AMEC International Communication Effectiveness Awards 2016
Entry Form Template – Measurement Agencies

Category: Best use of integrated communication measurement/research/
Most innovative use of measurement in a digital campaign
Entering Company Name: PR News Partners
Client: Aviasales
Campaign title: **PR News for Aviasales**

Objective/Brief

Aviasales is the largest air ticket metasearch engine on the Russian-language internet, aggregating flight prices from 728 airlines, 200 air ticket offices and 5 GDS booking services. The Aviasales app is installed on one in three iPhones in Russia and has been named the best app of the year by Google and Apple several times. Forbes ranked Aviasales among Russia's 20 most valuable online services companies in 2016. The Aviasales website attracts a monthly audience of 6,800,000 unique visitors, making it attractive for B2B partnerships as well as to advertisers.

Aviasales' <u>key asset</u> is active users who use the website to search for, book and buy air tickets.

Aviasales made news a part of its strategy employing real-time PR, also known as newsjacking, including provocative PR that is meant to trigger an instant reaction to news and events as they unfold. The emergence of provocative PR practices sparked a wide range of responses and a discussion in the professional community, calling for the development of new ways to evaluate the effectives of this new form of PR.

Under normal conditions, the share of users coming to Aviasales from social networks is below 1%. With the help of provocative real-time PR, the company expected to achieve the following goals:

- improve performance by increasing the share of users from social networks to 1.5% and maintain high user numbers;
- improve reputation, including recognition, media profile and brand appeal.

The use of real-time PR on a regular basis achieved the targets set by the company and increased the share of users coming to its website from social networks.

At the next stage, the company required **a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of its strategy involving its official social network pages**. Additionally, we studied the impact of the company's provocative PR strategy on its reputation as perceived by the general public.

We conducted **an integrated evaluation of the effects of the company's real-time provocative PR efforts on its reputation and performance** using a comprehensive analysis model encompassing a wide range of methods and techniques including media coverage monitoring, content analysis, psycho-semantic analysis of traditional media coverage and social network posts, polls and benchmarking.

Strategy

The **goal** of the research was to provide an integrated evaluation of the effectiveness of the company's real-time provocative PR efforts within its strategy for its social network pages and the impact on the company's reputation and performance, including user traffic from social networks and overall traffic on the company's website.

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Methods:
- quality audit of the company's Facebook page;
- analysis of the company's coverage in traditional media;
- reconstruction of the company's image as formed by users as a result of discussions of the company's actions on social media;
- benchmarking of the company's activities against industry averages;
- express reputation audit via polling.

The results of the company's experiments integrating the provocative component into traditional real-time PR were the **subject** of our research.

Execution/Implementation

We analyzed data for the period from May through December 2016 using quantitative and qualitative methods of measurement, including content, psycho-semantic and correlation analysis.

Social media OWNED	Social media EARNED	Traditional media	Poll
Using our proprietary measurement method, called Social Ear, we collected data on user activity on the company's Facebook page, analyzed it based on both quantitative and qualitative criteria, and compared the results for real-time provocative content against those of other types of content.	Simultaneously we analyzed earned social media coverage to gauge user engagement and the spread of the provocative content posted by the company on its Facebook page across social media.	We monitored and content-analyzed coverage of the company and its competitors in traditional media to calculate a monthly media quality coefficient and see how it correlates to the company's SMM strategy, and to gauge the emotional intensity of editorials and op-eds/expert pieces, and the spread of the provocative content discussed on social media across traditional media.	Our partners conducted a poll of 1,000 men and women between the ages of 20 and 45 living in cities with a population over 1 million in all federal districts of Russia who use metasearch engines to buy air tickets and have heard or/and used Aviasales[1]. Respondents were asked about air ticket search services and their reputation as well as about their attitude to the use by such businesses of provocative PR to promote their services.

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[1] Respondents for the poll were selected so that their sex, age and place of residence were representative of Russia's whole population in accordance with the data published by the Federal Statistics Service

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At the next stage, we analyzed user comments on both the company's Facebook page and other social media outlets in order to reconstruct the perception of the company formed by the provocative content in the mind of users.		
Benchmarking, comparing the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the company's activities against industry averages, was used for comprehensive analysis at all stages.		
✚ Additionally we analyzed search queries for Aviasales on Yandex and Google to gauge actual user interest to the company.		

During preparation and data collection, we rethought the measurement methods we had planned to use which turned out to be this project's key methodological insight for us as a research company. We realized that traditional methods were insufficient for the task set before us and in order to analyze provocative content and PR strategies, we needed to review the approaches to measuring the tone of coverage and its impact on the perception of the company.

The results of media analysis (traditional and social media, owned and earned) and data from the poll were analyzed against the company's performance indicators, such as the share of users from social networks and overall user traffic on the company's website. To demonstrate the impact of various forms of communication on the company's reputation, we used statistical methods of analysis (factor and correlation analysis) (see Appendix 1, AMEC Measurement Framework).

Effectiveness of Assignment

We studied the effects of real-time provocative PR within the company's digital campaign across all levels (intermediary effects, target audience effects). The use of the integrated measurement approach demonstrated that the provocative PR strategy proved effective in improving the company's performance and reputation. It also allowed us to identify the opportunities this approach offered as well as its limitations.

- ✓ Real-time provocative content that proved successful significantly increased the company's exposure to earned media. The stories spread into traditional media, generated additional coverage, stimulated discussion, and benefited the company's positioning. They attracted the attention of both media and the public, earning the company free coverage in the short and medium term:
  - o in the short term, the content worked by making the offended parties keep the stories alive, thus increasing the amount of coverage and keeping the company the focus of attention;
  - o in the medium term, after the public generally lost interest, the big stories continued to appear on various lists of top scandals and marketing tools giving the company a reputation as an expert in the field, which is also backed by the fact that users looked both at what the content was about and how it was presented, and recognized the talents of the company's PR team.

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With the travel industry characterized by seasonality, we found that real-time PR created an offsetting effect during the low periods, maintaining high levels of reach and user engagement.

✓ Provocative content significantly increased user engagement on the company's Facebook page. Making up only 3% of all content published by the company, it accounted for 30% of user engagement. On average, provocative content generates several times more responses than the traditional kind. The same is true for earned social media, with provocative content generating nearly half of the responses.

✓ We found that the success of provocative real-time PR depended on the intensity of users' emotional response, rather than whether their feelings were positive, negative or neutral:
  o positive responses demonstrated loyalty and determined people's decision to use Aviasales;
  o exaggerated negative responses assigned numerous faults to the company and eventually led to them being diluted. Negative responses mostly appeared on the days when the provocative content was published and over time the actual content of these responses became lost leaving behind only the context within which Aviasales was perceived as bold, proactive and relevant.

✓ In the biggest reputational outcome, the company earned an image as relevant, proactive and bold ("Aviasales are professional PR hooligans") which grew stronger with each new big story. By the end of the year the public got used to that image and expected the company to come up with more such stories. Comments contained such remarks as "as always" and "the company known for its tricks" and similar efforts made by other companies were seen as copying what Aviasales was doing. Based on this, it can be concluded that the company's strategy achieved recognition among both the general public and the expert community.

✓ We found statistically significant correlations (sig. 0.01) between key coverage parameters and performance, proving that, firstly, real-time content boosted earned social media engagement and, secondly, there was a trend towards an increase in user traffic to the company's website from social networks.
  The increase in the share of traffic from social networks was also influenced by the following:
  o spread of real-time provocative content into traditional media (which linked to the posts on the company's Facebook page), enabling the company to control the process offering the media exclusive ideas and solutions;
  o increased share of emotional coverage by traditional media, not necessarily positive as negative coverage also achieved the set goals;
  o scale and intensity of discussion on social media (earned coverage);
  o user engagement (likes, comments, reposts) on social media - the more users interacted with the content (discussed, shared and reacted to it), the more likely they were to visit the company's website.

✓ Correlation analysis showed that the increase in overall traffic on the company's website was closely tied to search queries. There was a strong correlation between search queries and user engagement in discussions of the provocative content on social media. Generally, likes are the main factor that drives an increase in search queries (likes demonstrate loyalty and recognition, meaning that if users approve of content they tend to look for a company online more (see Appendix).

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- ✓ In the poll, which compared Aviasales and its main competitors, 78% of respondents named Aviasales the best company in the industry, and it also had the highest reputation index of 61%. The respondents who read Aviasales' provocative posts ranked the company higher on the reputation index than those who didn't read the posts. Moreover, the poll showed that not only had the provocations not affected the company's reputation but they could also attract new clients as the respondents who had never used Aviasales but were aware of its scandalous policies thought better about the company's reputation (see appendix).
- ✓ The poll confirmed the conclusions from the media coverage analysis in that the provocative content boosted traffic on the company's website, shaped constructive opinions/attitudes about the company, and had potential to attract new visitors/clients (analysis of user comments showed that people were willing to use Aviasales despite the controversy over its choice of provocative stories and formats).
- ✓ Based on the analysis of the provocative content, we found that while the topics varied greatly from politics to celebrities, users liked the bold approach and tools used which were relevant to the values of both the company and its audiences. The increase in user engagement achieved the main goals set by the company: higher reach, both in traditional media and on social media, and higher website traffic, while the tone of the discussion ceased to be the key indicator of audiences' sentiment.

Provocative real-time PR is a positioning strategy intended to attract the public's attention by exploiting sensitive topics. Our findings break the stereotype about provocative PR being a potential reputational risk. However, it should be noted that this tool has quite limited application.

We found that provocative PR helped reinforce the company's key messages through the following:

- relevance to the values of both the company and its target audience;
- original presentation and formats;
- urgency and relevance of the provocative content.

The case of Aviasales demonstrates that provocative PR can be successfully integrated into a communication strategy, and can yield both reputational dividends and achieve performance targets.

Janis Dzenis, PR Director, Aviasales:

"PR News research is a valuable asset for the marketing team. Real-time PR as a communication study is quite new. So guidelines, best practices, do's and dont's are work in progress. The backbone for the vast majority of routes is a god feeling. Hence, clear and rational conclusions could be a workflow for further campaigns.
I'd like to emphasize, this research was Russian first ever attempt to the systematic and academical social media impact analysis. Here I'm not talking about such obvious things like 'reach', 'number of likes', etc. This research goes beyond and forms the PR measurement system landscape as a role model for successful communications".