BOOM AND BUST
THE B2B TECH MEDIA LANDSCAPE POST-COVID-19
The B2B tech sector has been dealt one of the better hands in 2020. Companies have accelerated their digital transformation or tested operating fully virtually, while we all leaned on cloud services to continue our work despite the physical disruption. Business is booming for many of these tech providers.

Despite this, the broader media landscape has suffered. Staff writers have been on and off furlough, editorial schedules have changed, and some publications have folded entirely. A huge number of journalists were placed on furlough in late March in an initial wave impacting hundreds. Dennis Publishing alone placed 130 journalists on furlough across its 50 brands, with some of its publications including The Week folding permanently. Since June, journalists have been reinstated to their roles, but editorial teams have been further squeezed by redundancies. This will become more apparent in September as the furlough scheme winds down.

We can expect the landscape to continue changing as the economic situation evolves. However, we’re starting to see patterns emerging that indicate what is to come. To guide us through the rest of the year, we’ve taken a look at the shifts to the B2B technology landscape and what the data says about emerging trends, with recommendations on how brands can cut through despite the changes taking place.

Our Bread and Butter: Technology Trades

We’ve seen early signs that, due to B2B technology brands’ continued advertising support, technology journalists have been slightly less affected than those working across other sectors.

The journalists still working are under enormous time pressure to deliver multiple workloads with smaller teams. Fatigue around doom-and-gloom stories about the downturn and coronavirus has also set in. Meanwhile, they are inundated with the same stories advocating for remote working infrastructure, and canned comments on the latest security vulnerability making workforces susceptible to breaches while at home.

Looking at the data and examining the success of our recent client campaigns, the bar is set higher to achieve cutthrough. Here’s how we recommend approaching B2B titles:

**Good News Wins**

Amid tension, uncertainty and worry, a good news story can be a breath of fresh air for readers and B2B trade media is no exception.

Customer success stories are also popular – showing how they’ve adapted to changing customer preferences and ways of working.

Ask your best spokespeople for their good news hypotheses and whether there’s data to back it up – or, if you can, commission research to support. And a customer voice continues to go a long way.

**Look for the Untold Story in Well-trodden Subjects**

Everyone is talking about working from home, digital transformation and innovation in the cloud. To capture the attention of editors, any content, data or research should illuminate a new story within the topic.

We recommend looking for ways to talk about financial and behavioural impact and letting anecdotes and hunches from around the business inform research questions, as well as using the data and tools at your disposal to conduct a media audit to make sure your story hasn’t already been exhausted by other brands.

**Manage Expectations Internally About the Current News Cycle.**

Coverage is still coming in, but not necessarily in the first 48 hours after launch. For those of us used to seeing 75% of campaign results on day one, this can be disappointing.

What we’re seeing is that coverage volumes are fairly strong but spread over a much longer period of three to four weeks. If the story and your relationship with the journalist is strong, it will get coverage, but it is taking longer to appear. As with any big story, we recommend looking at the different ways to cut the research to produce different angles across nationals, trades and vertical press.
NATIONAL AND BROADCAST MEDIA

While larger publications managed to stave off furloughs of journalists covering technology initially, they have now taken a toll, the effects of which are becoming more visible. Print has understandably been hit the hardest, but online news readership is higher than ever, so it is truly a mixed bag for the national landscape.

Technology reporters seem to be insulated from the worst of the impact, but the recent media attention on the role of technology in business means the bar is set much higher than previously for the stories making it into print and online, due to a wealth of access to influential spokespeople from leading businesses and robust data. We’d recommend approaching as follows:

**BE REALISTIC ABOUT THE NEWS VALUE OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP**

Thought leadership is an extremely important and strategic tool in PR, but it is not always what the nationals want to be writing about. With so much uncertainty in the short- and near-term, national media want facts, data and hard evidence as proof of what’s around the corner for people and businesses.

Looking to your own business and how it fits into the news agenda – in performance and people in particular, and trends pertinent to the UK – is a better route to carving out share of voice in the national media right now.

**EXCLUSIVES ARE STILL POWERFUL**

Before the pandemic, nationals were already using exclusives as a bargaining chip to cover stories while competing with other titles for clicks and eyes on their content. This remains unchanged, and exclusives are still one of the best ways to secure national coverage for broad interest and impact B2B technology stories.

Pitch early, focus on the human edge of the story, and be flexible with editors about when the story goes live for the best chance of a prominent feature.

**OLD SCHOOL PR TRICKS FOR A NEW MEDIA AGENDA**

The current focus of nationals is on vaccine development, tensions with China, the economy, jobs and unemployment, the upcoming debt hangover and company news from business giants such as Apple, Amazon and the FTSE 500.

An interest in lighter stories presents an opportunity for brands to bring their role in the recovery to life through PR. Leaning into visuals through strong photography that illustrates the human side of problems and solutions can capture significant moments for businesses, such as the return to offices.

Real human case studies including people whose individual stories reflect the experiences of many are of enormous interest to national media and are prominently featured online.

**UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDS PHYSICAL EVENTS**

Online versions of company events have proven enormously successful, but it’s still too early to tell on whether their business impact is the same as in-person activations. Holding attention online for long periods can be problematic, and so brands have adapted their approaches to stagger keynotes and event sessions over several days or even weeks to make attendance easier and more digestible for people watching at home. There is also a choice of what to watch for the viewer, as opposed to the brand dictating this.

Meanwhile, the humble B2B webinar has boomed, with many customers and prospects using time at home to learn about new technologies and listen to existing customers about their experiences and use cases, with attendance surpassing expectations across the board.

We recommend giving digital event audiences high-impact but digestible content to hold attention in short bursts, lowering the chances of being distracted by everything else online.

**USING DATA TO PLAN FOR FUTURE CAMPAIGNS**

Diving into the data from the past six months provides solid clues about the next few months and the opportunities for B2B technology storytelling. We’ve used data tools to track frequency of topics in UK publications from January to mid-July to see what’s getting media interest and what it could mean for the rest of 2020.

**THE BIG PICTURE**

The initial impact of coronavirus reaching public awareness in the UK in a gigantic wave can be visualised with data. An enormous spike in February and March has since steadily declined but still represents upwards of 30,000 articles per month as of June and July.

It looms over all other topics and should still be front of mind for PR planning – it’s still the biggest issue in the world and will be for some time.

**CONTROVERSY SELLS**

When you take out coronavirus and China from the analysis, cyber security and 5G dwarf the other topics by article count.

Spikes relating to specific security vulnerabilities and breaches sit on top of a steady volume of cyber security coverage and it will continue to remain a significant focus for analysts and journalists covering the B2B technology sector. As ever, a robust PR framework for communicating around security and 5G policies is essential to any communications strategy.
A CLOSER LOOK AT B2B TECHNOLOGY TOPICS

Narrowing in on specific B2B technology keywords, digital transformation and artificial intelligence remain the biggest topics (outside of security) by article count, with remote working the new entrant since late February 2020.

The data tells us that the initial spike of coverage on remote working was not a flash in the pan but instead has levelled out into sustained coverage levels, surpassing cloud computing and software as a service keywords by article count.

WHAT A SUCCESSFUL B2B TECHNOLOGY CAMPAIGN LOOKS LIKE

Using a recent anonymised campaign as an example, the uplift in coverage brands should look for should be over weeks and months with lower troughs and overall sustained coverage in the weeks and months post-launch. In other words, you should look for two or three smaller spikes instead of one.

As a rule, we recommend keeping the same KPIs for your campaigns but extending the reporting period to capture coverage coming in gradually over time.

FINAL THOUGHTS

After over five months of adapting campaigns to daily shifts and changes in our world, data gives us some clarity about the B2B technology landscape as we move into H2.

Robust, data-driven campaigns that speak to the short- and near-term future will give technology writers what they require to provide much needed insight and analysis to their IT decision maker audiences. Thought leadership should be backed up by evidence and supported by strong visuals and human case studies. Good news and optimism are sure-fire routes to success as media clamour for hopeful stories to balance the negativity and an opportunity to shout about customer successes.

If you would like to see more data about the B2B technology media landscape or have a conversation about what this means for your brand, please get in touch.

If these challenges sound familiar to you then we’d love to chat through our experience in helping brands navigate the new world of technology communications and how this could help your brand cut through. Contact David at David.lucas@3monkeyszeno.com to discuss further.

For more information, visit us at: https://3monkeyszeno.com/technology