

## AI In PR: What You Need To Know Dirty Transcript 02.28/24

Julie: Good morning, everyone. I'm Julie Livingston of WantLeverage communications. I specialize in executive visibility and creating thought leadership content on LinkedIn. I want to invite you to download my free tip sheet, "Make your C-suite stand out on LinkedIn"; I think you'll find a lot of helpful tips there. Today on PR patter we're going to be talking about AI in PR: What You Need to Know."

Julie: I want to welcome my special guest, Linda Zebian of Muck Rack. Linda is senior director of communications and community, where she sets communication strategy for muck racks enterprise, both internally and externally including messaging issues, management, media relations, social media, and employee communications. She joined Muck Rack as its first ever director of communications. So you're setting the standard Linda - in January, 2022 from the New York Times and 2023 Ragan Communications named Linda a top woman in PR for leadership, which is so impressive. So Linda, welcome. And why don't we start by having you share a little bit more of your backstory, how you got to Muck Rack and your career path.

Linda: Sure. Thanks so much for having me, Julie. I'm excited to be here today to talk about this very important topic. I did join Muck Rack in 2022 as its first communications lead from The New York Times. I came here to give a voice and power to people like me. I've been in the industry a long time. I admired what Muck Rack was doing to help elevate our profession and make us better and get us recognized. As I mentioned, I joined Muck Rack from The New York Times. I worked in corporate communications there for about 10 years. It was an honor. I look back at, back at that very fondly. And before that I was a Consumer Reports, over in Yonkers, New York, doing media relations for that non profit. I started my career as a journalist, actually, a trade journalist for a small B2B publication covering the magazine industry. Have I been working in the media? I've gotta say, I've just been working in the media industry for a long time.

Julie: Yeah, you know, it's funny, I was talking to a few friends the other day over lunch about magazines, because I too started as a journalist at a teenage fashion magazine, which I loved, and I'm still kind of addicted to magazines. And I went through the list of every magazine that I currently get in the mail because I just still love reading magazines of all kinds and I think I still get about eight or nine.

Linda: We need more of you out there, Julie. Thank you for supporting magazines!

Julie: So Linda, I happen to be a Muck Rack user and I've read about your report, the state of AI and PR, which was released just this January 2024. And I was wondering if you could share some of the results and the highlights of your report with us.

Linda: Sure. Yes, we did just release a new report state of AI 2024 as a follow up that came eight months after our first state of AI and PR report in 2023. So in just eight months, AI

adoption doubled. That's the highlight. It's incredible. It serves nearly 40% from when we asked people.

So in 2023 folks were perhaps a little apprehensive in the beginning and throughout the year. Now, it seems they have embraced it. And, the good news is that it's had a positive impact. On work quality and efficiency for those who are using it. 74% of respondents reported an increase in the quality of their work and 89% said it helps them complete projects more quickly. We saw a lot of change last year and I think we're headed into similar territory this year.

Julie: You know, it's interesting. I've dipped my toe in the AI, AI space and I need to do a lot more of it. And we've been talking a lot about it here on PR Patter. I think I've had maybe six or seven conversations about different aspects of AI so far, which I think is pretty good. And there's a website, there's an AI for that. And I've been following AI developments on that too. And I think, about eight or nine months ago, when you started publishing your AI reports, there were about 7,000-something AI tools available on the market, and now there are more than 12,000.

Linda: So again, as you said, there's so much movement and so much growth in what's available in AI, and it really is having a lot of positive impact on what we do. And in PR certainly there is a threat of negative impact, which we can talk about, as well as the fears and the concerns.

Linda: The technology can be applied in many use cases, and 57% of 1,000 survey participants revealed that folks are using AI for writing tasks. Almost all participants are editing the output.

Linda: Two thirds of respondents or 58% use generative AI for research, writing press releases and crafting pitches and social copy. So the writing is there. The research is there. A bunch of folks are also using it for strategy.

Linda: Again, I think that it is an extension of the research arm. So there's lots of different applications and folks are certainly embracing it.

Julie: That's great. Were there any surprises that you saw in the report results?

Linda: We did have a big surprise. And frankly, when we were putting the questions together to find out to check the pulse of the industry, we had a hunch that there might be some discrepancies. And the big surprise is that a noticeable discrepancy exists between brands and agencies and how they're disclosing AI use. One in five or 21 percent of agency folks admit never disclosing their AI utilization to their clients.

Julie: This may sound like a stupid question, but why should they disclose AI use?

Linda: Well, I guess that's the question, should they disclose it? You know, I think that there are concerns over privacy. Um, And also there's all this talk about hourly agency rates and should

agencies be charging at an hourly rate? Brands say that maybe their agency is spending less time on the account because they're using AI.

But I think, you know, most folks understand that AI is just making them better for you, right? They're not using it to go have a cocktail on the beach. What they're doing is they're using it for repetitive tasks that can serve as a springboard to make them more efficient so they can better serve you as a client.

Linda: So all it does is free up time that they know that they didn't have. If you're an agency and you bring in another head into your team, what would you say? Oh, "We should be paying you less ." No, of course not. It's just another resource and a research tool. What they're doing is gaining back time to invest that time into high value activities for their clients.

Julie: So, when you do use AI as a PR person, if you use AI for research- you're also able to kind of check out what the competition is doing more easily. Exactly. You can check out competitors.

Linda: You can look to it for inspiration on how to take an angle on a certain news moment. There's all sorts of applications and things you can do with it.

Julie: That can really help with brand differentiation.

Linda: Yes.

Julie: Can you describe some of the steps that you can take to kind of keep ahead of the curve in AI?

Linda: Oh, absolutely. the thing that most folks do, it's a matter of testing it, testing it and learning.

Julie: On a consistent basis, I would imagine.

Linda: Yes, play with it. Play with prompting generative AI. And if you don't get the results that you want, discover ways to refine those results more. There are a lot of ways you can do that when you're writing a good AI prompt. Be specific, define a character limit, be mindful of privacy, review your results. You can use words like list, generate, produce, propose, compile, describe, brainstorm? These are great kinds of prompts for AI. And then you can go back and say, to refine it, edit, combine, elaborate, reduce, clarify, define, interpret, these kinds of triggers to get the AI to do what you want.

Linda: So playing with AI programs is the first way to stay ahead. Always edit and review and, and make it better. Also try different tools, beyond generative AI. That's the most important thing that any PR professional communications Person can do right now is to get your data into a tool that centralizes it for you.

Linda: So if you've got stuff in spreadsheets and emails and Slack channels or written in your notebook, it's probably not the best use of your time for your data. If you get your data in a good PR tech platform that will centralize your data for you, it's all there. The tech's already there to learn from your activity, your lists, your data, who you are, how you work, who you talk to, who you pitch, how often, when, what topics.

Linda: And it learns from that and it can make better recommendations. That's machine learning. Better recommendations for you to just increase your outputs, increase your performance. Because it knows you better, it can learn, and it can make a suggestion. Just like Netflix makes a suggestion on the movies you're going to like. If you didn't do that, you'd be fed all sorts of nonsense that you don't want to watch and you go to sleep upset. You didn't watch anything. You just scroll. It's kind of the same idea.

Julie: Absolutely. I think another thing that's probably very important for PR folks is to really find a trusted partner to work with on getting the technology that's appropriate for your particular business.

Linda: So whether that's Muck Rack or another source.

Julie: I think that's really, really important because you have to have that give and take, to kind of make it your own.

Linda: Absolutely. And you know, there's a lot of different kinds of technology. There's free technology, of course, like your chat GPTs. But if you're looking for something more advanced and, really, to streamline your efficiencies, you probably need a more advanced technology tool. And so if you're looking for a tech tool make sure you know what questions to ask. Make sure you understand your needs and your use cases when you're exploring your options out there.

Julie: Yeah. Which is why you need to experiment beforehand so that you kind of know what you're talking about. Indeed. And you don't have to be an expert in it cause you're going to have this partner who they're going to kind of guide you along, but you should know enough.

Linda: Exactly. You should know at least what you need, what questions to ask.

Julie: So how can a PR consultant or team centralize the data that they have?

Linda: So again, they need to work with a reputable, powerful public relations management tool. And I think the thing is, it's a combination of two kinds of data. It's your data, right? So your first party data, your team activity, your media list, your pitches, your reports, your monitoring. And then you have third party data. So, for example, if you use Muck Rack, that's Muck Rack's data. So, their database, their monitoring power. Where do they monitor? How are you going to know when you're mentioned? How are you going to get your alerts? All of that. And their reporting power, you know. Are they going to tell you about sentiment?

What other metrics are you going to have? Do they have a key message pull-through metric? Do they have an impressions metric? Do they incorporate Google analytics? All of these things, when you're thinking about how to centralize your data, those two data sources combined is where the power of the future of the AI lies.

Julie: I mean, it's just incredible. It's incredible to have all of this in one place. Yes. We used to spend so much time, you know, pulling from here and there and, you know, then figuring out how to meld it all together, to show the results of our work.

Linda: So how can AI actually help? To write a prompt, a good one. So again, it goes back to, um, test and learn, right? So when you are putting in a prompt, you want to keep a few things in mind. And I did mention some of these before, but just be specific, like an example, write a short tagline for a brand.

Linda: A "new dog grooming service" is an example. Okay, that's fine, but you may not get the results you want from that. Instead, write a short tagline for the new grand opening of a dog grooming service in San Diego that caters to senior dogs. And you might get what you want, and then you want to set the tone too. You can say, I want to be funny or I want to be serious. You can even say, you can even have it act as a journalist, right? Act as a journalist in covering the grand opening of my dog grooming service. See what it comes back with. You should also define your character limits. So if you're asking about Chat GPT, you should say, I need 120 characters or three paragraphs. You could be really specific. And I would suggest that you tell it to avoid jargon.

Julie: That's a huge one. That's huge.

Linda: So don't use acronyms, don't use jargon in your prompt, because then you're going to get some nonsense back. AI can hallucinate, they say, like it can just make things up.

Linda: And I've talked to so many folks, especially in the early days, about a year ago, where they would put something in and it would just absolutely come up with a story, something completely asinine and unrelated. So we have to tell it, we have to kind of guide it down the hill a little bit and help it understand.

Linda: Cause we, again this is not replacing human oversight, at least not now. So we're in control.

Julie: So I, as you know, I specialize in raising executive visibility on LinkedIn specifically. Um, And, and, you know, in traditional media too. So what about AI and the development of thought leadership content, powerful leadership content?

Linda: Absolutely. So I think that you can use it in a similar way. So when, if you're going to be, um, brainstorming on thought leadership, ask what should I write about? What's already been

said? When you're thinking of powerful thought leadership, you're thinking of unique and new. So you're going to go to Google and see what's already been said. See if you can riff on that a little bit. See, you can use generative AI in the same way. Say, tell me, you know, pull from the top five things that are being discussed right now about food insecurity in New York city. Boom. And they'll tell you what's already being discussed, right?

Linda: Or give me an idea. Help me generate an idea to amplify this message or, you know, whatever it is you can use it. I would be really careful when you're doing thought leadership and anything in generative AI is about being mindful of privacy too, because all of that information in the AI comes from somewhere else, right? Someone that's someone else's source, which is why it's cause for concern. Yeah. A hundred percent. And also what you put in it. So if you're working for an executive and they have an idea or there is something proprietary or something you don't want out there, ChatGPT may not be the tool for you.

Linda: So check out other tools where it allows for the user's identity to be obfuscated and data can't be tracked.

Julie: Talk a little bit about the safe use and some guidelines that people should follow when, when using AI,. You said before you were talking about agency disclosure to clients and how that's a kind of a topic that's been tossed around a bit.

Linda: We created a standards guide. There's a lot of that kind of information out there. And I was thinking, how do we make this simple for people? People don't have time to read through 20 pages of rules, right? I think that the first thing is to see if your organization might have a training or policy in place and follow that training.

Linda: We did ask about that. Only about half of the folks we asked have training and or a policy in place. So if you don't have one you are a leader, consider making one and you can start with our standards, right? So there's a few things to think about.

Linda: Confidentiality. So are you protecting people? Right. Are you keeping information private?

Anything you create, anything you output should always be vetted, fact checked, in the same way human content, human created content is. You wouldn't let, you know, someone who's brand new go and, you know, blast a press release out without looking at it. No. No, you wouldn't. So, I think, you know, simple, it's, it's kind of like, well, this doesn't mean like you're, sitting drinking margaritas on the beach. You have to be even more careful. And then for images, if you're creating images, you absolutely should label it as such for journalists and PR folks. If you created an image using AI, it should be labeled that it was created using AI. And then again, we just talked about management and training.

Linda: It's the responsibility of your organization to train and create AI policies. But really, at the end of the day, it's about you, the individual practitioner. You are responsible for what you

create. So, vet it. You know, and our point of view, again, is agencies who follow these kinds of guidelines and are using AI responsibly shouldn't need to disclose it.

Linda: Right? It's when you're not following. If you were putting that in, Right, right. Yeah. So if you follow these normal kinds of, I'll be, I mean even though they're not obvious to other people, but you know, industry standard guidelines, you shouldn't have to disclose it. When you use a spell checker, do you disclose it to your client? Do you say "we've been using AI and Muck Rack for years, for monitoring." Do you say, "I use Muck Rack to get alerted to your mentioned client? And therefore I should be paid less." I mean, it's kind of ridiculous. So, you don't have to disclose it. But of course, goodwill is important. And I think in a way, if I worked in an agency, I'd be like, yeah, we use AI.

Linda: We're saving all this time. We did this. Yeah. Are they behind the times or are they with it? Yeah. Exactly. Of course, we're using AI. We're using it responsibly. We're using it confidentially, we're checking every single output. We are embracing technology. And this is all, these are all the things that we did by saving time with data. Or these are the outcomes we got for you. We didn't know this journalist covered ice cream. But you know what? The AI in Muck Rack informed me that I'm missing a journalist on my list. And then we got you coverage on your ice cream and you're happy and we're happy and all right.

Julie: One of the things that publicists spend a lot of time doing, and it's not easy these days with no more phones, phone numbers, is the pitching process. So how can AI help? And do you have a, like a case study that you could share with us about how AI is being used in PR?

Linda: Yes. So, AI is massively helpful with pitching on both the creative creation side of the pitch and the pitching and the, you know, media media relations and media lists.

Linda: So in my practice, in terms of a case study, we have a customer breakdown, which is a PR link building agency. They've been using PressPal, which is our customer Generative AI tool. So PressPal has a couple of components. It has a pitch component that is like ChatGPT but doesn't take your data. Put in your prompt and it creates a pitch under 200 words because that's what our research found is the ideal maximum limit. And then it creates a pitch for you. You can copy and paste it and edit it and make it your own. Also can do it on the press release side. So you just toggle the thing, make a pitch, make a press release. This is free for everyone.

Linda: In addition to that, if you're not paying for Muck Rack, check it out and then it offers a list of journalists who may be interested in your news based on the keyword you put into the product. So that's really great because then you're finding journalists you may not have known about which is wonderful. So those are the components of this tool and break of how PR folks are using it. Also, when you miss a keyword in your search, or you don't think of it. You don't add somebody to your list, but the AI does it for you.

Linda: And then in addition to that, we also have a tool called recommended journalists, um, which actually looks at your media list. So again, your centralized data, the media lists you

already have, you built on your own and that you use. And it says, Hey, and it kind of pops up and says, Hey, you might want to, if you're building a new media list, you might want to add this person to this media list based on your family, formerly, formerly, former media lists or other media lists and your actions.

Linda: Again, you think about when you have to rebuild a list, you have to remember every single person for that is huge. That is just huge. Yeah, because there are so many niche publications these days, you know, digital publications, you can't possibly know all of them. Exactly. That's great. It's power for us, you know, we're all so maxed out, right?

Linda: We're saturated with information. You know, let the AI handle that for you and do something more productive than trying to remember, you know, which journalists might cover this particular.

Julie: That's great. Well, Linda, this has been a fantastic conversation. I've learned so much and I'm actually getting even more pumped to dip more toes in the AI water for sure. What's the best way for people to get in touch with you?

Linda: Email me [Linda@MuckRack.com](mailto:Linda@MuckRack.com). Very easy, simple. I'm pretty active on LinkedIn too. Check me out there.

Julie: Okay, fantastic. Thanks everyone for joining us today. Remember to download, Make Your C Suite Stand Out on LinkedIn at [wantleverage.com](http://wantleverage.com) and I'll see you next time on PR Patter.