

A PRESS RELEASE ISN'T A PRODUCT LAUNCH: A GUIDE FOR B2B COMMUNICATORS



For a B2B tech communicator, the simple phrase “upcoming product launch” can kick start an emotional rollercoaster of excitement and anxiety. Tech launches are usually unpredictable – with moving deadlines, evolving product features and functionality and a last minute race to finish development and get to market. It’s generally far from the perfect equation for strong public relations results.

Regardless of what it took to get a product developed and ready for release and whether or not its actually newsworthy – tech communicators are held responsible for generating the kind of excitement and buzz that will directly impact both sales and brand visibility. And they are often armed with only a press release and a prayer. Adding to the challenge are the major changes that tech publications have faced over the past few years – including a shift in focus to breaking news vs. company profiles, a reduction in reporters that are dedicated to product reviews and major competition for ink from Silicon Valley darlings and the daily announcements of Fortune 500 heavyweights ([Tesla](#), [Facebook](#) and [Apple](#), anyone?).

So what’s a tech PR pro to do? [Affect](#) has got you covered. We talked to reporters at major tech pubs, investigated the needs of the sales team at launch time, took a deep dive into the metrics for success and created the ultimate guide to launching your B2B tech product.

DEFINING SUCCESS

There’s no way to have a strong product launch without first defining what success looks like – and coming to an agreement on metrics and measurement. Many PR professionals assume that bulk coverage and as many media mentions as possible equals success – but that’s not necessarily true. One of the biggest mistakes in evaluating product launch outcomes is relying on quantity of coverage alone. This metric is usually used because goals weren’t set at the outset.



During the planning phase of a product launch it’s critical to work with all stakeholders, including sales, product management and the c-suite to set clear expectations. PR needs to be involved from the ground up. The framework for this conversation should include:

- ▶ Evaluation of the product, new features and newsworthiness
- ▶ Identification of an industry trend or challenge that the new product will solve
- ▶ Target audiences, verticals and influencers – including press and industry analysts
- ▶ Identification of key media targets (e.g. What would a dream placement look like? Which publication will it be in? How will your product be positioned?)
- ▶ Evaluation of sales team needs (e.g. What kind of placement would they like to send to prospects? Which verticals/publications will have the most impact?)



- ▶ Collaboration on necessary marketing assets (e.g. Product demos, infographics, collateral, digital properties, FAQ etc.)
- ▶ Media audit of competitor launches to get an idea of positioning, results and media interest

Aligning on success factors prior to launch allows public relations pros to set expectations that everyone can agree on – making it easier to define, execute and evaluate launch activities.

Product launch metrics should be qualitative and quantitative and may include:

- ▶ Total quantity of coverage (e.g. Number of total articles were secured)
- ▶ Quality of coverage (e.g. Feature story vs. small mention or relevant press release pick-up)
- ▶ Share of voice against competitor launches/products
- ▶ Number of placements in high-value publications (e.g. Business publications vs. trade)
- ▶ Message placement and desired positioning
- ▶ Type of coverage (Print vs. online vs. broadcast)
- ▶ Website traffic generated from media placements
- ▶ Social media shares and followers gained
- ▶ Leads/conversions/sales inquiries generated from media placements

Finally, it's critical to define the time period for measurement – in B2B it's rare that you're able to truly evaluate launch success within the first two weeks. Results should be reviewed at 30, 60 and 90 days post launch and should be tied to all marketing and sales efforts.

THE PR PREDICAMENT

When it comes to tech launch coverage – there are several publications that are always mentioned as dream-come-true placements. To get a closer look at what it takes to get top tier coverage, we interviewed four leading reporters to get their insights on best practices for pitching products.



Our panel of reporters included:

- ▶ [Nicholas Deleon, formerly Vice Media's Motherboard](#)
- ▶ [Anthony Ha, TechCrunch](#)
- ▶ [Edmund Lee, Recode](#)
- ▶ [Brian Sommer, ZDNet](#)

All of the reporters that we spoke with were quick to point out that PR 101 applies to launches – and agreed that the basics are often overlooked. Top tips for getting a pitch read include:

- ▶ Understanding individual reporter's beat or specific area of interest and sending highly customized pitches
- ▶ Pitching reporters that specifically cover product vs. those that focus on industry trends or tech titans
- ▶ Clearly explaining the product and its value – and having an ability to answer specific questions about features/functionality
- ▶ Willingness to answer questions around revenue, pricing and availability (Edmund Lee noted, "If you're unwilling to talk about that, don't call me.")
- ▶ Ensuring that the product pitch clearly explains why it is interesting to readers
- ▶ Including proof points and customer references



Simply put, if you want to secure coverage for a product launch – your pitch needs to be thoughtful, customized and clear. Additional best practices shared by Affect's reporter panel include:

- 1. Embargoes and Exclusives Can Give You an Edge** – All reporters agreed that embargoes are useful – but exclusives still reign supreme. As a general rule, an exclusive needs about 7 days. According to Anthony Ha, *"3-7 days is ideal for advance notice – longer if you're hoping for something more in-depth."*
- 2. Pitch Selectively, Don't Blast** – while an offer to review a product might work for ZDNet and TechCrunch, it won't fly with Recode – so it's critical to position your pitch accordingly. According to Edmund Lee, *"While I'm happy to do interviews with executives, we don't do product reviews. We want to see how products work so that we can cover them as part of a larger story."*
- 3. Assets Are Important** – Brian Sommer commented, *"The best-read stories are ones that have relevant graphics. I don't care if it's a screenshot or slide out of a launch deck. It's frustrating to me when companies do a WebEx where every slide is confidential – it's a waste of time if I can't take screen grabs."*
- 4. Tie It to a Trend** – All reporters asked that product pitches tie back to larger reader interest and major news trends. Lee said, *"Recode is interested in the business of tech and media and big companies like Google, Facebook and Amazon. We're also interested in breaking news, executive changes and M&A activities."*
- 5. Timing is Everything** – The timing of media outreach around a product launch is critical – and breaking news may inform how you write and execute your pitch. For example, while Motherboard doesn't generally cover straight product news, there are key trends and breaking news that they follow – where product information may help to build a story. Nicholas Deleon said, *"I'm interested in things like net neutrality, online privacy and stories/product having to do with those issues."*

Affect recommends that every product launch include two types of media pitches:

- ▶ **Product Pitch** – that includes:
 - Product overview
 - Industry challenge that the product addresses
 - Key features and functionality
 - Pricing and availability
 - Executive quote on the industry and market served (avoid product jargon here!)
 - Link to press release
- ▶ **Trend Pitch** – that includes:
 - Key industry trend and supporting data or research
 - Overview of client expertise on the trend
 - Executive quote on the trend
 - Product overview as a proof point your company's industry expertise

Having two pitches ensures that you're able to reach out to a reporter – regardless of whether they directly cover product. Using a product as a proof point in a trend/thought leadership pitch can also bolster top tier media coverage, as reporters are more interested in industry trends than specific solutions.



PRODUCT LAUNCH TOOLBOX

A product launch is much more than a press release – and the most successful launches use marketing assets to their advantage – showing off the solution and its value to tell a story and showcase how it fits into industry trends and challenges. In short, assets can do everything from prove that your product works to break down key differentiators and market position.



In addition to a press release, launch assets can include:

- 1. Product Demo** – This can be as simple as a powerpoint with detailed screenshots or as complicated as an interactive digital experience – but it is critical to have something to show the media.
- 2. Proof Points** – Create a simple one sheet that hits the following points:
 - o What does your product do?
 - o Why is it different than competitors in the market?
 - o How does it solve a real, important challenge faced by your target audience?
 - o When is it available and how much does it cost?
- 3. Supporting Data** – Data is a strong way to showcase why your solution is needed and how it fits into a trend. This can be your data or reputable third-party data that backs your claims.
- 4. Battlecard** – Line your product up against the competition to showcase how it's truly different.
- 5. Interactive Element** – Consider using an infographic or interactive landing site to showcase how your product works and its impact on the market.
- 6. Case Study/Whitepaper** – A strong case study or whitepaper tells a better story than a simple press release and can show off your product in action. If you've completed a beta launch and have a customer to tout – a short case study can go a long way. It is critical however, for your customer to be named, blind case studies don't generate press interest.
- 7. Customer Testimonial** – If you're unable to complete a case study, a short customer quote or customer participation in a press release can go a long way. Remember, the press wants to see how your product works in the real world.
- 8. Analyst Quote** – Consider engaging an industry analyst to provide a quote for a press release or participate in media opportunities. While the big guys (e.g. Gartner and Forrester) might require you to pay – some of the smaller analyst firms are happy to provide insights on the industry in return for the PR you'll do in their name.
- 9. Blog and Social Media Posts** – A product launch may require more than a single blog and social media post. Prepping a series of social media content focusing on several different topics (e.g. the product itself, an industry outlook, a Q&A with the product developer or customer etc.) can help bolster PR efforts and drive traffic to your website.



ALIGN WITH THE SALES TEAM

Communicating and proving the value of launch efforts to the c-suite is critical – and the executives are looking at the bottom line. With that in mind, PR pros must engage the sales team in their efforts. It is critical to keep sales executives apprised of PR activities – soliciting their feedback on media targets and published articles, providing insight into activities and giving instruction on how to position media coverage to sales prospects. Partnering with and empowering the sales team to take advantage of media results is a strong way to showcase the importance of PR efforts.

Remember, at the end of the day product launches are about awareness and sales outcomes – B2B tech communicators need to be honest about expectations, align on goals and creatively use assets to drive customer interest and achieve success.



LAUNCH WITH AFFECT

Getting ready to launch a tech product?

Let us help – contact us to work with Affect on your next launch!

CONTACT:

212-398-9680

info@affect.com

www.affect.com



AFFECT NY

989 6TH AVE., 6TH FLOOR

NEW YORK, NY, 10018

TEL 212.398.9680

FAX 212.504.8211



AFFECT BOSTON

711 ATLANTIC AVE., LOWER LEVEL

BOSTON, MA 02111

TEL 617.284.6910