

Lessons in Surviving the Covid News Agenda and What it Means for the Future of Digital PR

Shannon McGuirk
Client Services & Delivery Director, Aira





19th March 2020, California.



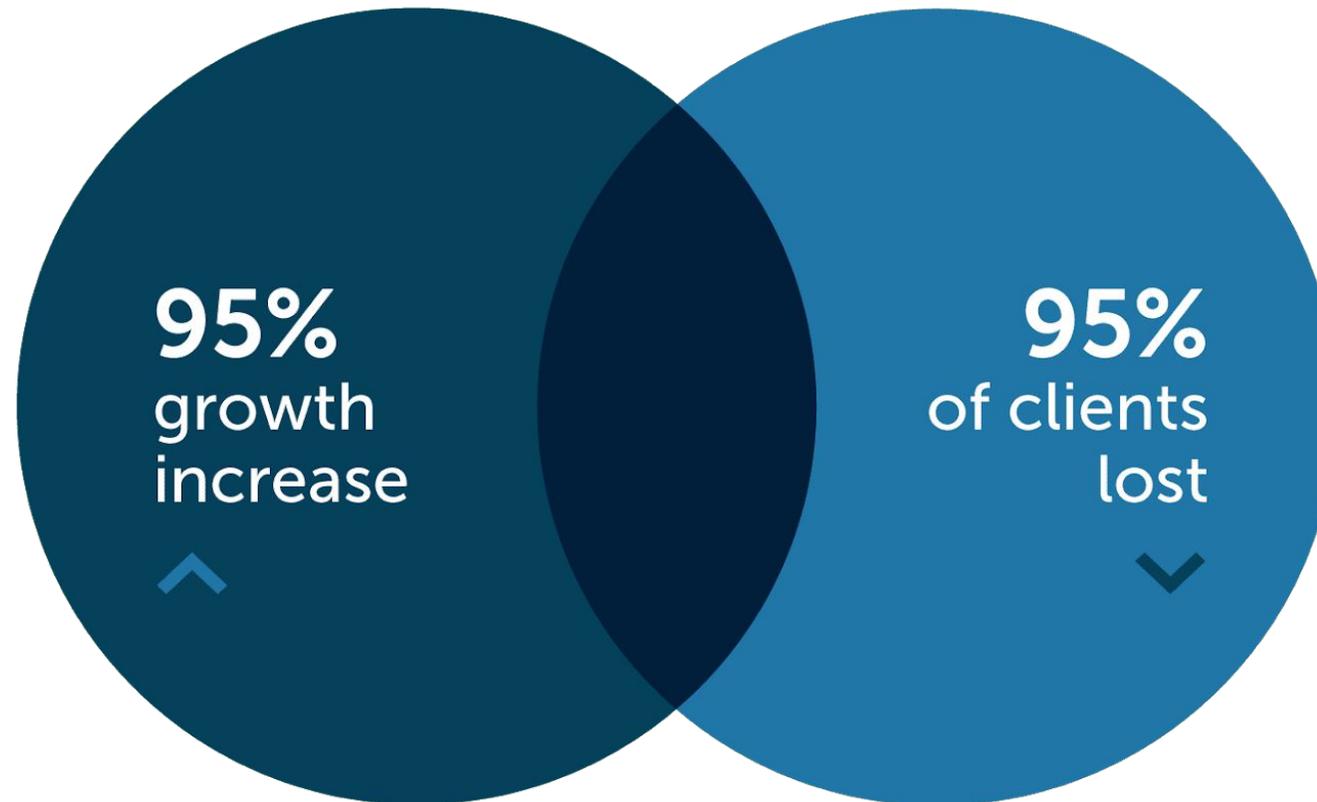
23rd March 2020, England.

Our lives as we knew them **changed.**

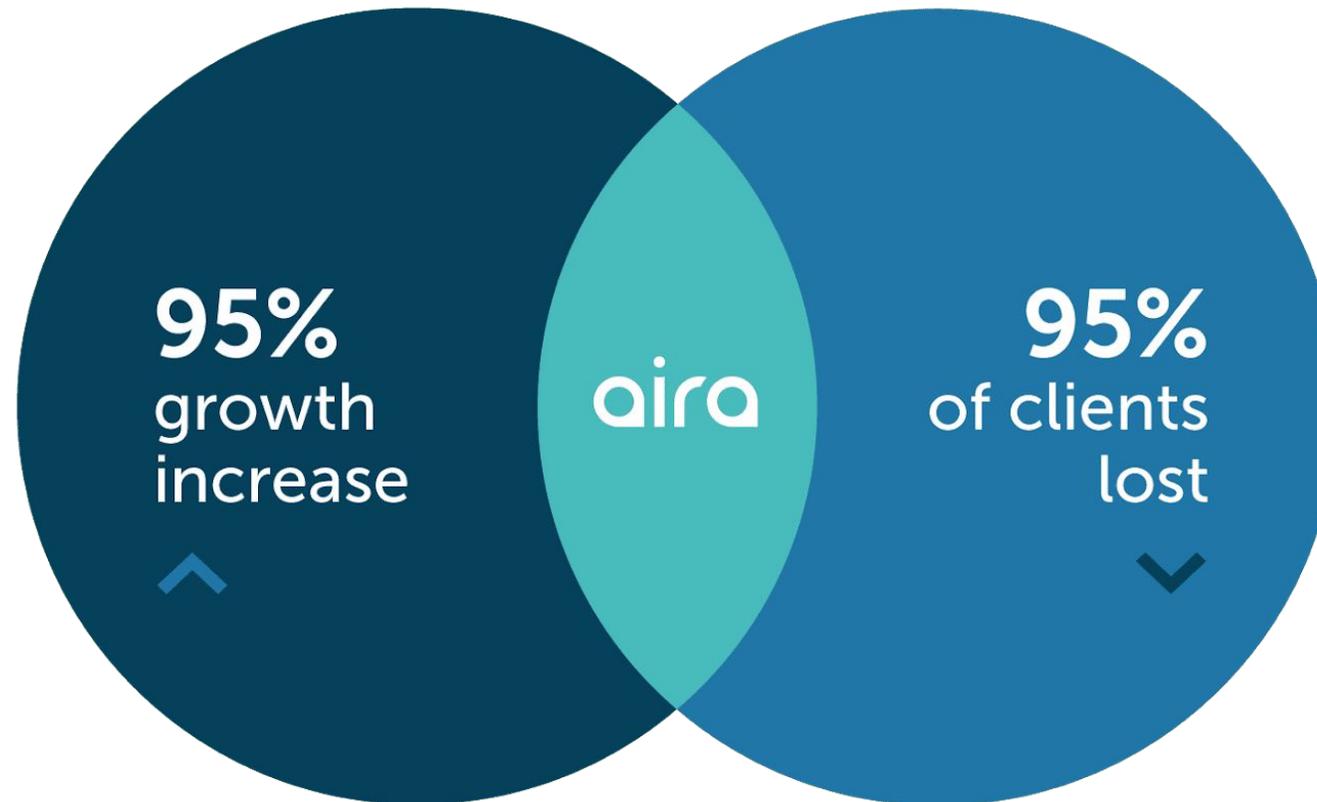
Our industry as we knew it **changed.**

Our roles in-house, at agencies and
as consultants **changed.**

A tale of two halves...



A tale of two halves...



Two weeks into the lockdown we'd **lost**
more than **50%** of our revenue.

In April, we won a huge project with a
household brand.

In July, our **largest client** turned their activity *“back on”*.

In September, our **full team** were back from furlough.

By November, we had one of our **highest revenue** generating months.

Despite these wins, we were still **down overall**. Our world wasn't working.

The ongoing polarisation caused a state of *'survival mode'* to trigger within.

I grew up. **Fast.**

My personal journey...



My roles...

HEAD OF PR

Adapt and find
new ways to
generate links
and traffic.

DIRECTOR

Get the
company
through this
in one piece.

That's *my* story, but this
also affected our industry.

The Problem

Surviving the Covid News Agenda



aira

MozCon Virtual

GETTING YOU NOTICED ONLINE

Great Expectations

The Truth About Digital PR Campaigns

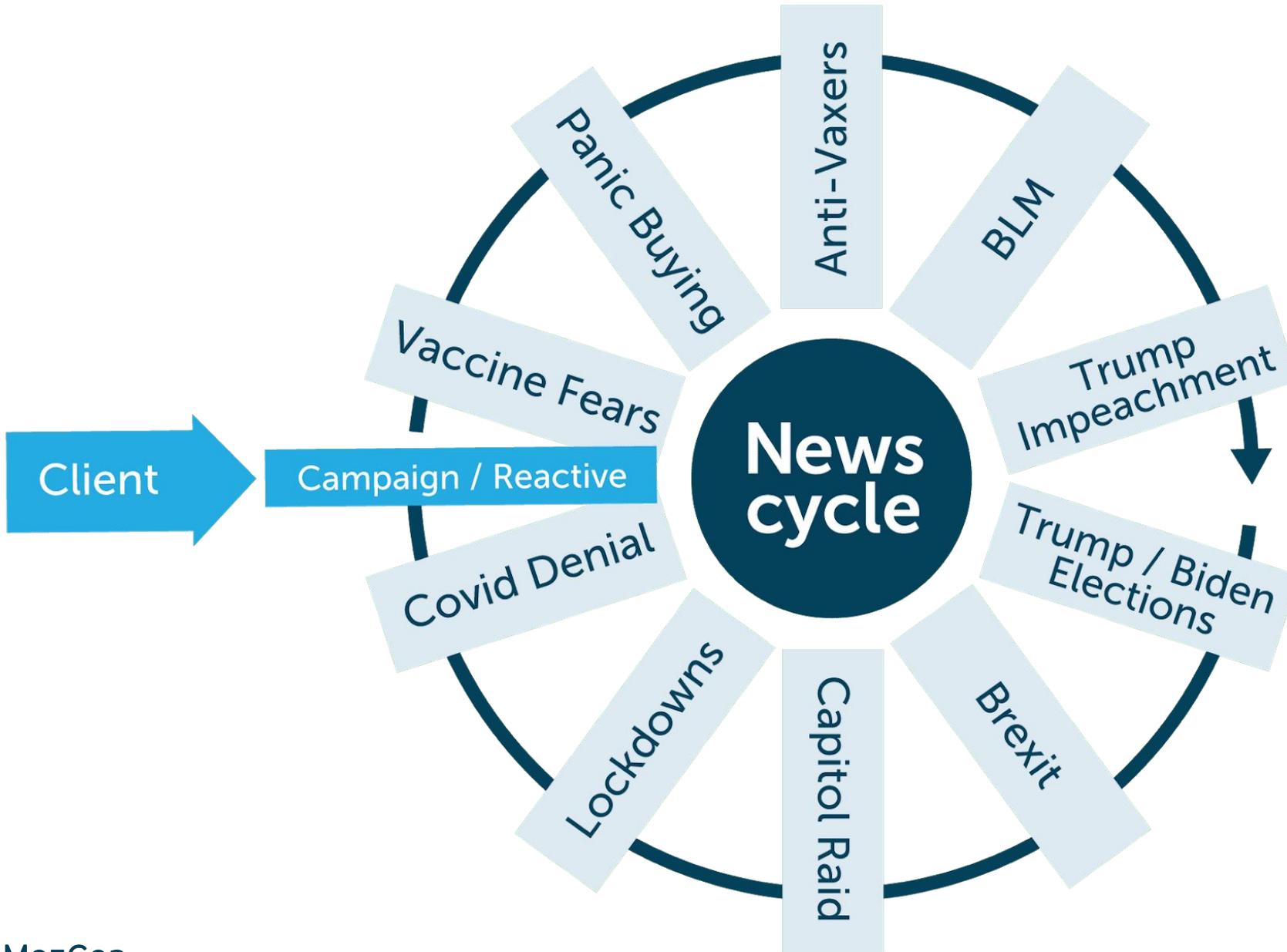
If **only** I knew at the time we were going through the **largest challenge** we'd faced yet as a team.

We've **never** seen a news agenda like this before.

Client







The space for our clients to play in was getting **smaller and smaller.**

Nearly **75% of all campaigns** were
paused or stopped...

A travel client...

We spotted this morning that the [Maldives](#) now has confirmed cases with some tourists in isolation

A DIY client...

With regards to the Mates Rates campaign, we think that due to the update from the government yesterday evening, and with a lot of tradespeople most likely being out of work at the moment, it doesn't feel like the right time to be outreaching this campaign.

And on Slack...



Ruth Barrett



12:42 PM

Holding off on outreach this afternoon after the announcement re the Duke of Edinburgh



3





We felt like headless chickens.

On top of that, the campaigns we were pitching were being **'kept on file'**.

Journalist responses...

It's not at the moment I'm afraid. I've got it on file incase anything changes though.

Thanks,

Large evergreen creative campaigns
weren't getting cut through.

We've spent **5 years** putting processes and frameworks in place that make our digital PR campaigns **sustainable.**



Supercharge your link building with a digital PR newsroom

Shannon McGuirk,
Head of PR & Content

DIGITAL PR NEWSROOM



Content Calendar ☆ 📁 ☁ Saved to Drive

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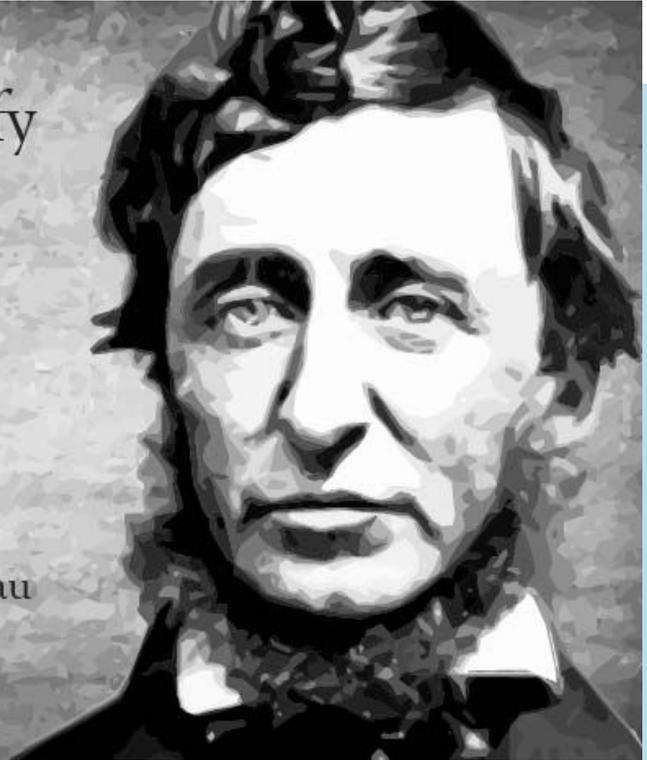
A4 fx

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Content Calendar					
2						
3	This document outlines all of the awareness days, holidays, events and opportunities for reactive editorial for the next 6 months of the year.					
4						
5		April	May	June	July	August
6	MONTH LONG EVENTS	Bowel Cancer Awareness IBS Awareness Stress Awareness National Pet Month	Maternal Mental Health Month National Walking Month Skin Cancer Awareness Month May Measurement	Vounteers Month Sands Month Candy Month		
7	1		Loyalty Day Law Day	The Big Lunch World Milk Day	Canada Day International Joke Day	National GF Day
8	2	World Autism Day International Childrens Book D	World Asthma Day National Truffle Day		World UFO Day	International Beer Day National Colouring Book Day
9	3	Walk to Work Day Chocolate Moose Day		Child Safety Week Heart Rythm Week	National Stay Out of Sun Day	
10	4	International Pillow Talk Day Discover Parks Day	Sun Awareness Week Firefighters Awareness Day	Cheese Day	Independence Day	National Sisters Day
11	5	National Raisin Spice Day Education & Sharing Day	National Teachers Day	World Environment Day		National Underwater Day
12	6	Bee Happy, Bee Healthy Day	World Mental Health Day	Fish and Chips Day	International Kissing Day	
13	7	World Health Day		Cancer Survivors Day		

12th July 2021 National Simplicity Day

“As you simplify
your life, the
laws of the
universe will
be simpler.”

— Henry David Thoreau



Content Calendar ☆ 📁 ☁ Saved to Drive

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REDUNDANT

ent Calendar 2020/2021

rt Format Data Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was made on 9 April by Zoe-Lee Skelton

Share

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
4										
5	Ideation									
6	Build									
7	Launch									
8	Promotion									
9										
10			2020							
11	Idea	KPI	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April
12	Q1: Esports earners salary This interactive graphic will look at the highest earning Esport gamers of all time. We would take their earnings from previous years and create a GIF with a counter that shows how much they earn every day, hour and minute.	KPI - 23 links per quarter	Ideation	Build & Launch	Promotion					
13	Q1: Cartoons released and loved the year you were born This interactive tool will show users which cartoon was released the year they were born, as well as which was the most popular that year.	KPI - 23 links per quarter			Build & Launch	Promotion				
14	Q2: Ideation placeholder for next quarter's ideas	KPI - 23 links per quarter					Ideation			
15	Q2: If game characters had dating profiles This piece would be an interactive swipe style graphic where people could swipe through the dating profiles of gaming characters which we would create	KPI - 23 links per quarter					Build	Launch	Promotion	

The news agenda was changing so fast,
forward planning was **practically
impossible.**

We're used to the news agenda dictating our every move but this was **100x worse.**

We moved to a more
'reactive' mindset.



Lauren Field 10:16 AM

Something small to note for the glamping reactive, doing some pre research and Johnny Vegas is coming up a lot

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/johnny-vegas-carry-on-glamping>



Channel 4

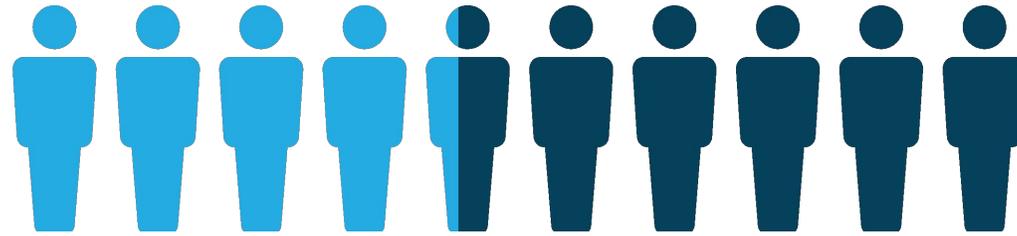
Johnny Vegas: Carry on Glamping

Johnny Vegas creates the country's coolest glamping site out of old, repurposed vehicles (177 kB) ▾



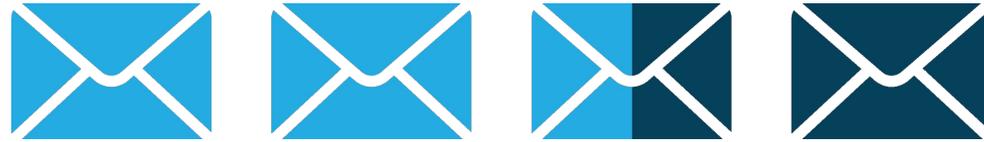
It **worked** but there was something much bigger at play.

Journalism was and still is **suffering**.



44% of journalists were on furlough.

August is known as the **quietest** month
for outreach.



We received **250** out of offices from **400** journalists emailed.

Our outreach pool was **much smaller.**

This and the fast paced nature of having to change tactics to drive links put **pressure** on the team.

This and the fast paced nature of having to change tactics to drive links put **pressure** on the team.

No Client Services Director wants this...



to Elina, Charlotte, me, Aoife, Jasmine ▾

Hi Charlotte, Shannon,

Thanks for expressing your awareness of the current situation. It was quite timely because I was only looking at your performance yesterday morning.

Performance on some accounts was affected and we had to **dig deeper** than we already were.



**Reminder: we are living in
a global pandemic!**

**Aira wasn't the only
agency to go through this.**

Pressure to perform puts industry
standards at risk.

Performance pressures + hectic news
agenda = **imperfect campaigns.**

Performance pressures + a hectic news agenda = **PRs spinning bigger stories.**

Creative genius?



We've responded to a **difficult situation** with **bigger** PR spins and **bolder** ideas.

Formats that keep on giving...

You can now get paid £1k to go to the pub and eat steak with your pals

Greene King's Pub & Grill is on the hunt for a Grill Seeker, who will be tasked with getting together with five friends or family members and sample the pub brand's new seasonal menu

SHARE      COMMENTS

By [Samantha Bartlett](#) Senior Lifestyle & Travel Reporter

13:19, 4 JUN 2021



We've responded to a **difficult situation** with tried and tested formats that get links.

I get it.
There's a lot going on.

More news

Planning issues

**Businesses under
threat**

Less journalists

We've **risked quality** and **relevance** in favour of launching quickly.

Yes, it works **for now...**

We're in **danger** of producing the same irrelevant stories over and over to get links.

Do we really think Google will **want** to reward this long term?

**This approach
isn't sustainable.
It never has been.**

The Solution

What Got Us Here, Won't Get Us There

Aira learnt some hard lessons whilst in
‘survival mode’.

#1

Ideation

#2

Production

#3

Promotion

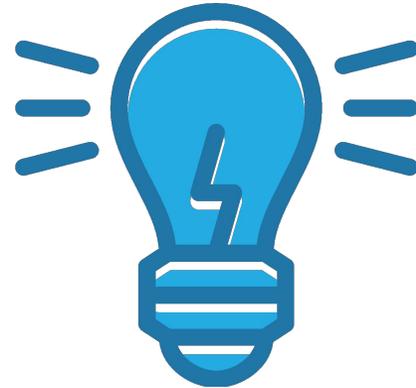
I want to share **3 tactics** to help future proof your digital PR work.

They'll help you **survive** an ever
changing news agenda.

They'll also **increase** the **quality** and **relevance** of your outputs.

#1 Ideation

The ROR Framework



Every successful campaign starts with a
great idea.

How do you know you've got a good idea?

There are **3 important things** you need to validate your idea against when working under **pressure**.

Relevancy, Opinion, Resolution.

Think of this as 'Natural Selection'...



Relevancy, Opinion, Resolution.

Relevance

Should the brand be talking about the **topic** and/or **theme**?

Relevance

TOPIC

THEME

Relevance

TOPIC

**3 to 5 subjects
defined at kick off
that relate directly to
the product offering
and act as guide rails
for the project.**

THEME

Relevance

TOPIC

3 to 5 subjects defined at kick off that relate directly to the product offering and act as guide rails for the project.

THEME

A layer deeper than themes that the brand can have a solid opinion or voice on to make them famous for that thing.

Relevance

Come on, **be honest.**
Should they?

Relevance

When you have these topics and themes defined head to **Reddit** and **Buzzsumo**.

Relevance

Reddit: **“Women in STEM”**

A screenshot of a Reddit post from the subreddit r/AskWomen. The post title is "Women in STEM, have you had any experiences that make you understand why there are so few of us, or events that make you want to leave the field? How do you deal with these things?". The post is by user u/boldlygoinghome, posted 2 months ago. It has 53 upvotes and 87 comments. The post content includes a comment from user confused_67, who shares their experience of receiving a female-only scholarship and internship, and discusses the challenges of being a woman in STEM, such as sexual harassment and lack of maternity leave. The screenshot also shows the Reddit interface, including the search bar, navigation icons, and a sidebar with upvote/downvote counts for various posts.

Relevance

Buzzsumo: “Women in STEM”

<input type="checkbox"/> Women in STEM are at the forefront of fighting COVID-19 By Kate Whiting Journalist NEW Feb 11, 2021 weforum.org	9.2K	593	0	0	11	6	9.8K	
<input type="checkbox"/> Universities leading the way for women in STEM By Study International Staff Aug 11, 2020 studyinternational.com	7.7K	15	1	0	-	4	7.7K	
<input type="checkbox"/> Women in STEM Speaker Series By Carnegie Science Ctr Jul 10, 2020 carnegiesciencecenter.org	6.1K	80	3	0	9	4	6.2K	
<input type="checkbox"/> Women in science are making a difference during the pandemic By Un Women Journalist NEW Feb 9, 2021 medium.com	4.2K	1.7K	4	0	5	5	5.9K	

Relevance

TOPIC

Women in STEM

THEME

- Universities
- Challenges
- Impact on Covid
- Scholarships

Relevance

Tip:

Establish topics and themes, then **overlay** them on Reddit and Buzzsumo to produce relevant ideas.

Relevancy, **Opinion**, Resolution.

Opinion

This is your **brand's** opinion.

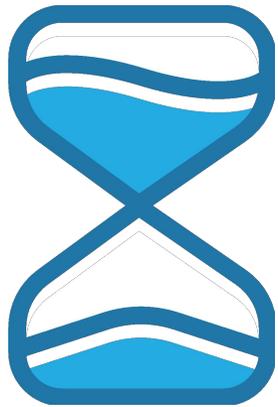
Opinion

What can your brand have a **clear,**
distinctive and **unique** voice on?

Opinion

This should be on a **relevant** theme and topic too.

Opinion



Time



Finance



Solution

Opinion

This opinion needs to go in **any press material** and be ready to offer unique comments.

Opinion

Tip:

Confirm whether your brand has a clear voice or opinion on the idea **before** creating it.

Relevancy, Opinion, **Resolution.**

Resolution

We're **not** going to solve world issues
with digital PR campaigns alone.

Resolution

But that doesn't mean your campaign shouldn't offer your brand's audience an **answer or resolution.**

Resolution

This **directly ties back** to relevance and being able to create an opinion on the topic or theme.

Resolution

Audience query:

How much would it cost to rent a royal residence?

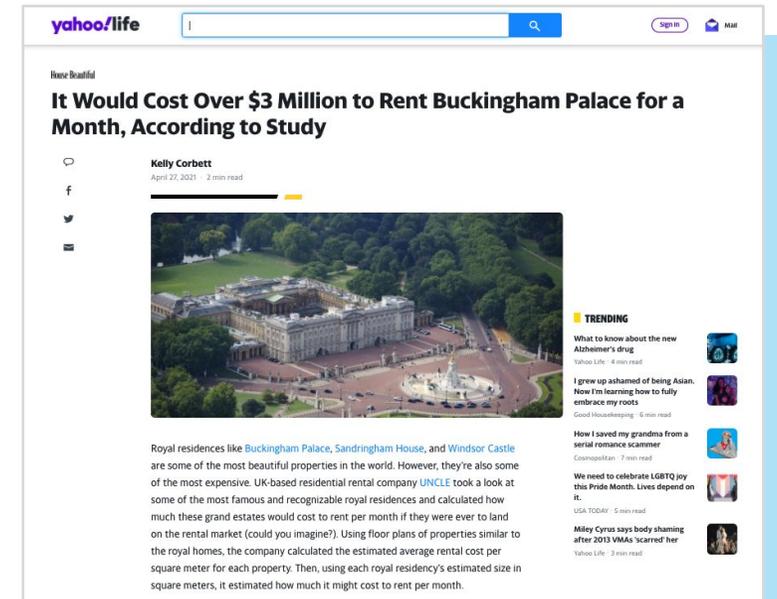
The size and monthly rental cost of each royal property

Royal Residence	Who lives there?	Property Area*	No. of rooms	Rental PCM*
Buckingham Palace, Westminster, London	The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	77,000 sq m	775	£2,550,018
St James's Palace, St James's, London	The Princess Royal	36,482 sq m	Unknown	£1,734,713
Windsor Castle, Windsor	The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	53,000 sq m	1,000	£1,354,741
Kensington Palace, Kensington, London	The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge	2,780 sq m	20	£75,697
Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, Scotland	The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	8,330 sq m	Unknown	£333,429
Clarence House, St James's, London	The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall	1,552 sq m	15	£67,799
Balmoral Castle, Aberdeenshire, Scotland	The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	1,242 sq m	52	£82,200
Sandringham House, Sandringham, Norfolk	The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	1,404 sq m	Unknown	£78,257
Highgrove House, Tetbury, Gloucestershire	The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall	2,646 sq m	19	£73,208
Hillsborough Castle, Hillsborough, Northern Ireland	The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	4,200 sq m	Unknown	£62,387
Anmer Hall, Sandringham, Norfolk	The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge	4,178 sq m	30	£44,360
Gatcombe Park, Midsalhampton, Gloucestershire	The Princess Royal	3,760 sq m	27	£43,076
Frogmore Cottage, Windsor	Former home of The Duke and Duchess of Sussex	706 sq m	9	£27,650
Nottingham Cottage, Kensington, London	Former home of The Duke and Duchess of Sussex	123 sq m	2	£7,760

UNCLE *Estimated



Resolution



Resolution

Tip:

Be curious about the challenges the audience faces and the questions they have.

#2 Production Format Libraries

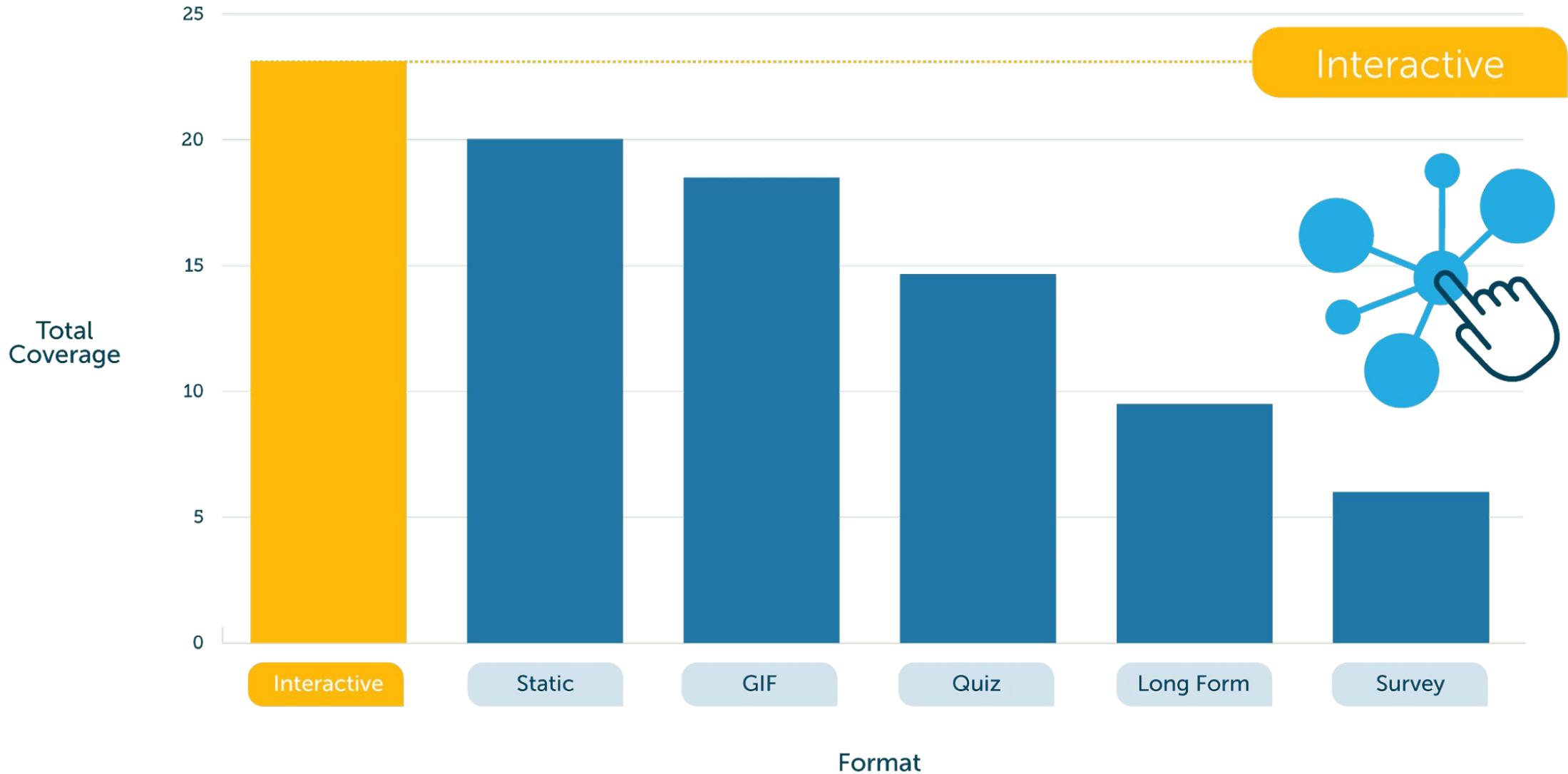
Resolution

Sustainable digital PR is as much about the day to day **detail** as it is the overall approach.

Given the busy news agenda, it makes sense to spend **more time and budget** on outreach.

Production is still **very important.**

Our data tells us what formats **work well**
for digital PR.



Format libraries...

Project title goes here
 Subtitle goes here

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum irure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisis at vero eros et accumsan et justo odio dignissim qui blandit.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

[CTA HERE](#)

Use the tool below to explore XXXX. Click on the 'i' icon to find out more.

FILTER 1 FILTER 2 FILTER 3 FILTER 4 FILTER 5 FILTER 6

1 City Country	2 City Country	3 City Country	4 City Country
5 City Country	6 City Country	7 City Country	8 City Country

Smaller title goes here
Project title goes here

Use the filters below to order XXXX

FILTER 1 FILTER 2 FILTER 3 FILTER 4 FILTER 5 FILTER 6

Score out of 100

United States	77
Israel	62
South Korea	58
Japan	48
Sweden	47
Denmark	45
Germany	43
Finland	43
Switzerland	42
Austria	41
Belgium	39
France	38
Iceland	34
Norway	34
United Kingdom	34
Singapore	34

Project title goes here
 Subtitle goes here

Use the tool below to explore XXXX. Click on the 'i' icon to find out more.

[VIEW](#)

Legend: XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX

Close Logo here

These wireframes are **tailored bespoke**
for each client's ideas.

This **streamlines** the process without compromising on quality and gives more time to outreach.

Action:
Research popular formats for your brand
and **establish** content libraries.

#3 *Promotion*
**Managing Unforeseen
Circumstances**

I'm **not** going to go into outreach
101 today.

We're going to talk about when the worst happens and you **can't launch.**

We've experienced this at least **10+ times**
in the last 12 months thanks to the news
agenda.

But that's okay, because we had a **plan** in place to get through it.

Assess, Communicate, Perspective.

Assess

Review social media, news outlets and see how large the story is likely to be.

Assess

If it's trending, it will almost **certainly** be in the press.

Assess

NI TRAVEL
news

NEWS | BLOG | COMPETITIONS | TRADE | EVENTS | DIRECTORY |   



FCO Asks Holidaymakers to Avoid Maldives

Holidaymakers are being advised to avoid four island resorts in the Maldives due to confirmed cases of the coronavirus

Assess

One person needs to take charge and be **comfortable** making the call to pause.

Assess



Jasmine 9:19 AM

The gov. stance on Maldives

Screen Shot 2020-03-11 at 09.19.00.png ▾

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all but essential travel to Kuredu, Vilemendhu, Batalaa and Kuramathi Island Resorts.

There have been confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Maldives. The Kuredu, Vilemendhu, Batalaa and Kuramathi Island Resorts have all been placed under temporary quarantine. If you have upcoming travel plans in these resorts, contact your tour operator and insurance provider for more information.

The Government of Maldives is taking precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. This includes a temporary ban on all cruise ships from entering and docking in the Maldives. Speak to your tour operator for further information. In addition, all persons who have been in the last 14 days to Mainland China (not including Hong Kong), Iran, South Korea (North Gyeongsang and South Gyeongsang Provinces), Italy and Bangladesh are not allowed to enter or transit through the Maldives. Passengers and airline crew must fill-in a Health Declaration Card and an Immigration Arrival Card before arriving in the Maldives and undergo a screening procedure. See [Health](#).



Shannon 9:20 AM

Our hands are tied, it's the right thing to do to pause this launch



Jasmine 9:20 AM

I'll draft an email to James now

Communicate

Always **feedback** client/stakeholder efficiently. Be clear of the **risk**.

Communicate

Each morning, a crucial part of our scrum/stand up is to review the news in the many sectors that our clients fit into and as I'm sure you're well aware, Coronavirus is the hot topic at the moment.

We spotted this morning that the [Maldives](#) now has confirmed cases with some tourists in isolation and there's a temporary ban on cruise ships entering the dock.

On our most recent campaign, Maldives sits in the top 10 which leads us to a little bit of a concern that we may not get cut through. Journalists may not want to suggest that the Maldives is a country making lots of money from tourism, as that might not be the case for the next few months. There's also a lot of press of how [tourism](#) is being affected, which I'm sure you're all too aware of over at Alpha.

With this in mind, our suggestion is to pause on this campaign and shift our focus to the Rubbish Destinations piece and press forward with this one. We have the raw data for the Rubbish Destinations campaign and our next step is to finalise the data and pull out key angles/destinations to show in this piece.

We will keep an eye on the press and if The Maldives doesn't appear to be of high risk in the coming weeks, we could potentially still launch soon. If there's no sign of the Coronavirus slowing down and we're still concerned, we could update the Endangered Species campaign as this is low risk. As this campaign isn't promoting travel, we'd feel comfortable outreaching and it's also Endangered Species Day in May which obviously worked really well for us last year.

Communicate

Take the reins, **you** are the expert.

Communicate

Hi Jasmine,

We completely agree! Lets put it on pause and follow the proposed next steps 😊

Kind regards,

Perspective

You, your team and your
client/stakeholder
will be **frustrated.**

Perspective

Be **vulnerable**. Ask **questions**.

Perspective

Be **productive** with re-launch planning.

Perspective

With the news agenda so full, this is **likely** to happen to you at some point.

Action:

Take a breath. Assess, communicate and have perspective.

In Summary...

Circling back around to the main point.

These frameworks have been born out of Aira's lessons from being in **'survival mode'**.

The **goal** of sharing them with you is to:

1. Be more **authentic** with
your campaign work

2. Do **what's right** for the brand

3. Place a larger focus on **quality** and **relevance**.

You'll have **better** digital PR outputs that drive real business growth.

**This is what being in
'survival mode' has taught
us.**



Thank You!