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Chloe Thomas
Hello and welcome. If you're looking to improve the performance of return on investment of your marketing, then you are in the right place. I'm Chloe Thomas, the host of this marketing focused podcast, and it's very, very cool to have you tuning in. In today's episode, I'm talking to Mark Hook about PR because this month is all about content marketing.

Chloe Thomas
And in today's episode, we're going to be talking about what the point of PR is, because I know a lot of you are asking that question and we're going to be talking about how to go about doing PR successfully. What's important, how you can measure it, how you can optimize it. Yes, you could optimize it. Why relationship building with your journalists is just as important as understanding and working with your SEO team is just as important as crafting the right story and bringing that emotional content.

Chloe Thomas
Mark is a master of his craft and he's also really good at sharing it.

Chloe Thomas
So sharing that knowledge, that is. So I think you're going to really like this one. We're going to meet today's guest in a moment. But before we do, please do check out the sponsors. This podcast is brought to you by Klaviyo, the ultimate eCommerce marketing platform for email and SMS messaging. Whether you're launching your e-commerce business or taking your brand to the next level, Klaviyo gives you the tools to get growing faster. That's why it's trusted by over 38000 eCommerce brands.

Chloe Thomas
Build your contact lists and emails that pop and create marketing moments that build valuable customer relationships over any distance. Get started for free today!! Visit Klaviyo.com/masterplan to create your free account. That's KLAVIYO.com/masterplan. Today, I'm chatting with content marketing expert Mark Hook. Mark is the global director of PR and communications at digital operations solution provider Brightpearl. He's been in power for over 10 years working for content sites, hospitals at a PR agency and as global PR leader.
Chloe Thomas: eCommerce retailer Love Honey. It's fair to say that Mark knows PR inside out. Hello, Mark.

Mark Hook: Hello. What an intro?

Chloe Thomas: Well, you did it all say that I'm only writing what's true, but how did you get into PR? Because you've done it in so many different ways. How did you end up in the world of PR?

Mark Hook: Yeah, it's a bit of a story actually. So we just sort of briefly spoke off about the fact that I worked for a publishing company and I had always had an interest in PR. And I wrote a press release actually to launch one of those websites.

And it was one of the it was I've got some very interesting feedback on a release that was printed off with Post-it notes and red lines all over it.

Chloe Thomas: You know, it's bad when someone's added Post-it notes and not just read Red Pen.

Mark Hook: Yeah, that's not enough. Not enough space on the actual on the actual dock to out the comment. So they bring out the Post-it notes anyway. So it was it was quite funny. So I sort of took it out that night to show a friend. It was a Friday night, we were out on the town and then we met with another group of people and the wife of a chap there was actually PR director of an agency. So I had got chatting and then oddly enough, they had the press release.

So I showed it to her and she liked it, which was obviously a huge boost of confidence for me. And I'm watching now. She had an opening for a train trying to park. They invited me in and that was my sort of foot in the door. But previously to that, Yeah, it was very completely random. But previous to that, I had done quite a lot of sort of volunteering for PR agencies and work experience.

So I had built up the experience. I was kind of just looking for an opening. And there's no real clear track to work in the agency, no obvious route of travel, so to speak. So that's how I got in. In a Pub... And it does require quite a lot of skills, doesn't it?
PR which you don't necessarily pick up unless you're actually doing PR. You know, you go to the copywriting, you've got to get the marketing angle, make something that isn't at all marketing copy, actually sell something. And it's a really complex set of soft skills.

Mark Hook
It is, yeah. I always say that it's simple if you sort of know what you're doing, if that makes sense.

So you kind of it should be simple PR if you have a good if you have a good nose for a story and that is fundamentally what you need. You understand what makes a story and you understand that you are the kind of the relationship between journalists and the clients. If you understand that dynamic, as well as being a good writer and you can deliver interesting and engaging content, then those are the skills you need to set your set yourself up for the success.

So, yeah, simple. But, it's not really and as you say, that the soft skills, the ability to sell a story, that's obviously hugely important as well.

And you mentioned that that PR is about that relationship between the business and the journalist. Was the word used in this weird the wonderful world we now live in, the edges of PR have kind of merged into SEO. They've merged into Influencer activity to social media, to content. So how do you how do you define PR? Because it's still I see what the reason I want to ask you is partly because I see a lot of businesses kind of going, oh, we do Influencer.

So we didn't do PR or oh, we do SEO. So we don't need to do PR or or vice versa. So where how do you define PR as does the edges that that mean this is the bit that really is PR that requires that skill set when it comes to PR.

To not recognise how important it is within that kind of overarching market mix is a bit of a service. PR certainly overlaps with SEO, overlaps of content and influencers as well. When it comes to PR and SEO, I, I like to look as they both dovetail with each other on both disciplines. They do work closely with one another, but they also strengthen one another as well. So when you look at when you look at what SEO does, it is essentially it's a link building tactic, right.

So you're looking to improve the visibility of the page and search engine results. You're looking to increase the traffic to a client's website. That's well and good. But how do you do that externally? The end goal outside of PR and SEO is the same. You need you need to have incredibly creative content. You need to give something of value that means that people want to link back to. And that's where it comes back to PR.

No one's just going to randomly link to your website or cover your business unless you have a good story to tell on a good story to sell as well. And I think that's where people maybe don't understand the value of PR. It's helping to build that that relationship, essentially.
Chloe Thomas
As we mentioned about you mentioned, about being the link between the brand and the journalist.

And I think that's a part of it that gets overlooked a little. I think people think, oh, we write a press release, good or bad, covered in Post-it notes or not. And we email that to some journalists and pray. Whereas actually it's not just about building a list of people to send it to. It's about building a relationship with those people. You're sending the press release or whatever it might be, too.

Mark Hook
Absolutely. I think there's you've touched upon something now, which, first of all, is, I think, undervalued in the world of PR and its media relations, building that relationship with journalists.

I think that's the one piece of advice I now give to all kind of newbie PRs is I always ask them, do you last time you actually spoke to a journalist and a lot of them haven't. They just speak via email or increasingly like WhatsApp and text message. But an actual conversation with a journalist is again, like super valuable. And it's something that isn't, I think, being utilized to its broadest purpose. Because once you create an established relationship with a journalist, then that goes both ways.

Right. You can start to discuss the story angles and you can start to look at what they're working on, how that fits in, how you and they're much more willing to cover your business in a more positive sense. If they like you and they understand what your business does and you produce content that is of value to them, you're not just trying to plug your business so that building those relationships, are really useful. But I think you still get maybe too many lazy PRs that just want to fire over a story and hope for the best.

That the second part of that is understanding again, what makes news and what adds value coming all the way back to Influencer and SEO and all that good stuff. PR is a content driven exercise. It should be adding value and it should be creating stories. When I talk about what I talk about storytelling, what I mean and this relates to eCommerce business as it relates to anyone you work with, it could be a hospital. It can be a tech brand.

But I always say you have to tell a story that that's important. Otherwise you might as well be advertising. Might as well just put a billboard up because, you know, you're not giving anything of value. What PR comes back to is offering engaging content that offers some sort of value. And that can be and it doesn't just need to be a press release. That could be a podcast. That could be Influencer relationship, a review unboxing. You need to offer something over to journalists or to the external audience that is of value.

Just an example of that is the love, honey. They most recently did a virtual love honey exercise, a digital event where they offered the ability for people to tune in and listen to broad advice from a range of sexual experts, like wellness experts offering lots of free advice and content. And that was great. Obviously, they wanted to get coverage from that event and they invited me to come along and cover it. But first of all, myself would add value to their audience.
Right. And they're offering value to the journalist, whether that's educational and informational or pure entertainment. And that's that's the business. And I think with. When it comes to PR, you can write. You can write press releases that say, hey, we want a deal also. But what it misses is, I would say, the three key elements of any story or any PR campaign. And that's bad news, topicality and human interest. You need to have those three elements.

That's what creates a story. So when I came back to Brightpearl one of the first things I wanted to do was talk about our transformation piece. So, Brightpearl have had their, own turnaround story.

And internally it was kind of like, well, why don't we talk about the positives that we're generating record revenues and you know, we've increased bookings by 80 percent since the spring and that's great.

But people don't care. People don't care about the sunrise until they see the sunset. So you need to take people on a journey and you need to give them more than just the victory lap. You need to give them the struggle. And that that always works well because it becomes relatable. So for Brightpearl, we talked about the fact that we had stagnant growth four years ago, that we didn't really understand how our product fitted with the audience we were trying to sell to.

These are it is quite awkward conversations to actually talk about publicly. But what that does is it builds trust, relatability and credibility. Because if you're willing to talk about that, people do start to believe in you as a brand. You're not just saying you're not just writing fluff pieces. And journalists also connect with you because they understand that you're willing to tell a story that is more than just your victory speech.

And that their readers are more interested in reading it.

Because let's face it, we all like a bit of schadenfreude, but we also all like to know how someone recovered from their problems, because the chances are we're probably going through some of our own.

So there's kind of more lessons to be learned from a recovery story than there is from a continuous growth story.

Exactly. You've hit the nail on the head that you learn more from defeat than you do in victory. Right. And those are the lessons that are really important. And we shouldn't brush over those. And that's essentially what makes people work is that it is nailing down the bad news to topicality the human interest. And you look around the world today, what makes news, what drives interest, what drives unfortunately, traffic and clicks and everything else is, is the negativity.

It now there's nuggets of positivity in that. But first and foremost, it is negative if we're attracted to to bad news elements who are attracted to human interest and that you can make that work for you in your favor. But but that's why I think such a useful discipline for a business to have, because it does
help you to establish yourself differently so it can work so well. Yes, it's about creating brand awareness. It can help to drive referral traffic, but much more than some of those other disciplines we talked about.

[00:15:14.360] It can help you shape your positioning and your reputation and use that to differentiate yourself against your competitors as well. And that's hugely, hugely valuable. I would say, you know, if you're if you're the business, it's telling stories and you're sharing content and that content can be educational. It can be it can be entertaining. You build connections with your audience. And that's super valuable, like super valuable because that's what keeps people coming back to buy.

[00:15:45.800] Right. Not just the fact that they can trust you, but that they like you. And that's what PR is. It is for building that emotional connection.

[00:15:53.870] Chloe Thomas

So during twenty twenty, we've seen more businesses than we normally would, connecting with the emotional side and admitting what's going on behind the scenes, either because they're enlightened enough to realize it would be a good idea or because the shit hit the proverbial fan, they had no choice. But do you think that means we're heading towards, especially when it comes to retailers who are loathe to reveal what happens behind the scenes?

[00:16:22.010] Traditionally one of the worst sorry guys out there, but you are one of the worst businesses for revealing what's going on. Do you think it is going to lead to a more to more success in the PR space, I suppose, for businesses? Because they're getting into that habit of flexing those muscles, of admitting to what's going on and revealing the humanity within the business?

[00:16:44.480] Mark Hook

Yeah, I think it could do. It will be it'll be very interesting to see if it happened initially when a lot of eCommerce retailers couldn't sell as they went very heavy on brand. And starting to talk about the brand, starting to share content, real salt content marketing focus, which is great.

[00:17:06.720] It'll be interesting to see if that lasts, I think. What we need to do is really summarize the benefit of opening up for companies and it's not necessarily on the conversion side, but it what but it's on the repeat business. The cost of acquisition is so high for eCommerce retailers that they need to build return buys. And the best the best way to do that is obviously provide a fantastic experience. But it's also to get people to buy into your culture and to buy into a brand.

[00:17:44.710] And you can't do that if you don't share who you are and the story behind your brand. If you're very close, then it's very hard to be loved. Right. And businesses that are more willing to open and acknowledge their faults as well as their victories, those are probably the ones that will connect better with their audiences and have longer term success.
Chloe Thomas

And it's interesting is that because they can obviously do that by blogging on the website, then they can do it by sending better email marketing communications. But if they really want to maximize it, they want to make sure that when their customers are opening the relevant press, that they're also seeing that same openness being reiterated there. Because if you hit people in multiple times, in multiple places, you have that bigger impact. I guess that's where the power of PR really starts to impact.

Mark Hook

Yeah, and that's where it dovetails with SEO. I always say that you can't sell unless people know who you are. Right?

And what really builds credibility, what really, really does build credibility is being seen in multiple locations. So if you can start getting editorial placed and we all search online, right. If you search for a pair of shoes, if you start to see I don't know, if you see parker shoes mentioned in various different places and articles without even reading those articles, you start to build a level of trust in that brand. So much the same way with with online reviews, you will properly trust the brand with 7000 reviews.

Even if like eight of those are negative, then you will with someone with just two reviews and you're probably more likely to buy from the company of 7000 reviews. Why? Well, more people have bought from them. And that works much the same way nowadays with PR. It's about building multiple opportunities to be seen. And if you look at it very tactically, that that is what the job of PR is in the digital age. It's building opportunities, building brand awareness is getting companies linked higher up their search engines in more multiple places.

So that builds that trust that credibility and ultimately persuades people to buy it.

Chloe Thomas

Which is exactly why people put all the logos of the places where they've been featured on their website, because it hasn't it has another impact there. But Mark, that's been a really interesting stroll through the world of PR. I'm sure we've convinced a few people to add it into the mix and hopefully we convinced convince more people to be to be open. But we're now going to pause for a reminder of our sponsors and then we're going to talk about the wider world of content marketing.

It's safe to say that most of us have been doing more shopping online lately, and if you're an eCommerce brand, that means you might be seeing more first time customers. But once they made that first purchase, how do you keep them coming back? Well, that's what Klaviyo is for. Klaviyo is the ultimate email and SMS marketing platform for eCommerce brands. It gives you the tools to build your contact lists, some memorable emails, or to make key messages a more way, way more.
Whether you're launching a new business or taking your brand to the next level, Klaviyo can help you get growing faster. And it's free to get started. Visit Klaviyo.com/masterplan to create your free account? That's KLAVIYO.com/masterplan.

OK, Mark, so far we've gone deep into PR. Now you get to wow us with your insider knowledge about the whole world of content marketing. So for the following questions, your answer can be anything to do with content marketing, which, of course, does include PR.

So, Mark, you ready for the insider tips?

Mark Hook

I am.

Chloe Thomas

OK, let's start with content marketing newbie advice. If we've inspired someone to take that first step with content, what do they need to know to give themselves the best chance of success?

Mark Hook

I think it when it comes to PR, it really is about knowing your audience.

So as soon as I whenever I take on a role within the PR space, it's looking at how much data have we got about our customers, our audience, because that's how you basically build the cadence of your storytelling and you just get so much insights because the data about your customers that that gives you the ability to look at trends, that gives you the ability to look at opportunity, not just in PR, but in SEO and in other sides of the coin, Influencer marketing.

But you need to you need to really understand what your customers are looking for and what the trends are from their perspective. So I look at data. I typically will speak to customers from a pure Brightpearl perspective. I spoke to 10 12 customers off the bat to really find out why they were using the platform. But actually, what's going on in that space? I'm from that you can get a picture of what is going to resonate with a wider audience.

So that would be my it's a very obvious thing, but will not be my first go to is just understand who you're speaking to in your audience. And I'm not sure enough people do that.

Chloe Thomas

Are they certain? Certainly not enough. Pick up the phone and speak to them, she says, thinking how little she speaks to her actual listeners. But I speak to anyway, anyway, enough of my problems.
And I think once you've started, of course, you've got to Keep Optimising. So what is your favorite way to improve content marketing performance?

Mark Hook
I'm going to go back to PR again and talk about the kind of PRs relationship with measurement.

I think this is it's related. It's related to everything. Right?

But I really want to know the measurement side of things, because we have always had a, like I said, a bit of a relationship with monitoring the performance of piano, not talking like PR value avy. How much how much would you have spent on an advertisement? I'm talking about the actual value of PR and there are tools out there. Now that can really help you understand how you're tracking your messages, what landing, where it's landing, is it landing on the type of sites with high domain authority that that's actually going to translate into search engine and direct search benefits?

You know, are you connecting? Is your stories connecting? Is your share voice increasing over time that that sort of stuff? You know, getting a real quantitative and qualitative idea of the success of your PR performance over time? Like I said, there's tools out there that can do that, but it can help you now really paint a picture of success for PR, which I, I would say probably wasn't that maybe five years ago. But now it really does help.

And you can you can people that are using the right tools can stand proudly next to other sort of disciplines and say, well, actually we can see the benefit of on Search, we can see the benefit in terms of referral traffic. We know that our share of voice over time is ticking upwards. We're 20 percent at Brightpearl. We've seen our share voice against our competitors. And so when I say share voice, I mean share of kind of the coverage that you're earning in media compared to your competitors, you can track that.

So you can really see how your brand awareness is increasing over time. And that's like hugely valuable.

So I would say get that sorted and don't be afraid to monitor because it can help you plan your activity, make adjustments and hone your strategies.

Chloe Thomas
Is a simple stuff, as is if you've seen if you see that one particular outlet is coming up again and again and again and you've never actually spoken to that particular outlet, there's a really good hint.
Go and have a chat with them, find out why they like you. And because clearly they’re up for doing more, aren't they?

Mark Hook

Exactly. We saw we had a piece of coverage it landed on and it was it was like a tech blog. It wasn’t one of our it was like an outlier kind of target for us, but it drove huge amounts of social shares and also traffic back to Brightpearl. And it was kind of a. It was a. Five great inventory management solutions or something like that, like a list of all types, but it had a huge impact. Now, we would never have known that.

We would have just been like, oh, yeah, we were on this blog badguy. We saw the value of it. And we're like, well, let's make them a target because you can see the impact. And also then you, like Brenin will continue to work and hone the relationships we have.

Because what we have found and this is an interesting aside, is that you can start to narrow your field of vision.

And we want to be on tech, tech websites who want to be on in the industry retail trades like everyone is just just read stock right now are a typical audience state.

They probably don't actually read a lot of these titles or they certainly don't just read those titles. So we didn't want to limit ourselves. And what we found is like regional coverage was getting shared. We were getting tons of traffic from for regionals. They with love, honey, actually, and with Brightpearl. So we're like, let's double down on those areas. Let's start sharing case studies of companies we work with retailers that often don't know how to field and start building more profile from that.

So we started to implement new tactics in the purchase because we were seeing the impact of of PR in different media outlets and we maybe would have initially expected. So measurement hugely valuable.

And that brings us on nicely to the next of the insider tips, which is that it's impossible to improve our marketing unless we’re monitoring the performance. But the list, the stuff we can monitor can be overwhelming. So what for you is the number one content marketing or PR KPI? What's the number you look at?
Oh, gosh. So I think it does depend on what I guess you are reporting into your board, what their value is. Right. Unfortunately, they're going to do OK. But I think that there is a you can you can create loads of different measurements and metrics, but I have done that. And it's not a Brightpearl, but different companies. It's been. Well, yeah, but what does that mean when it comes to Aviva?

[00:28:31.740] So that does you have to kind of, first of all, create the metrics and the measurements that the are seen and considered to be valuable, whatever those are, and then introduce others over time. So for me I think well what I see as being the most valuable is our kind of average domain authority. So where if we're placing highly on well ranked websites, we know that's going to have a tangible effect on our search rankings over time.

[00:29:05.970] So that's a huge for us. You know, that's a real measure of success. And it's show of voice, you know, are we are we crushing it when it comes to earning more coverage compared to our competitors? Because a very high level, if you're in more places, you're more likely to be seen as a competitor.

[00:29:25.350] And if you were to buy and made, that is an advantage and a massive competitive advantage. So if you see Brightpearl over someone else and you've seen them five places and you have much more opportunity to see Brightpearl first and foremost. And then when you're looking at the fact that you've seen Brightpearl in various different places, you go, well, you just again, it comes back to that review example. You start you start to lean towards.

[00:29:50.370] And just because the trust is that right or familiarities. 

Chloe Thomas

If you see whether you're looking at, you know, you're seeing articles about SaaS companies or retailers, if you see it in multiple places, then that just it's that drip, drip, drip effect that gets the consumer to move. Finally, it is crystal ball time. What's coming up in the next six to 12 months that we should be getting ready for in content marketing?

[00:30:13.140] Mark Hook

I so I think the next year will be, will be and will be very, very digitally focused, obviously, because of the the the pandemic era is going to be behere for a while.

[00:30:24.360] But I think we're all moving to a digital world primarily anyway. When it comes to content marketing, I think from a PR and SEO perspective, and content perspective will be working much more closely together. I think if you're if you are PR and you're not designing campaign strategies and purchase in line with SEO and an almost an PR for SEO approach, now, then you are massively missing a trick because it should all be aligned. And increasingly I look at PR as being a very much a digital activity and sitting in that park alongside affiliate marketing, social Influencers as an SEO and we should be.
Happy to be sat there, so I think a lot of where PR will be going will be looking to support those other disciplines and functions and and helping eCommerce businesses but other businesses outside of that sector in terms of just enhancing the digital strategies.

Chloe Thomas

 Nice.

Mark, we have learned a lot from you today. You mentioned Brightpearl a couple of times, and we should really let us know where they can find Brightpearl if they're interested in taking a look at all the coverage you're getting. So could you let the listeners know where they can find you and Brightpearl on the Web and social media, please?

Mark Hook

Of course.

Yet we are Brightpearl.com. If you just stick us into Google, you'll see plenty of articles come up about us. And also on Social media, we are Brightpearl HQ.

Chloe Thomas

Excellent. Well, Mark, thank you so much for being on the podcast. It's been it's been a revelation to me, actually, just how close PR and SEO are and in a friendly way as well. And the level of tracking that it's now possible to do. That's really fascinating. So thanks very much for coming on.

Mark Hook

That's OK. No worries.

So a really interesting look into PR there with Mark, who is clearly very good at PR and is good at explaining it too. I loved that the three key elements to get into those press releases, bad news, topicality and human interest. I love that phrase he used as the justification for as in people don't care about the sunrise until they've seen the sunset. So getting those being honest and talking about, you know, how things have gone from bad to worse or in the case of products, talking about the problem that your product is there to solve.
There are so many ways of doing it, but you really do have to get your kind of creative brain onto to do so.

If you are wondering how to work out who you should be building those relationships with in terms of where you want to get people talking about your your past stories, then have a listen to the last episode we put live, which was Episode 24, where I'm chatting with Rand Fishkin from SparkToro all about how to go, about finding the places you should be trying to put content. And he's going to talk about the SparkToro tool, which is very cool tool, which you can you can use for free, as well as to a certain level you can use for free.

So that's enough to get get you going. And the other thing I thought was quite interesting was how Mark was so keyed into the world of SEO and how, you know, when he said about his KPI average domain authority of the places they're getting mentioned is a key KPI for them on a key PR KPI are we getting mentioned on high quality sites based on domain authority? Really interesting way of looking at things. Now you can get links to everything.

We discussed the full transcript of the episode, important notes and much more at KeepOptimising.com with an E or does it? Well, thank you for tuning in to this episode of the Keep Optimising podcast. This month is Content Marketing Month and we are skipping the webinar, which gives you time to listen back to your favorite episodes or to scroll through the back catalogue and listen to any Keep Optimising episodes that you’ve missed. Next time we're flipping back into the world of own site content marketing.

So make sure you come back to join us for that. And please do tell your fellow marketers about the show, because I want to help as many marketers as possible to improve the performance of their marketing. So if you know other people who are planning great things with content in twenty, twenty one with their onsite content strategy or their off site content strategy, then make sure you tell them about these episodes, because I know they’re really going to help them when you have a great week and make sure you listen to the next episode so I can help you to Keep Optimising your marketing.

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