online users. Visits to an organization’s web site should be treated seriously,
knowing that the user’s experience on the site will determine if he/she will return to not
just the web site, but the organization as a whole (Kent, 2003). Apart from logical web
design and solid content, the interactivity of your pages plays a large role in positively affecting the user’s experience and laying the building blocks for an effective relationship. A number of basic elements can help increase the interactivity of your website by employing a number of different 2WS features online (Sundar, 2003).

**Content and design choices to increase interactivity**

People view websites with more links as being interactive because it lets them choose the information they want to see. A 2003 study examined the effect of links on a political candidate’s website to people’s opinions of that political candidate. The study showed that users thought that a website with more hyperlinks was more interactive, and that the more interactive the site, the better the perception of the candidate (Sundar, 2003). In a sense, this study epitomizes the relationship forming ability of an interactive website because it deals with a one-to-one connection; the user’s ability to access specific information was shown to directly relate to how the user felt about the website host, in this case, a singular person. In order to properly build relationships through the web, Kent suggests having a site that is easy to use and provides clear and easy access to the information users want. Building a site with appropriate links is the first step to forming a viable online relationship (Kent, 1998).

Another way Kent suggests to build relationships online is to tailor content (or allow users to select content) so that they’re not bombarded with unwanted information. This task can prove to be a difficult one, as a website must cater to a wide variety of audiences (Kent, 1998). One way to make sure that the information a specific user wants is easily accessible is to allow customization (Warsi, 2008). Allowing users to move
content blocks, add applications or change fonts and colors is an easy way to build a more personal relationship with your online users (Yeon, 2005). Giving users the ability to customize their site also gives them a sense of closeness that increases the likelihood of revisiting the site (Warsi, 2008). Allowing for these tasks to be done easily (and even automatically from the user’s perspective, similar to how some news and social networking sites “remember” previously viewed content) will help boost the user experience (Morville, 2005).

Both customization and linking are examples of features that do more to boost the perception of 2WS communication, rather than facilitating actual interaction (Yeon 2005). The following features act in ways that facilitate the conversation between an organization and its online audiences.

**Registration forms solicit specific information**

Registration forms and log-in pages are some of the oldest tools used on web pages to solicit specific information from online users. By asking users to submit data relating to their gender, age, or location, web designers can gather information about the users visiting their site outside of basic web hits. Even in 2009, online registration forms have been said to be a powerful tool for facilitating user tasks and quickly collecting basic information (Romanik, 2009).

Certain care must be taken when implementing login or registration elements into an organizational web site to ensure that a mutual relationship starts off on the right foot. Web designers must explain to their users why they must register for the site by
explaining what’s in it for them. For example: It will remember certain settings, automatically generate suggested content, or the most basic answer, it will help designers tailor the site to meet their needs (Kennedy, 2009). A good registration form is built in a way that forms a relationship with the users: it’s friendly, easy to use and doesn’t mandate fields that users are unlikely to provide (i.e. personal sensitive information (Romanik, 2009). The best way to ensure that a form helps build a relationship (instead of just seeming like extra work for the user) is to test the forms and gather feedback from initial testing (McGovern, 2010).

Registrations and log-in pages are a large part of building interactive features onto a web site because of their important role in the exchange of information. For them to be successful though, the data collected must be implemented to support the user’s experience with the site and not solely for the organization’s gain. By utilizing the information gathered in these forms to better facilitate the users’ experience on the site and ability to complete common tasks, a true 2WS exchange is occurring (Yeon, 2005; McGovern, 2010).

**Comment fields open up the lines of communication**

Registration forms allow an organization to learn more about its target audience, but also limit the exchange of information to a list of preset data fields hence stifling the lines of communication. Though information must be shared between the organization and its publics in order to cultivate a relationship, the site should also “allow (users) to engage an organization in dialogue as an informed partner” (Kent, 1998, p. 328).
Interactive features on web sites, such as comment fields and virtual suggestion boxes have the ability to generate dialogue, which can result in a feeling of psychological closeness (Sundar, 2003). Soliciting suggestions from web site’s users is a great way to develop ideas for new content. Short of allowing user generated content, allowing key publics to voice their opinions on desired content, then providing them with this data is the best way to keep a web site frequently updated with relevant content (Kent, 1998).

Opening up a direct communication channel on an organization’s web site is one of the best ways to get feedback specifically from interested publics who visit the site (Kent, 2003). Giving users a way to send notes directly to the organization via the web site also allows the organization to attend to issues raised by their target audience directly on a first-hand basis. Establishing this working dialogical loop online requires that a company delegates the appropriate resources to monitoring the channel. This means having trained communications professionals attending to the messages submitted via the comment field or suggestions boxes on a full-time basis (Kent, 1998). It is an organization’s ability to respond to comments and suggestions that will determine if their site is truly offering a 2WS experience for their key stakeholders (Kent, 2003). Comment features that are open to the public allow users to respond to each other, which can reduce the demand on an organization but also requires the organization giving up some control of the message (Holtz, 2006).

**Chat offers real-time dialogue**

Comment fields and suggestions boxes are examples of 2WS features that give an organization some amount of time to respond. Web sites that include a chat feature take
the communication channel to the next level, enabling real-time dialogue. Though this requires significantly more resources, it does significantly increase the interactivity of the web site and allows an organization to attend to the needs of its target audience instantaneously in a one-on-one manner. In line with dialogic and 2WS theories, chat features allow for an organization to interact with its publics in an honest and ethical manner when used correctly (Kent, 2003).

As the practice of offering online customer support grew over time, it became more of an expectation – especially in service industries. Leveraging traditional customer relations knowledge that forming a strong relationships with customers is worth the short term investment, organizations started to use this 2WS online feature to accomplish just that. Delivering a humanized and individualized customer experience via online chat increases a customer experience through conversations that forge loyalty, meaning an increased propensity to purchase and promote the organization even in instances of adversity (Forrester, 2010).

But as mentioned previously, if an organization is looking to open any kind of communication channel online, it must make sure it has the resources to do so effectively. Giving users the option to communicate with the organization and then ignoring their input is worse than never asking them in the first place (Kent, 1998).

**Conclusion**

“Interactive resources are typical of and inherent in the Internet, and are what make it different from any other media” (Capriotti, 2007, p. 89).
In a Web 2.0 world, where users are empowered to generate content and conversations are occurring in places other than an organizational web site, the traditional 2WS features described in this section are only the tip of the iceberg. Sites enabling real-time updates of information like Facebook and Twitter are increasing online interactivity in ways that even actively maintained web sites cannot do. It would be virtually impossible for an organization to mimic the interactivity offered by social media sites, which is the increasing expectation of target audiences online (Kelley, 2009).

Paradigm shifts in the online world are frequent. Using an organizational web site to foster 2WS communication online will never completely disappear, but its use is likely to change drastically as social media applications step to the forefront. No matter what medium is used though, effective public relations online is rooted in establishing 2WS communication and forming a relationship based in mutual understanding (Yeon, 2005).

Scholarly researchers a decade ago realized the importance for using the web to listen to target audiences rather than talk at them:

“Without a dialogic loop in webbed communication, Internet public relations becomes nothing more than a new monologic communication medium, or a new marketing technology” (Kent, 1998, p. 325).

While some organizations are still in the initial phases of incorporating these features in their web design, the importance of doing so is growing astronomically. As social media empowers users to communicate with each other, organizations must be prepared to join the conversation, starting with opening the front door of their homepage.
Social Media Changes 2WS PR – conversations develop, shift from web sites

In a matter of years, the traditional web site will transform as points of interaction between an organization and its publics are spread to different channels. Portals are now open, and these conversations have already started to move into social networking sites (Kelley, 2009). In addition, as Wired Magazine’s editor Chris Anderson discussed in his August 2010 article “The Web Is Dead. Long Live the Internet,” many organizations are providing information and messaging to users directly through application software, depending more on mobile applications or other Internet channels outside of the World Wide Web and organizational web pages.

Web users accessing information via mobile devices and applications has continued to increase since Anderson’s commentary, and how organizations deliver information will need to adjust if they want to remain effective at shaping audience’s perceptions or forming relationships online (Simmons, 2011). To be effective at forming relationships, organizations entering the social media space need to do so with a human face. “Social networking is about people engaging with people. Individuals don’t want to build relationships with brands and corporations. They want to talk to other people” (Boag, 2009).

Often organizations are wasting time and money on social networking. Corporate tweets or advertising pitches on YouTube are ineffective ways of using this channel as they go against the essence of what social media is about – forming relationship and establishing real two-way symmetrical (2WS) interaction between two people (Boag, 2009). The age of “Web 3.0” (as Kelly uses almost jokingly) could be coming soon as organization start
using social sites to interact with publics more and “traditional” means such as email and web site feedback mechanisms are used less (2009).

This section of the literature review discusses the changes in recent history occurring online that will shape the public relations industry for years to come. It discusses the limited amount of existing research in this area, including a sampling of books, journal articles, research papers and interviews with current professionals in the field. The summary of research included here is not meant to predict how public relations will be conducted online in the future, but rather describe the current state of PR activities relating to social media and controlling the online perception related to that brand.

**The value of social media**

Though it is a new medium for communication and manner of interaction between an organization and its publics, social media brings with it inherent value that cannot be found in more traditional outlets – including the pre-social Internet (Gaines, 2010). A natural progression of the Internet age, the “social” (or interactive) dynamic of the Web 2.0 world is defined by self-publishers sharing information with each other rather than relying solely on organizations to provide it. By diversifying the sources of information, this social revolution forced organizations to change the way they communicated. In a sentence: it forced them to be honest (Scoble, 2006; Holtz, 2006).

While the usefulness of social media is being discovered newly each day by the organizations choosing to participate in it, some basic practices and value have been agreed upon to this point. This section discusses three of the major uses presently
embraced by public relations professionals and touches on alternate and emerging uses that continue to grow in adoption throughout PR and related communication fields. These discussions hinge on controlling brand perception in the online space while openly admitting the difficulties a social Internet presents to maintaining this control.

**Monitoring: social media used to listen.** Among the principle uses of social media by public relations professionals is monitoring: the practice of following online conversations to learn more about an organization’s key audiences. (Hemann, 2011). With the increase of “chatter” occurring on third party sites -- blogs, forums, social networking sites and more – PR pros have access to a wealth of information online that was previously captured only through expensive social research techniques. Learning about an organization’s customers and competitors via social content can provide PR practitioners valuable insight for crafting messages to their key audiences (Barwise, 2010).

As one of the earliest uses of social media by PR pros, monitoring has already developed a significant amount of academic research and professional adoption. It is often the first step organizations take when deciding to engage in social media and prescribed by experts as the “very least a company should be doing” to pay attention to this rising media landscape (Hemann, 2011). Being tapped into the online conversation allows an organization to understand how else they may leverage social media to advance the organization’s mission. It also can be an early indicator for PR pros to intercept potential crises (a social media use that’s discussed later in this section) (Hemann, 2011; Gaines 2010).
One of the best places for an organization to look when starting a social media monitoring campaign is the organization’s web site (Hemann, 2011). As established earlier in this literature review, the organization’s web site is the central location for shaping perceptions online and showcases the essence of what the company is communicating openly to the public (Kent, 1998). Understanding the topics that are important to an organization based on its web sites’ information architecture will identify appropriate key words and search topics to look for on social sites. These are also generally the topics of conversation that are most readily available online (Hemann, 2011; Morville, 2007).

As the value of social media monitoring have increased, so have the number and capability of tools to track key words and assess sentiment. Harnessing algorithms to automate many of these processes, the credible data available to PR pros via the social web continues to increase along with the usage of social sites by the general public. Though increased use of online content and social spaces means increased complexity, it is clear that the amount of information and types of research available to PR pros has increased dramatically not only since the increased use of the Internet, but also since activity on social media has increased, especially in the last ten, or even five years (Hemann, 2011; Baer, 2011)

As you’ll see in the remaining sections about social media, monitoring is the “entry fee” for organizations to engage in social media. Understanding and identifying users’ experiences with a customer by listening to the conversations in the social web is paramount. Being aware of the overall sentiment for a brand as well as pinpointing
specific conversations can allow an organization to foster influencers and prevent detractors engaged in the conversation before they have a chance to substantially affect the public perception of a brand (Forrester).

**Capitalizing on the conversation.** Information flows in many directions in the Web 2.0 world where consumers create content and share it at a pace brands can only dream of keeping up with (Tripodi, 2011). Because information shared within these networks is often seen as more credible than that found via traditional means – e.g. marketing, advertising, media placements or a company’s web site – marketing directors are quickly losing their ability to control the conversation (Holtz, 2006; Tripodi, 2011). This section discusses how an organization can capitalize on the ongoing conversation by 1) admitting they can’t control it and 2) looking to facilitate it instead.

Admitting your audience controls your brand

Because a brand’s web site still reigns supreme in terms of shaping brand perceptions online, it must play a crucial role in shaping this conversation (Hemann, 2011). But because the majority of the interaction between publics is occurring elsewhere, the truth remains that company’s have considerably less control over their corporate message, branding and what is said about them – all things that have a direct link to marketing, PR and business goals (Gaines, 2010).

PR professionals engaged in social media have noticed that brands embracing social media are often the ones that realize other people are doing a lot more to shape their brand than they are (Hemann, 2011). Social media is a means for them to foster a community of brand advocates to engage in positive conversations. Instead of using
social tools as a direct means of selling their products, these PR pros are facilitating good will and brand loyalty through social tools in a way that traditional marketing has never allowed (Hemann, 2011; Baer, 2011).

If a company can generate brand advocacy amongst a core influencer group in a social space, it can be much more powerful than traditional communications that focuses on raising awareness. “Awareness is fine, but advocacy will take your business to the next level,” says Coca-cola’s CMO, Joe Tripodi in a 2010 post on Harvard Business Reviews “The Conversation.” Consumers can create more messages than a brand can based on sheer volume alone, and the PR professionals who realize this and leverage those consumers to carry their own messages will be the most successful at shaping brand perceptions in the social space (Tripodi, 2011).

*Facilitating the conversation to shape perception.* Social media forces companies to make new kinds of relationships with their audiences in order to effectively steer the ongoing conversation in a way that favors their brand. With people connecting to people in the social space, organizations must foster an emotional tie to their online audiences in a way that is different from other corporate messaging done in the past (Spenner, 2010). Instead of the traditional business-to-consumer (B2C) relationships fostered with traditional (and Web 1.0) methods, companies must look to foster C2C, or consumer-to-consumer, relationships.

Tasks of managing online relationships within influencer communities come with a new set of rules for PR and marketing pros. Building a two-way symmetrical model that suits
both B2C and B2B audiences is not an easy task, especially considering it’s not been
done before. As this literature review discussed previously, this online interaction begins
on a company’s own web site, but has now fully extended into the social realm
(Forrester, 2010).

The best bet for a brand to successfully manage its perception in the social media space is
to rely on an educated community of brand advocates (Tripodi, 2010). The focus of PR
pros is to manage this community by providing interesting content, but more importantly
prompts for the community to create interesting content (Baer, 2011). Enticing an
advocate community to create content that shares their own stories is the best way to
generate real testimonials. Customer or key-audience advocacy is more prevalent and
pervasive than a corporate message could ever be. If the community is fostered well and
includes enough positive influencers, it is also self-policing, identifying and mitigating
negative comments before they become an issue (Tripodi, 2011).

In order for a brand to cultivate and fully engage an effective community in the social
space, they must follow the “unwritten” rules of customer engagement in the social space
(Barwise, 2010). The essence of these written rules is to keep the message authentic for it
to be effective. Even a corporate message (which must be identified as being from the
company) should mimic the style and format of the audience’s in a given social space to
be seen as credible. In other words, an organization’s content must still appear to be user-
generated to garner the same trust as other content in social spaces (Spenner, 2010).
Ideally though, the company would provide supporting information and allow for peers within a community to drive the majority of the conversation. This goes along with the idea that a company must cede some control to be effective, resisting the urge to respond to every negative message and allowing the conversation to take its natural course within that community (Barwise, 2010).

When attempting to steer the conversation, PR professionals must look to address the online conversation in the very place that it resides: social media. As established, this also means responding to audience commentary in the same style of conversation (Barwise, 2010). Conversations are ultimately most effective when they’re tied back to a more rich form of media than is often available on social media sites. Integrating platforms in the social space together to combine text, image, video and interactive media can allow a PR professional to more effectively steer a community’s conversation in their direction (Barwise, 2010). For instance, a link to a video posted on a networking site is more likely to get shared with a broad audience than a basic text post would be.

Integrating multiple social networks together to facilitate and steer the conversation is just the first step. PR pros who can effectively integrate their organization’s web site with social media spaces and bridge the communities conversation with corporate content on the company’s web site can not only more effectively foster a positive online conversation, but are also more likely to be able to measure the outcomes of the conversation (Barwise, 2010).
The final section of this social media literature review dives deeper into the integration of social media with a company’s web site while also discussing the organizational changes that can help a brand leverage traditional PR and marketing practices while also taking advantage of the new dynamics available in the social space.

**Crisis control: social media as an early warning system.** Apart from monitoring social media for research and lightly engaging with audiences, one of the most predominate ways PR pros have adopted social media is for crisis communication (Baer, 2011) While an established community like the ones discussed in the previous section can help mitigate negative commentary about a brand before it escalates to the crisis level, these same types of communities can help establish trust by staying in touch with the key audience groups in real time (Barwise, 2010). Being able to disseminate information directly to the people can help the media relations side of crisis management, so long that the information provided by the company is truthful and supported by other credible perspectives (Barwise, 2010).

In nearly the same breath, social media also creates a new set of issues for PR professional, giving “negative influencers” a whole new arsenal to damage an organization’s reputation. Similarly to how a well fostered community can bolster a brand’s reputation, the lack of such a community can leave room for detractors to spread information with the potential to harm public perception of an organization (Gaines, 2010). Examples of both positive and negative are available for PR pros to see the effect social media can have both in creating and abetting a crisis (Baer, 2011). Emotional, fact-void arguments are difficult for a company to defend against and now spread faster in
these social spaces. Without preparation these types of reputation attacks are difficult to address. Even worse, without social media monitoring provisions in place, they can go unnoticed (Gaines, 2010).

There are numerous ways for social media to impact online brand perception that have gone unmentioned in this review. Additionally, the review has neglected to mention specific social media platforms and nearly avoids mentioning media types. Keeping the discussion of social media general is meant to add to this review’s timelessness, especially as new platforms are established and use increasingly more interactive and dynamic media channels. The final section of this social media literature review, which was hinted at earlier, discusses the integration of social media practices both with the organizational web site as well as traditional public relations activities.

**Social media integration**

When looking to begin any type of social media campaign or project, brands need to put their digital media activity in perspective with the entirety of their marketing and communications endeavors. Though social has become a significant 15 percent of communication activities for a number of top B2C companies, tying an organization’s social outreach with traditional communications approaches is imperative (Hemann, 2011; Gaines, 2010). Additionally, organizations need to remain focused on the media that works (albeit traditional, Web 1.0 or other), or risk falling short when it comes to their overall communication/marketing objectives (Gaines, 2010).
Because public relations and communications professionals are still new to the field of social media, most companies do not yet have their internal structures aligned to properly handle communication or branding in a social space (Forrester, 2010). Traditional divides between PR and marketing will not work in the social space and have anecdotally failed in the early days of social media (Spencer, 2010). Ultimately, an internal divide projected into the social space – even if both messages are positive for the brand – will confuse the key audiences and have a negative effect on branding or community building in this space (Forrester, 2010).

In order for social media activities to have the most impact on shaping perceptions online, SM efforts should be focused through one point in a company’s corporate communications or marketing structure (Forrester, 2010). The skill set needed for effective social media demands knowledge of traditional marketing and communications outreach, but is faster paced and requires a strong element of digital savvy (Spencer, 2010). Leaders in the corporate social space must be integrative thinkers, implementing brand mechanics and corporate communications practices across multiple mediums in a synchronized fashion (Hemann, 2011; Spencer, 2010).

But creating a social media department or management position doesn’t mean starting from scratch. Companies that succeed in social media revise, not rewrite, the traditional public relations playbook. By focusing on the audience or users needs, traditional PR and marketing practices can often be applied to social spaces. In general the pace is quicker and the tone of communications more informal, but many of the “old rules” still apply (Barwise, 2010).
Communicators can best accomplish an effective integration by looking to apply their traditional marketing practices in a social space. The first step is choosing the most appropriate channels in the social space, while taking care not to neglect other important online entities (Gaines, 2010). Above anything else – and as noted throughout this literature review – an organization’s web page is the most important online element. This fact is increasingly true for organizations with broad social footprints. The larger an organization’s social scope, the more robust, interactive and refined the website must be. Success also correlates to the integration of social activities with the web page, and according to experts this integration will be standard (Hemann, 2011).

**Conclusion**

Just as communication underwent a monumental shift with the birth of the Internet, social technologies have the potential to impact communication in the online world. Evolving from a world with only a few publishers to one with billions has already impacted the way brands represent themselves in the online world and beyond. Both opportunities and threats exist for organizations with the advent of social media, but it has for sure changed the way public relations professionals handle their job. This change will be different depending on the nature of the organization, but it is something communications and marketing professionals alike must stay attuned to or risk peril of brand perception.

Social elements in a communication plan can help add a personal touch to an organization – especially an organization without this inherent appeal in the B2B space. Being more personal as a brand has a direct link on brand advocacy and commercial success in the online space (Forrester, 2010). Affording organizations a personal appeal
as well as a real-time channel to reach their most influential audiences is a game changer for PR professionals. These two components alone will have a major impact on customer satisfaction on- and off-line increasingly into the future as social media continues to evolve.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

A review of the common literature on online brand perception highlighted web design elements specific to key publics as one of the most crucial elements for online branding. Research and best practices described in the literature show that an information architecture designed with main users in mind was a key component to successfully establishing a relationship with online publics. Reaching an audience through a web site requires navigation and labeling that cater to the key audiences. Among these traits, the positioning and breadth of the content is deemed one of the most important characteristics of an organization’s web page to investigate.

Ultimately the goal of the research was to understand how Veyance Technologies could improve their online presence and meet their business objectives. Decisions on how to shape the research were based on important characteristics as defined by the academic literature as well as a consideration for how this information could be translated to business professionals operating in the real world. A thorough understanding of what shapes online brand perception guided the research and subsequent recommendations. Based on the findings, recommended business and communication tactics will support Veyance’s business objectives by increasing brand presence and positive perception of
the Goodyear Engineered Products brand online. Goals of the research can be summarized in the following questions:

1) How does Goodyear Engineered Products’ Automotive Aftermarket web site compare to its major competitors and an industry best practice?

2) How is the Goodyear Engineered Products brand leveraging social media to shape perception online in comparison to its competitors?

3) What are the major business needs and how can an improved online brand presence for Goodyear Engineered Products help fulfill these needs?

**Research Tool and Sample**

To appropriately examine the main components of an organization’s web presence as defined by the literature review, a content analysis was chosen as the primary research tool. Congruent to the literature review, the content analysis focused on three distinct investigations: web site design, interactive elements and social media involvement. The last of these categories was investigated three-fold, looking at the social media footprint (output), its integration with the web site and the conversations occurring off of the organizational page. A secondary content analysis combined with Google Alerts was used to examine conversations occurring in other places on the web.

Procedures for the main content analysis combined components of similar methodologies found in research of web design and interactive components using a specific sample germane to the Goodyear Engineered Products brand. Limiting the number of organizations being compared to four allowed for the research to be qualitative in nature
demonstrating more accurately the influence the sites have on perception online. Similar content analyses that translate dynamic web content to a coded, quantitative scale offer a more generalized view of these components, while the competitive analysis of this research generated actionable suggestions for the Goodyear Engineered Products brand.

The selection of two competitors and one best practice was derived based on the internal audience at Veyance. Naturally, competitor information produces influential triggers for business managers looking to invest in certain marketing and branding projects. Though these examples aren’t always the best examples of good work when compared to all web sites online, they represent a fair comparison of where Veyance should be based on their similar resources, audiences and position in the marketplace.

Additionally, including a best practice case within the automotive aftermarket allowed Veyance to examine a suitable end-goal to focus on. Although organizations in other industries provided more advanced examples of best practices, choosing an organization within the industry proved more useful because of the similarity in audiences and content. Selecting Tenneco as the best practice comparison within the industry gave the most practical examples with a close overlap in execution suitable for this project and relevant to the internal audience at Veyance. Tenneco’s web site was chosen for its strong execution of the online PR principles described in the literature. Dayco and Gates are the most direct competitors to the Goodyear Engineered Products brand in the aftermarket with similar shares of market and comparable product quality and availability. Their activity on the marketing/PR front both in traditional and new media have also proven
powerful tools for motivating Veyance business objectives, which is a key component to pitching successful recommendations in the business plan.

The content analysis was compiled in a visual manner to make it easy to scan and digest as part of the business communication plan. It was conducted over the course of one month and examined sites using two major Internet browsers (Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox). Because the plan focuses on the North American portion of Veyance’s business, the web sites used were specific to this geographical area. Sites including content on more than just the automotive aftermarket also focused on portions of the site specific to the industry.

To fulfill the last research question and provide more information on the business of Veyance Technologies, basic analytics on the company’s financials and strategic direction were catalogued in a standard report. Research from the company’s communications and marketing departments were summarized in this report to give context to the business environment in which the findings of the content analysis would be implemented. Research focused on business performance and objectives, current use of online communication channels and audience profiles of key stakeholders. More detailed information is available in the Results section.

**Web Design Analysis**

The first category the content analysis focused on directly relates to the first chapter of the literature review examining major components of web design and information architecture. Investigating pages relevant to the four main audiences highlighted in the
literature (investors, customers, media and potential employees) closely linked from the organization’s North American homepage, the analysis looked at prominence, quality and volume of content for each audience. Focused on labeling, navigation, organization and design, the content analysis compares screen shots of the organizational web sites side-by-side to give a visual comparison of what someone from each key audience group would see when visiting each site.

Investigation of web design and information architecture related elements focused on the organizational homepage and pages within four clicks of this page (a typical IA scope), giving prominence to pages more closely linked to the homepage. It also identified when links appeared in the prominent global navigation position versus in persistent navigation menus located on other portions of the page, as research shows global navigation links are more often seen and clicked by online users. Visual representations of text and graphics are shown by the screen capture to demonstrate the visual design qualities of the links, and when applicable notation indicates whether the link appeared below the fold.

**Web Site Interactivity**

Progressing through the literature review, a comparison of interactive elements on organizational web sites was conducted to gauge potential two-way symmetrical communication. Based on the four main types of interaction defined by the literature – navigation, contact, registration and comments – each of the web sites was examined to determine how any of the key publics could initiate a conversation with the organization. Although a key component to two-way symmetrical communication online exists in how an organization manages web content based on its analytics to better serve the audience,
back-end data was not available for this investigation. Because of this, the characteristics of information architecture discussed in the web design portion of the content analysis were the best information available to highlight how well an organization catered to the conversational nature of dynamic online content.

Focusing on the “Contact Us” pages and registration forms that the literature highlighted as key website elements, the content analysis focused on prominence of these elements within each of the sites examined. Interactive elements available on the Global Navigation of a page were treated as more important as they signified an organization embracing dialogues with web site users more so than if the site include this information in a place users were less likely to find. Similarly, interactive elements on the homepage were treated as more substantial than in other areas. Pages four clicks from the homepage were examined for interactive elements and were categorized by visual interest and clarity with an “N/A’ being listed when no interactive component was available.

**Social Media**

The third and last portion of the content analysis looked at social media components – the main location that organizations are engaging audiences in real-time (or close to it) conversations. Outside of the time-lapsed iteration of two-way communication an organization uses on their organizational site, social media has provided a platform for key publics to consume information in rapid rates – whether that information comes from the organization, a competitor or another source.
The social media portion of the content analysis can be broken into three main components: integration with the organizational web site, activity on social media sites, and conversations occurring about the organization in social media. Collecting data for the last portion of this follows a different methodology that is discussed in the social media monitoring section later in this section.

A close extension of interactive components on the web site was how social media elements were integrated within the organizational web site. Because these areas have been identified as platforms for true two-way communication, the literature shows that a web site is smart to link to their “social hubs” so that key audiences looking to engage can join in on conversations already occurring. A thorough examination of each web site and closely affiliated sub sites was conducted to find places social media sites were integrated within the site. Three designations were given for the integration: prominent placement (1-2 clicks from homepage), other (still on main site) and sub-sites.

Social media activity was examined to see what each organization was doing to generate conversations in the social web. Based on research done for the social media section of the literature review, three primary sites were examined for the social media portion of the content analysis: Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. These three social sites were also the only sites that were integrated with the organizations’ web sites. Activity in each of these “social hubs” were measured to capture both output (content posted) and outtakes (how many people viewed the content).
Social Media Monitoring

In order to gauge the volume and tone of conversations occurring on social sites about the organizations in the competitive portions of the content analysis, Google Alerts were set up for the three competing brands. Limiting the social media monitoring to like-organizations, the best practice example of Tenneco was eliminated from this exercise to focus on conversations about products operating in the same space. Identifying existing online conversations germane to the organizations was conducted through two weeks of experimental Google Alert terms. Multiple iterations of organizations’ names and names of key brands were monitored with various Boolean search devices over the course of two weeks. Ultimately, product-based search terms resulted in the most relevant content, i.e. actual consumer conversations taking place about the companies and their products.

Over the course of a month and a half, Google Alerts revealed that the majority of conversations occurring about Goodyear Engineered Products, Dayco and Gates were taking place in industry specific forums dealing with product applications. Each mention was tracked for tonality for each brand (positive, negative or neutral), with the majority of mentions including a brief qualitative summary. This produced a high-level numeric representation of share of conversation and tonality, as well as a more detailed description of the conversations and product that could be provided to the business.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following five pages titled “Online Presence Comparative Analysis” showcase the findings of the web site content analysis described in the Methodology section.

The pages after this highlight the Social Media monitoring findings based on Google Alerts, including a catalogue of all the conversations online.

Lastly, the business was examined and findings on how improved online brand presence could help fulfill business objectives is captured in the last section.

Online Presence Comparative Analysis

See next page for the beginning of the comparative content analysis.
## Online Presence Comparative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Page</th>
<th>Links to Key Publics</th>
<th>Competeive Analysis</th>
<th>Best Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goodyear</td>
<td><a href="http://www.goodyear.com">www.goodyear.com</a></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayco</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dayco.com">www.dayco.com</a></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gates</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gates.com">www.gates.com</a></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenneco</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tenneco.com">www.tenneco.com</a></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Home Page

- **Goodyear**
  - Where to Buy
  - Product Categories
  - Resource Center

- **Dayco**
  - Where to Buy
  - Online Catalog
  - Training Videos

- **Gates**
  - Link to company information

- **Tenneco**
  - Financial/Investors

### Links to Key Publics

- **Investors**
  - N/A

- **Customers**
  - Global Navigation
  - Persistent header nav
  - Customer Service:
    - USA: 888-936-6354
    - Canada: 888-275-4397
    - International: +1-800-5444

- **Home Page**
  - DAYCO STORE
  - DAYCO DIRECT

### Side Navigation

- Aftermarket
  - Aftermarket Customers
  - New Product Lines
  - Services
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Home Page</strong></th>
<th><strong>Goodyear</strong></th>
<th><strong>DAYCO</strong></th>
<th><strong>Gates</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tenneco</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Global Navigation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>global nav. drop down</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Our Locations</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Events</strong></td>
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<td><strong>News Room</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contact Us</strong></td>
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<td><strong>WHAT'S NEW</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Gates Careers</strong></td>
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<td>DAYCO</td>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>Tenneco</td>
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<td>CONTACT</td>
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<td>website.</td>
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<td>Not yet registered? Register</td>
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<td>DAYCO DIRECT</td>
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<td>sub global nav.</td>
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<td>page off of sub nav.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Join/Login</td>
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<td>User Login</td>
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<td>Login to DAYCO DIRECT</td>
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<td>Not yet registered? Register</td>
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<td>Interactive elements</td>
<td>Goodyear</td>
<td>DAYCO</td>
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<td>TENNECO</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Media</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Web site integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>prominent placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub-sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity by SM site</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N/A                  | above footer nav. | aftermarket homepage | only on brand pages |
| training page        | Facebook          | Google my business  | N/A                 |
| embedded video       | N/A               | N/A                 | N/A                 |
| visit our youtube channel | N/A             | N/A                 | N/A                 |
| N/A                  | N/A               | N/A                 | N/A                 |

| N/A                  | N/A               | N/A                 | N/A                 |

<p>| N/A                  | Dayco UK          | Gates Auto         | N/A                 |
| 78 followers, 90 tweets | N/A             | N/A                 | N/A                 |
| Dayco Brasil         | N/A               | N/A                 | N/A                 |
| 360 followers, 242 tweets | N/A             | N/A                 | N/A                 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity by SM site</th>
<th>Goodyear</th>
<th>DAYCO</th>
<th>Gates</th>
<th>TENNECO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>694 Likes</td>
<td>300 Likes</td>
<td>649 Likes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook activity</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15 photos (3 albums) Active Links Active Wall posts</td>
<td>208 photos (33 albums) Some Links Active Wall posts Integrated w/ other sites</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>37 Videos</td>
<td>37 Videos</td>
<td>26 Videos</td>
<td>29 Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>32 Subscribers 1 Comment</td>
<td>58 Subscribers 1 Comment</td>
<td>65 Subscribers 14 Comments</td>
<td>106 Subscribers 74 Comments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Media Monitoring Grid

To capture a snippet of the social media conversation around the Gatorback brand and its main competitors, Google Alerts were set up for the terms “gatorback,” “gates belts” and “dayco” from February 1 to March 15, 2011. Mentions of the brand online turned back an average of 10-15 links per day, with 3-5 of them being mentions applicable to the study. These mentions of interest were defined as commentary coming from user-generated content about aftermarket automotive belts. Other links consisted of advertisements, “link-farms” or unrelated topics using overlapping uses of these key words.

Of the social mentions, forum discussion dominated. Automotive users seeking input from their communities posted questions regarding the quality, availability and proper use of underhood belts, relying on trusted strangers to provide helpful insights. Monitoring these conversations gives an important insight into the consumer’s mindset, especially amongst DIYers, who are often the influencers among the general public. The consumers who fix their own cars are the ones who are sought out for advice among friends and family, so this audience’s opinion of the Gatorback brand is an important one.

Mentions were categorized based on the brand that was mentioned and the nature of the conversations. Because the most useful data is generated when there are conflicting opinions, the best examples of these conversations are the ones where multiple brands are mentioned.

Mentions in the chart below are coded by positive (+), negative (-) and neutral (N), with an “A” designating a mix between social and “advertorial” type content (content that is in
some way tied to paid placement). The distinction here is based on impact on the target audience, as social mentions coming from within a trusted community (like a forum) are generally more influential than suggestions from third party advertisements.

A summary of all the mentions is shown below, indicating that the Gatorback brand has a clear opportunity to engage social influencers who are already out supporting the brand on their own.

Figure 2. Social Media Monitoring Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gatorback</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayco</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These findings conflict with the comparative analysis, which shows Gates and Dayco have more successful social media hubs to build online support. It’s clear that with some effort to build a hub and provide sharable content, the Gatorback and Goodyear Engineered Products brands could gain significant support from these communities.

Combined with a mechanism to drive online sales by partnering with a distributor and e-commerce site, a significant new revenue stream could be created.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gatorback</th>
<th>Gates</th>
<th>Dayco</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | +         | N     | N     | Celica needs new serpentine belt –  
Goodyear Gatorback is best belt out there by far (+1, +2!) (DAYCO, GATES)  
| 2 | +         |       |       | Is the alignment on my Gatorback correct?  
| 3 | -         | +     | n     | F150 owner: "I Flat Out Hate Gatorback Belts!"  
(GATES) “I’m sick of Gatorback – the hype is all garbage!”  
"Gatorback suck, period. Gates is a much better belt" (dust and noise)  
<Back and forth debate – worth reading through the posts>  
http://www.f150online.com/forums/lightning/254097-i-flat-out-hate-gatorback-belts.html |
| 4 | +         | n     |       | Kene Bell + Gatorback = AWESOME!  
Some back-and-forth on Gates v Gatorback with the “KB” blower, but overall positive feedback about Gatorback.  
Where to get Gatorback – order from Summit Racing for cheaper than parts store belts  
| 5 | +         |       |       | Is there a website to identify Gatorback Partnumbers?  
http://partfinder.veyance.com  
| 6 | N         |       |       | Looks like the tensioning spring got bent on the reinstall, leading the Gates belt not to fit  
| 7 | +         | +     |       | AutoZone doesn’t sell Gatorback anymore; where can I find one?  
Get them from Summit – they’re $10 cheaper anyway  
http://dodgeforum.com/forum/1st-gen-durango/280108-no-more- |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>gatorback.html</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Anyone ever ordered from RockAuto? They've got a Gatorback I want… <a href="http://www.duramaxforum.com/forum/maintenance/85615-gatorback-belt.html">http://www.duramaxforum.com/forum/maintenance/85615-gatorback-belt.html</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>I definitely want a Gatorback (hard to fin in UK) – Summit ships At the very bottom of the post <a href="http://forums.clubrsx.com/showthread.php?p=36012418">http://forums.clubrsx.com/showthread.php?p=36012418</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Press release publishing <a href="http://news.wittysparks.com/article/0alt3e06D4dLK">http://news.wittysparks.com/article/0alt3e06D4dLK</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Replacing my tensioner, but it doesn’t seem to fit <a href="http://www.saturnfans.com/forums/showthread.php?t=163589">http://www.saturnfans.com/forums/showthread.php?t=163589</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>“What’s the part number for Gatorback belt?” “Here’s a link, but you’ll probably have to order it” “Thanks, I got it from Autozone”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatorback</td>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>Dayco</td>
<td></td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squeak issue on Toyota Tundra: “Installed Gatorback and it was better than new!”</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tundrasolutions.com/forums/1gen-tundra/207102-thoughts-on-tsb-serpentine-built-squeak/">http://www.tundrasolutions.com/forums/1gen-tundra/207102-thoughts-on-tsb-serpentine-built-squeak/</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacing Gatorback issues on G-8</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tundrasolutions.com/forums/1gen-tundra/207102-thoughts-on-tsb-serpentine-built-squeak/">http://www.tundrasolutions.com/forums/1gen-tundra/207102-thoughts-on-tsb-serpentine-built-squeak/</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Can’t find Gatorback – checked Autozone, Pep Boys, Advanced”&lt;br&gt;“Try ebay, Amazon or Rockauto – need part number”</td>
<td><a href="http://forums.genvibe.com/zerothread?id=43492">http://forums.genvibe.com/zerothread?id=43492</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought Gatorback for my GenVibe because I’ve heard it’s quieter than OEM</td>
<td><a href="http://forums.genvibe.com/zerothread?id=28226">http://forums.genvibe.com/zerothread?id=28226</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexus owner runs over oil pan on highway, gets old Gatorback belt stuck underhood</td>
<td><a href="http://us.lexusownersclub.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=68379">http://us.lexusownersclub.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=68379</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>+A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatorback</td>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>Dayco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Gates belt doesn’t fit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Gates belt rebranded is good – Dayco mention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gates belt used for airplane products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Snowmobile user buys Gates belt to big; Dayco recommended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Gatorback belt number discontinued? Not right for vehicle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Gatorback Mentioned on thermostat change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>+A</td>
<td>Gates bicycle belt gets rave reviews from Bicycling.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Part number correct for Gates belt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Where can I find Gates belt (specific application)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Detail explanation supporting Gatorback/Gates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Dayco belt makes noise, should I get Gatorback?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Dayco Marketing director comments on post</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatorback</td>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>Dayco</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gatorback</td>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>Dayco</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>I use nothing but Gatorback – can’t wait for no squeaky <a href="http://www.duramaxforum.com/forum/maintenance/85615-gatorback-belt.html">http://www.duramaxforum.com/forum/maintenance/85615-gatorback-belt.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.infamousperformance.net/servlet/the-534/Gates-Racing-Subaru-Timing/Detail">http://www.infamousperformance.net/servlet/the-534/Gates-Racing-Subaru-Timing/Detail</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Business Communication Plan**

The aggressive business growth plans of Veyance Technologies demand that each business segment “pull its own weight,” capitalizing on the opportunities in its respective markets. While some earnings growth will come from operational improvements to drop selling, general and administrative costs (SGA), much of the growth will need to be
captured in the marketplace. Whether this comes in the form of demanding higher prices from its current customers to increase gross margin (GM) or simply selling more products, a strong brand presence and increased exposure in the marketplace is a necessity. This business communication plan outlines the need for growth as dictated by the business, as well as a proposal to increase brand exposure in a relatively untouched medium for Veyance – the Internet.

One of Veyance’s business segments has a unique opportunity to magnify its presence in this digital space and make a significant impact on the top-line of the business. Because it acts as both a consumer and distribution-based business, Veyance’s replacement products, or automotive aftermarket business, stands to gain significant brand equity in the online world – specifically backed by the well-known Goodyear and Gatorback brands. Key stakeholders online represent both potential buyers and end-users with the ability to impact purchasing decisions on varying levels. “Countermen” who play an integral role in brand choice in the aftermarket are online more than ever now to do their jobs. Impacting these industry influencers via digital media represents significant word-of-mouth branding opportunities and means impacting individuals who make the purchasing decisions. Influencers in the general public are also seeking information from online sources rather than through the traditional networks of garages and repair shops representing an opportunity to establish brand loyalty.

**Business plan for increasing top-line growth**

In order to prove the value of this proposed communication plan, potential impact to Veyance’s top-line growth is outlined in this first section. A summary of business
objectives for the Replacement Products group of Veyance’s North America business highlights the need for increased sales growth to meet the overall growth objectives for the business. By strengthening Veyance’s brand presence within the aftermarket, increased top-line dollars will help the aftermarket portion of Veyance’s business reach these desired objectives. Additionally, notable industry research will reinforce the correlation between satisfying customers’ information needs online with brand loyalty.

**Veyance’s global business objectives.** Veyance Technologies, Inc., (VTI) must grow its profits significantly in the next three years to satisfy its owner’s demands. Each business segment is responsible for a percentage of this growth that is comparable to the size of the business and opportunities in the market place.

Figure 4. Veyance Business Objectives (financials shown as “equivalents” for privacy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total VTI</th>
<th>NA VTI</th>
<th>Aftermarket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2010 Sales</strong></td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>608.6</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2010 EBITDA</strong></td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012 Sales (Plan)</strong></td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>854</td>
<td><strong>280.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012 EBITDA</strong></td>
<td>209.9</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the aftermarket portion of Veyance’s business looks to replace the loss of a major retail distributor, it is also being challenged to grow its business organically amongst existing distributors and through new business. A major opportunity to accomplish this exists in the form of creating increased pull from the consumer level. As shown in a recent poll of North American and European consumers, customer experiences online play a major role in brand loyalty, including purchase decisions.
According to a Forrester research study conducted in 2010, poor online experiences have the ability to negatively affect consumers’ opinions of a company and future behavior. The research found that a bad experience during any portion of the purchase decision process increases the probability that a consumer would be less likely to continue searching, return to the site or buy a product. Though the study noted that professionals are still early in their understanding of how to foster a healthy online relationship with audiences, it’s clearly a differentiator and something online communicators are increasing their investment in.

Veyance is facing a growing opportunity to leverage digital communications to bolster its brand and achieve the stated business objectives. The communication plan that follows provides details for how this can be done.

**Communication Plan**

The following plan conveys how Veyance can help build the Goodyear Engineered Products and Gatorback brands in the aftermarket using communications online. The strategies listed here will drive business growth to meet the business goals and sales objectives described in the previous section.

**Goal and Objectives.** The communication plan’s success or failure will be determined based on the following set of measurable and time-bound objectives. Benchmark data for the objectives are outlined in the Research section of the plan; the time component is fluid based on start date of the plan. As overarching goals and objectives will be measured based on a number of performance indicators described
below. Strategies and tactics to accomplish these objectives are detailed later in the plan and are based on research conducted in the market.

**Goal.** Increase sales of Gatorback belts and affiliated Veyance products by increasing brand presence online among influencers in the aftermarket.

**Objective 1.** Increase web traffic (unique and repeat visitors) by aftermarket audiences by 30 percent in 6 months. Traffic defined as:

- Views of the replacement products pages lasting over 10 seconds
- Downloads of instructional content for Gatorback or other aftermarket products
- Click-throughs to “find a distributor” page, or purchase page

**Objective 2.** Create purchase portal for consumers to purchase products from the goodyearEP.com website.

Elevate the importance of website maintenance and content creation by generating revenue directly through the organizational web site

**Objective 3.** Increase two-way communication online, engaging in at least 75 ‘conversations’ each quarter.

- Conversations through web site and in SM where applicable
- Boost brand loyalty among aftermarket influencers

**Objective 4.** Increase positive brand mentions online by 30 percent from Feb. 2011 data within 12 months (compared to benchmark survey in Social Media Monitoring Grid)
Web site mentions collected via the same method on Google Alerts

**Research.** The strategies and tactics recommended later in this plan were based on two major components of research: audience profiling and content analysis (both competitive and comparative, on web sites and in social media). Audience profiles combine anecdotal references with information needs of these audiences groups and how that will be catered to in an upgraded web site and digital outreach campaign. The comparative analysis looks in depth at Veyance’s digital communication activity, comparing it to the activity of its major competitors and a best-practice case study. It also examines social media mentions. Overall, this information provides the insight necessary to propose the recommendations later in the plan.

**Key publics, including audience profiles.** By understanding more about who is essential to the success of Veyance’s Replacement Products business, we can begin to understand how to change their behaviors to meet both the communication and business objectives outlined earlier in this plan. Along with a brief summary of the audience groups below is a description of their information needs and typical tasks they would be looking to complete online.

**Primary Audience 1 - B2C Customers.** Business-to-consumer customers of Veyance’s Replacement Products group currently represent a fairly small portion of the overall revenue stream. Despite this, they are responsible for the majority of the online conversation occurring about the Gatorback brand online. They comprise professional and amateur car mechanics often working as installers at repair shops or dealerships, countermen at distribution warehouses or elsewhere in the aftermarket business. These
car enthusiasts are brand loyal and represent the largest untapped resource of influence both online and in person.

To help encourage these car enthusiasts to use the Gatorback brand and share their appreciation with others, a host of information should be made available on Veyance’s site and in social media networks frequented by the audience group. The common B2C customer in the aftermarket gathers information about their vehicle from sites other than manufacturers’ pages. Vehicle-specific forums, distributor e-commerce sites and instructional sites are the main sources of information, indicating that Veyance should produce content suitable for these sites. Because these car enthusiasts are typically looking to fix an issue with their vehicle, or perform some type of upgrade, information delivered by Veyance should also be germane to these tasks.

Examples of information that satisfy B2C customer needs to include product benefit information, installation instructions, availability information, solution-based service info, FAQ responses and important industry or product news updates. Maybe more importantly though, is the ability to personally respond to specific requests, complaints and comments from the B2C group, akin to what a customer service representative would do via other channels.

Primary Audience 2 - B2B Customers. The largest portion of the Replacement Products top-line comes from its distributor customers, or business-to-businesses customers. Selling down the aftermarket supply chain line to both repair-shops and smaller “jobber” distribution centers, the B2B customers represent an important middle-
man in the aftermarket. Their importance to the viability of Veyance’s business cannot be understated, and any actions taken to by-pass them and serve directly to the consumer must be weighed heavily by Veyance. The distributors are influenced by downstream demand in the aftermarket to a degree, but make decisions primarily based on terms with a manufacturer that allow them to generate the most profit for their business.

Because they are making purchase decisions based on a different set of criteria than B2C customers, the information needs of distributors differ greatly. While product benefit information is important, data on business operations (e.g. pricing terms, product availability, delivery metrics and customer service) is also crucial to provide. Detailed information of this nature is not shared publically in the online world, but it is still important for Veyance to portray a healthy and responsible business reputation in the aftermarket. This comes in many forms, and is well supported by a strong demand for its products down the supply line.

Secondary Audience 1 - Trade Media. Maintaining good relationships with the media online is an important element to communicating with all participants in the aftermarket. Racing and aftermarket publications hold a lot of influencers on both B2C and B2B customers, and provide an alternate channel to fulfilling the information needs described above. Similar to other trade media groups, aftermarket and racing publications depend heavily on manufacturers and distributors in the industry to provide content relevant to their readers. Another similarity is the time-crunch reporters and editors of these publications feel. Any steps Veyance can take to make relevant content more accessible to these groups the better, even if that content isn’t created by Veyance.
Timely, easily-accessed information in multiple media formats are perfect for publications in the aftermarket. Supporting in-person relationships with online content is crucial to leveraging this audience group’s influence on aftermarket participants. Though this plan won’t get into the details of Veyance’s media relations efforts, it will discuss ways in which the Replacement Products group could improve the way it delivers information to this audience group online.

Secondary Audience 2 – Investors and Potential Employees. A number of audience groups that are typically treated as a high priority are not fully investigated in this plan for various reasons. They are discussed here to justify the focus on the above audience groups.

Because Veyance is currently a private company, investors are not catered to in the online world as they are in other companies, including Veyance’s competitors (some of this is highlighted in the competitive analysis section below). Even if Veyance were a public company, since the Replacement Products segment is only a portion of Veyance’s overall business, it does not make sense to provide financial information to investors only for this side of the business.

For this same reason, potential employees are not specifically catered to by the Replacement Products business. Though aftermarket participants are also potential employees and will be exposed to the same messages as the audiences described above, they are not an essential audience to accomplishing the objectives of this plan.
Additionally, Veyance has other portions of their Web site that more directly handle recruiting information.

**Comparative analysis of online components.** Detailed in the charts starting on page 54, a comparative analysis examines key online components that shape perceptions of key stakeholders. Based on academic research in the field of online branding, the analysis focuses on home page design, website interactivity and social media (including both presence and website integration). It compares the Goodyear Engineered Products brand to that of its two main competitors in the aftermarket – Dayco and Gates – as well as an industry best practice in Tenneco. Using screen shots and supplemental explanation in an easy-to-read grid, the analysis is meant to be a visual guide comparing how all key audience members would perceive these brands in the online world. Additional analysis is found in the recommendations section, which puts the visuals into the context of next steps.

Please see Online Presence Comparative Analysis *(pg 54)*

Additional research was done through social media monitoring giving more contexts to the tone of conversation, i.e. positive, negative or neutral. A social media grid highlights mentions of the three competing brands and denotes the sentiment of each mention. This baseline measure adds a different element than brand exposure by identifying what types of emotions and behaviors that exposure is eliciting among consumers and other key publics.
Recommendations (Strategies and Tactics). To accomplish the four main objectives listed earlier in this plan, a number of strategies should be followed. The strategies include changes to GoodyearEP.com, as well as online activity on behalf of the Gatorback brand in other online spaces that reach primary audiences. Strategies are not exclusive to one objective and comprise a number of tactics that work in combination with the overarching strategies to drive the Gatorback brand toward its communication and financial objectives.

Strategy 1 – Refocus website. Re-organize the aftermarket portion of goodyearep.com to focus on the primary audiences described in this plan, changing the design to better suit these users’ needs.

Strategy 2 – Create portal to e-commerce site. Work with a major retail distributor to funnel sales requests from the site to an e-commerce site for online users to purchase “directly” (< 3 clicks) from goodyearep.com.

Strategy 3 – Create “Social Hubs.” Leverage conversations occurring online in social spaces by establishing a presence on major sites and providing content for influencers to share.

Strategy 4 – Engage users in online conversations. Stimulate online conversation by engaging influencers already having conversations about the Gatorback brand or its competitors on aftermarket websites.
Strategy 5 – Drive traffic to website. Link to product news and online “highlights” on goodyearep.com in content shared on social spaces to drive traffic to the site. Establish credibility by mixing this with non-brand industry news that is relevant and helpful to primary audiences.

Strategy 6 – Boost SEO. Leverage social activity to increase SEO on the aftermarket portion of goodyearep.com by discussing trending topics and driving in-bound links/traffic.

Each of these strategies is supported by specific tactics outlined in the section below that visually depicts how these recommendations work together to accomplish the objectives above. While tactics may change to fit current events, marketing directives and business climate, they should all fit within the strategic framework. Tactics listed here are simply examples and should be elaborated as the plan receives further preparation and prepares for launch.

Please see Strategy and Tactic recommendations on page 79.

Interaction in Social Media on behalf of Veyance Technologies and the brands it is licensed to use (Goodyear Engineered Products, Gatorback, etc.) should adhere to an overall policy that is rooted in the fundamentals of two-way symmetrical communication. A policy that protects the company legally from behavior on behalf of employees is attached along with a Social Media Guide that provides general tips for fundamental social media interaction. These tools are only the basics and should be used in conjunction with the above strategies to produce effective results.
Please see Appendices A – Social Media Policy (page 83)

Please see Appendices B – Social Media Guide (page 88)
Figure 5. Strategies and Tactic Recommendations

- **S1 – Site refocus**
  - Cater to key audiences – B2C & B2B customers
  - Highlight part identifier & parts locator
  - Solution-based training & product info
  - Modified Online newsroom to assist reporting tasks
  - Product specifics and installer perks
  - DataDrive sign-in (distributor specifics metrics)

- **S2 – e-commerce portal**
  - Partner w/ distributor & e-commerce site
  - Link w/ persistent navigation graphic
  - Secondary to information on site
  - Traffic driven via SM & Online ads

- **S3 – Social Hubs**
  - Produce content specific to online convos
  - Training/Instruction YouTube Channel
  - Facebook fan page specific to aftermarket
  - Recycle content on Gatorback Twitter account
  - Integrate with links to & from Web site

- **S4 – Engage Influencers**
  - Build keyword list to monitor convo specifics
  - Outline SM policy based on 2WS communication
  - Engage when relevant and strategically aligned
  - Link to content on Hubs & Web site; share content

- **S5 – Linking**
  - Social Hub content linked to site
  - Social engagement linked to site & Hub
  - Create content to reach to social convos

- **S6 – Boost SEO**
  - Key word usage
  - Page development & IA
  - Interactive pages
  - Social engagement

GoodyearEP.com

Integration

Social footprint

Traffic

the rest of the Web
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Investigating the components of online branding through the lens of traditional Public Relations is a task almost every professional and academic PR practitioner has spent time doing in the last decade. As information consumption changes and more people gather information via the Internet over other sources, the importance of managing perception online will continue to grow. This thesis has shown an example of one systematic approach to conducting an investigation of online branding components on behalf of an organization and determining how a PR pro could analyze and optimize their online efforts. This thesis also provides a sample plan a PR pro could use to supplement web site development, ensuring an organization’s web presence supports the task and information needs of stakeholder publics who have influence on the organization’s bottom line. Because business environments demand research and information to justify investment in PR activities, the methodology of this report provides a framework for how a PR practitioner could collect the necessary information to propose such a plan.

Combining research approaches taken in both the academic and professional realms of PR, the research method outlined above provides in-depth data on a scholarly level that is also actionable from a PR management standpoint in business. Crafting a research plan that satisfies both academia and executives does come with its drawbacks however, as pleasing everyone also means sacrificing simplicity for each specific audience group. Researchers looking to repeat this type of study should understand the specific needs of their audience and cater both the method of investigation and report of results in a way that is accessible and familiar to their audience. Similarly, future researchers should be
aware of the limitations of research online, knowing that the medium changes rapidly and findings can lose relevance if not acted on in a timely manner. Another drawback at looking at online perception in the same scope as this project is the difficulty in catering to many stakeholders and accurately replicating the experience various users might have with the organizational web site or any of the social elements affiliated with the brand.

Another caveat to the approach taken in this thesis deals with the context in which the research findings of an online study might be applied within an organization’s overall PR and marketing efforts. Admittedly, online messages are only a portion of what key audiences receive. Without recognition of communication channels outside of the Internet, an organization cannot make a viable impact on overall perception. Though audiences are receiving messages increasingly online versus other media, understanding what media mix is best to reach an organization’s key stakeholders should be a precursor to this type of research.

Because the Internet is an increasingly complex medium that’s used differently depending on the audience, content, situation and other variables, it’s also important to follow major trends in online communication to understand how to best influence perception among key stakeholders. The research catalogued in this thesis was outdated even as it was collected, and although it gives a good framework for how to understand the Internet’s role in shaping public perception, each investigation should consider the current state of online communications and understand the types of online communication (e.g. web sites, social media) that most directly impact the organization’s ability to communicate with its audiences.
The nature of online communication and its rapid changes highlight a point made throughout this thesis: it’s important for PR pros to work closely with information architects to effectively convey information and messages in the online world. Just as it’s important for PR pros to understand the business objectives of an organization and work closely with marketing and other disciplines to craft a clear and consistent message, PR pros need to understand how to convey that message via the complex channel of the Internet. Information architects are closely tied to the trends in online communication and can help PR pros understand the barriers they face when trying to send messages to stakeholder online. A partnership between these two fields will be an increasingly important dynamic in the future of web-based PR especially as entry points to online information continue to expand from the elementary examples of browser-accessed web sites to include, social media, mobile elements and more.
Policy Summary:

This Policy, together with other Veyance policies, provides guidance when employees contribute to and participate in any Social Media. It is intended to protect both you and Veyance, and also seeks to provide guidance to allow Associates to participate in Social Media in a responsible way that casts a strong light on our business. While Veyance respects your privacy, to the extent your conduct affects Veyance or reflects Veyance in any way, it is a legitimate business concern for Veyance. Accordingly, all conduct on Social Media may be reviewed by Veyance and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, even if the conduct occurs off the property or off the clock. It does not matter if your conduct is communicated in person or by phone, computer or other electronic vehicle.
Associates may look to engage in Social Media as a form of promoting Veyance or our brands. This type of engagement requires prior approval and must adhere to certain guidelines that protect our Company’s and our brands’ good names, while protecting against potential legal risks. Additionally, when engaging in Social Media, employees may be viewed as representing Veyance, and therefore each employee must do so in a responsible way.

Before you Post or communicate using any media information that relates in any way to Veyance, you should start by being aware of Veyance policies and procedures and be certain that your activities are compliant. You should also be thoughtful about what you share, how you share it and who you share it with. Be aware of privacy settings and distribution channels on Social Media sites, and even if you have privacy settings established, you should always operate as if you were in a public forum. Above all, your actions in social media, like your actions offline, must adhere to the provisions in Veyance’s Code of Conduct.

Some of the guidelines in this Policy may apply to communication on the Veyance Online Information and Communication Exchange (VOICE) intranet. Please refer to the Veyance Blogs Terms of Use Agreement when using VOICE or other Veyance sponsored intranet weblog, wiki, forum or other information sharing media.

1.0 Definitions

1.1 “Social Media” are internet based tools for sharing and discussing information. It most often refers to activities that integrate technology, social interaction and the sharing of words, pictures, videos and audio, such as the following:
   • Multimedia and social networking sites, like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and MySpace;
   • Blogs, wikis, message boards, microblogs and other community-based sites or collaboration tools;
   • Social commerce postings, like purchases, experiences or product reviews;
   • Geo-tagging social sites, where physical or virtual location can be shared, like Foursquare; and
   • Any other site where information – like text, images, video, sound or other files – can be uploaded or posted.
1.2 “Post” is any communication on the Internet, whether made online or offline or through images, videos or sound files.

1.3 “Account” is any registered entity to a Social Media site and encompasses personal identification information, and/or company/product information if it is not a personal account, and any Posts affiliated with the account.

1.4 “Network” refers to the group of people who you are connected to on a given Social Media site. For instance, this includes “Friends” on a site like Facebook, and “Subscribers” or “Followers” on many content sharing sites. It is important to understand who is in your network, as these people generally have more direct access to you, your information and the content you are Posting on the site.

1.5 “Veyance” refers to Veyance Technologies, Inc., its subsidiaries and affiliates.

2.0 Guidelines for Using Social Media for Personal Use

Veyance associates who choose to participate in Social Media in their personal lives must remember to adhere to the guidelines set forth in Veyance’s Code of Conduct. Among other things, this means refraining from making disparaging comments about the company and keeping confidential information confidential. For a reference on best practices in Social Media, please reference the Social Media Guide posted on the VOICE.

3.0 Guidelines for Using Social Media for Company Use

When using Social Media for company use, prior approval must be sought and the following guidelines must be followed. In addition to the below sections, make sure to follow the Veyance Code of Business Conduct, the Associate Confidentiality and Intellectual Property Agreement and Veyance Computer Users Agreement. Veyance emails should be used when creating accounts for company use.

3.1 Initiating a Social Media Account: If an employee wishes to initiate a Social Media account for promoting Veyance products or programs, the employee must first fill out a Social Media Account Registration Form (attached). This form must be submitted to the Global Communications department for approval by Vice President, Global Human Resources and the Trademark Counsel. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES shall an employee initiate a Veyance related Social Media account until the registration form has been submitted AND approved.
3.2 **You are responsible for what you Post.** Remember that individuals can be held personally accountable for comments deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libelous, whether they pertain to Veyance, another company or another person.

3.3 **Follow Veyance’s Social Media and Communication Style Guidelines.** All Posts must adhere to the style guidelines laid out in the *Communication Style Guidelines* as well as the Social Media Guide, both of which are posted on the VOICE. Associates must not refer to Veyance’s main brand, “Goodyear Engineered Products,” as if it was a company (See the Trademarks Policy).

**Related Document(s):**

- Veyance Code of Business Conduct
- Associate Confidentiality and Intellectual Property Agreement (ACIPA)
- Non–Veyance Associate Confidentiality and Intellectual Property Agreement (NACIPA)
- Veyance Computer Users Agreement
- Veyance Blogs Terms of Use Agreement
- Email Use Policy – IT-G-004
- Veyance Communications Style Guide
- Trademark Policy
- Social Media Guide (best practices)
This registration form is to be used in conjunction with Veyance Technologies, Inc. Social Media Policy, number HR-ITC-002 for employees who wish to initiate a social media account for a business purpose.

If an employee wishes to use social media for a business purpose (e.g. promoting a product, brand, program or Veyance in general), the employee must first get this Social Media Account Registration Form signed and approved. The form should be submitted to the Global Communications department for approval purposes from Information Technology, Communication and Legal departments.

**UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES** shall an employee initiate a business related social media account until the registration form has been submitted AND approved.

Employee making request: ____________________________________________

Social media site: ________________________________________________

Requested Account name/identifier: _________________________________

Employee(s) responsible for content on requested account:

_________________________________________________________________________________________

Intended Use of account (what specific product/program is being promoted):

_________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________

**NOTE:** Based on the above information, more detail about the intended use of the social media account may need to be gathered before approval is granted.

Approved by:

_________________________________________________________________________________________

(signature) (signature)

_________________________________________________________________________________________

(PRINT name and title) (PRINT name and title)
Appendix B – Social Media Guide

Veyance has no intention of monitoring associates' social media activity. The only concern is material relating to Veyance. Be smart with the info you share and who you share it with. Follow the guidelines here and adhere to Veyance’s SM Policy.

The following guide is a reference for Veyance associates using social media both for business and personal use. It is an extension of the Social Media Policy and was constructed for easy use while engaging in social media activities during the course of the day. The guidelines are not intended to be all inclusive and any suggested additions you have are more than welcome!

Helpful Social Media Tips

Be accurate, truthful and considerate
Be constructive, provide appropriate context, and think about the impact of your comments

Be safe
Be careful about posting personal information online, including photos, addresses and phone numbers

Assume anyone can see what you post
Customers, shareholders, competitors, other employers and the general public could see what you share

Understand the privacy settings
Know who you are sharing your information with, but realize that accidents can happen and info can leak

Identify yourself
Anonymity does not protect you; consider a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own

Focus on positive commentary
Remember that you’re interacting with people; follow the Golden Rule and post considerately

Stay within the rules: some common sense reminders

Obey the law
Laws to keep in mind: copyright, fair use, privacy, confidentiality, harassment, discrimination, defamation, etc.

Follow Veyance’s policies
In person or online, you must adhere to the policies of the company, including the Veyance Code of Conduct

Keep confidential information confidential
Focus posts on publicly known information, whether posting about Veyance, our competitors or otherwise

Don’t post on behalf of Veyance
Make it clear that you’re not a company spokesperson, but know that your posts still reflect upon the company

Save social media for personal time
Don’t let social media activity interfere with your work commitments

Don’t use Veyance’s intellectual property
Logos, trademarks and copyrights are property of Veyance, including the “Gondwana” brand

What is Social Media?
“Social Media” (SM) are any Internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information. The term commonly refers to activities that integrate technology, social interaction and the sharing of words, pictures, videos and audio, including social networking sites, collaboration tools, social commerce postings and geo-tagging social sites. Basically, this means any site where text, images, video, sound or other files can be posted.

Are you active in social media?
Have a blog, YouTube channel or Twitter account? If you’re a frequent user of a social media site, consider including a disclaimer on your profile that explains the postings on this site are your own and do not reflect the views or opinions of my employer.

Even with a disclaimer, understand that your actions may still be tied to the company. Please act accordingly.
References


