Whitepaper

Build vs Buy: Implementing The Right Newsroom Solution

We sat down with the global spokesperson from one of the world's biggest companies. Here's what we learned.

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Introduction

Implementing a newsroom solution requires an evaluation that takes into account the needs of multiple teams across communications, marketing, digital, branding and engineering departments.

This evaluation often begins with the question to build in-house, or to buy a commercial platform that offers flexibility that offers solutions for all involved teams, such as pr.co. We've created this whitepaper to help communications and engineering teams construct a well-argumented decision on whether to build or buy a newsroom solution.

What's pr.co?

pr.co is an Amsterdam-based Software as a Service company that equips communications teams at global brands to get exposure. Our activities are two-fold:

1. We design, develop and maintain websites for communications teams
pr.co designs, develops and implements tailor-made websites for communications teams, such as newsrooms, corporate blogs, thought-leadership platforms and investor relations websites.

2. We equip communications teams with the platform to get the job done
We've built an all-in-one platform that helps communications teams write and publish beautiful stories, schedule and send out news announcements, manage relationships with media contacts in accordance with GDPR, simplify editorial workflows between internal teams and external parties, and easily track what teams are working on.

We work with 300+ companies, all over the world. Our customers include global brands like Heineken, Taylormade Golf, Dolby, Shimano, WeTransfer, Viacom, Gofundme, and Bell Flight.

Why implement a newsroom solution?

A newsroom is the public-facing heart of your company: it's where journalists, customers and stakeholders learn about latest company news and developments. Where the largest chunk of your website is focused on your products or services, so basically *what you do*. Your

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newsroom informs your audience *what's happening* and more importantly, it shows *why you do it*.

Goals of implementing a good newsroom solution differ per company, but these are the most common reasons we've come across with our customers:

1. **Increase free media exposure**: The best way to get free media exposure is by making sure relationships with media contacts are as good as they can be. You need to make sure information is clear, (brand) consistent and sent in good time.

2. **Increase brand awareness**: Publish stories to increase visibility among your (international) audience.

3. **Increased consistency**: A centralised platform helps you deliver a cohesive brand narrative through stories that drive conversations about your brand.

4. **Lean governance**: Reduce complexity by organising content creation through a single dedicated newsroom instead of a multiplicity of PR, communication and marketing roles distributed across the company. Having one dedicated platform enables a greater degree of coherence between internal and external communication, global and local initiatives.

5. **Reduced costs**: Pool together efforts, resources and information. Become self-reliant with regard to ad agencies, cutting costs over the long run.

6. **Lead generation**: Using (purpose-driven) content as a way to generate leads.

Some teams are successful in bringing communications to scale with an internally built platform. However, this isn't the right choice for every team. Rolling out a successful and effective newsroom solution, whether built, or bought, comes down to these success factors:

Success factors	Why it matters
Ease of use: **Will the communications team know how to use the platform?**	Usability, especially for non-technical teams, can make the difference between communications as an afterthought, and a brand-altering communications strategy. Secondly, a well-designed and organized newsroom reduces the amount of 'standard' press requests. Instead of wasting expensive personnel for these requests, press wil be able to easily find all news and media assets online.

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Success factors	Why it matters
Design: **Will the newsroom convince journalists to pick up my story? And will journalists know how to navigate the newsroom?**	Content gets you to a site, but design keeps you on the site. A good design makes news more readable, makes people curious, and connects the story with the brand.
Total cost of ownership: **What is the total cost of ownership for designing, developing and maintaining the newsroom, and platform over time?**	The more time that your developers spend maintaining internal tooling, the less they will spend on developing customer-facing features and functionality.
People: **How will my teams know how to use the platform? And where do they go when something goes wrong?**	An often overlooked problem is that the work from your engineering team doesn't stop after the build. Users needs training to get the hang of the platform, and immediate support when something goes wrong.
Innovation: **How do I make sure my team stays up-to-date with industry trends? And with changes in legislation?**	Websites, tools, and the technology behind them evolve. Maintenance of both the newsroom, as well as the platform is crucial to a successful outcome.

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Requirements for implementing a successful newsroom solution

A good newsroom solution is more than just a public-facing website. More importantly, it should include the tools, training and support to help your communication teams excel with it.

A successful newsroom solution consists of three elements: the public-facing newsroom, the platform that your communications teams will work with, and the help and training your teams get to make the new platform their own.

Newsroom solution		
Newsroom	**Software**	**Help & Training**
✔ Design	✔ Content creation	✔ Project management
✔ Development	✔ Contact management	✔ Software training
✔ Maintenance	✔ News distribution	✔ Support during office hours
	✔ Workflow management	✔ Evangelism
	✔ Tracking and reporting	
	✔ Maintenance	

To give you a better understanding of what these elements include, we've listed both the functional, as well as the system requirements below.

Functional requirements of a strong newsroom solution

The functional requirements include everything needed for a communications team to reach their goals. This includes the design, development and maintenance of a strong newsroom, but also the development, purchase and maintenance of the tools necessary to create, publish, distribute and track content, and to manage relationships with journalists, and stakeholders.

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Functional requirements to develop	What these consist of:
Public facing newsroom	• Articles, stories and news releases • Media kits and other media assets • Company bio pages • Pages with spokespeople, and how to contact them • Options for the press to follow news (RSS, press newsletter service) • Multiple language support • Support for teams in multiple countries • Awards • Events • Optimized for social media, and search engines. • Maintenance to keep the newsroom onbrand, • Security to keep (often sensitive) news safe
Content creation and content management	• Editor needs to support rich media content (hi-res images, videos, documents) • Editor needs to support 3rd party services (Youtube, Vimeo, Spotify, Datawrapper, etc.) • Teams need to be able to optimise for social media with the correct metadata. • CMS needs to allow collaboration between in-house teams and external parties according to internal policies and legislation. • Users need correct roles and permissions to manage consistency and decrease chance of accidental publications (and therefore possible reputation damage). • CMS should support releases under embargo - where the press receives it *before* the news officially goes live. • Multi-language support • Multi-country support • Tagging and categorisation of content • Tracking, analytics and reporting. • Security to keep (often sensitive) news safe
Contact and relationship management	• Teams need to be able to safely upload lists of media contacts • Filtering and segmentation of contacts. • Tracking behavioral data from press contacts (open rates, click rates, unsubscribes, • Search large groups of contacts • Notes • Permission management to make sure contacts don't get in the wrong hands. • GDPR compliancy.
News distribution	• Email distributions tightly integrated with the newsroom • Strong email authentication and security to prevent emails from going to spam. • GDPR compliancy • Integration with tracking tool on newsroom to measure efficiency of distributions. • Unsubscribe handling

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Functional requirements to develop	What these consist of:
Workflow management	• In-house teams need to be able to work together • Activity feeds • Chat • Revision history • Approval workflows • News delegation to colleagues abroad • Translation management • Clear user, and access management.
Tracking and reporting	• Newsroom analytics • Distribution analytics
Maintenance	• Keeping newsroom on-brand • Bug fixes • Adding functionalities on request

System requirements of a strong newsroom solution

The functional requirements are essential to help your team, or teams, do their job. Next to these functional requirements there are also a few system requirements that companies should take in mind when building an in-house solution. These requirements are to comply with company regulation (security), legislation (GDPR), or simply to make the newsroom available (availability) , useable (user management) and discoverable (SEO).

System requirements to develop	What these consist of:
Security	✔ SSL Encryption (HTTPS) ✔ IP whitelisting ✔ File upload whitelist ✔ Prevent Brute-Forcing ✔ Prevent Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) ✔ Prevent Cross-Site Request Forgery ✔ Prevent SQL Injection ✔ Prevent Replay attacks ✔ Email address confirmation ✔ Secure password salting ✔ Password strength testing ✔ Secure codebase via github.com ✔ API: Custom oAuth implementation ✔ Email address confirmation ✔ Database encryption ✔ Database SSL only ✔ Cookie based sessions ✔ Secure & httpOnly cookies ✔ Passed multiple security audits ✔ Secure password handling ✔ User input sanitization

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System requirements to develop	What these consist of:
Availability	Especially a newsroom needs to be always available, even when the rest of the website is down. In times of crises, your newsroom is where you control the narrative.
User management and access management	
GDPR	Contact management and email distribution needs to happen in compliance with GDPR legislation. Failing to do so can result into (very) high fines.

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The newsroom implementation process

The newsroom production process

There are a few phases every company needs to go through to design, develop and implement a successful newsroom solution.

Newsroom production phases	
Phase 1: **Define & Design newsroom**	Branding, comms and marketing teams will start out with defining what content needs to be in the newsroom. Based on that, designers will start designing the newsroom from scratch. The result is a clickable mock-up that will go through a few iterations.
Phase 2: **Develop newsroom**	Once the design is approved, a development team will start coding the newsroom. Again, a few iterations back and forth, will result into a strong customer journey.
Phase 3: **Develop integrations**	Next step, integrate the newsroom with all systems: • CMS • CRM and email distribution • Workflow management • Analytics • Tracking systems • Reporting systems
Phase 4: **Manage newsroom and integrations**	Fourth phase, testing the newsroom for heavy use: • Security upgrades to prevent the site and CMS from being hacked • SEO updates • Branding updates • Traffic spike tests • Keep software up-to-date with industry changes
Phase 5: **Train communications teams**	Provide documentation and training to help the communications teams get started with the newsroom.
Phase 6: **Adapt software to stay up-to-date with industry changes.**	As the communications industry changes, software needs to change with it. We continuously work on improving our platform to keep you team up-to-date.
Phase 7: **Continuous IT support**	Training new employees, onboarding new teams, questions about the platform. Our support team will be happy to help you out via phone, email and live chat.
Phase 8: **Evaluate and scale up**	Reaping good results? We can add users, teams, countries and languages with the click of a button.

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Total cost of building your own solution

Building an in-house newsroom solution typically comes with a relatively small upfront investment. Over time, however, additional features and customizations become necessary as more in-house teams and external partners are starting to use the tool, and maintenance burdens begin to distract engineers from core product focus.

Beyond basic features

As teams grow to include more communications professionals, marketers, analysts, and external agencies, they will inevitably require more complex features from your internal tool. Some examples of advanced features are approval management, news delegation to colleagues abroad, email personalization features, multi-language and multi-country support, etc.

Maintenance cost

Teams that choose to build a solution in-house, often do so because it will give them unlimited flexibility to integrate with their application codebase and existing systems and processes. However, many teams quickly find that public relations, and newsroom solution design is not their core competency, and that unlimited flexibility means more opportunities for something to break.

When something breaks, there's someone who can fix it. Companies who successfully scale their external communicatinos with a homebuilt system have engineers on staff who are dedicated to supporting the system with ongoing maintenance and enabling others in the organization.

The upfront cost may be small, but the ongoing maintenance, care, service and training of your solution and the teams is where you'll spend most of your resources.

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Example of a cost estimation:

Human Resources	
Designing the newsroom	1 FTE for 2 months
Development and integration of your newsroom	1 FTE for 6 months
Project management	1 FTE continuously
Technical lead to manage newsroom and platform	1 FTE continuously
Maintenance of platform and newsroom (bug fixes, updates)	3 FTE continuously
Total	5 FTE continuously, 1 FTE for 6 months, and 1 FTE for three months. ± **$280.000 in the first year**

Tooling	Monthly pricing
CMS	between $0 and $2000
CRM (salesforce)	Between $25 and $300 per seat
Project / workflow management (asana, basecamp, etc)	Between $15 and $300
Email distribution	Between $0 and $500
Website reporting (google analytics)	Free
Total	**Between $500,- and $100.000,- in the first year**

Ownership of code

On many smaller teams, the person who built the tool holds much of the knowledge of how it works and how to troubleshoot, and documentation and support often become secondary priorities to work on customer-facing features. But what if that person leaves? With in-house built websites and platforms, teams often find it difficult to prioritize the work necessary to keep the tool up and running for regular use. Engineers will get pulled into other, customer-facing projects. And let's face it - isn't that where we need them most?

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Outsourcing benefits

Friendly, and dedicated support
If something goes wrong, pr.co has your back. Our support team is available via live chat, email, and phone.

Innovation
We stay up with industry trends and knowledge so you don't have to. This information is shared with pr.co customers in weekly qualitative articles.

Privacy & GDPR First
Stay up to date with latest (data/privacy) legislation.

Project management, & account management
During the design, development, implementation phases, you'll have a dedicated account manager who will manage your project smoothly. After that, your account manager, will regularly check in with you and the team(s).

Future active development (incl. Artificial Intelligence)
Tight integration with Match and our machine learning platform Pulse

Out-of-the-box analytics & tracking integrations
We integrate fully with your internal analytics and tracking tools, so you can use all of your favourite tools for our newsroom as well. We also provide our own tracking and reporting functionality.

Permission management system
Easily invite external parties like agencies, without giving them full access to all contacts and content.

Approval system
Increase accountability.

Flexibility
External API so you can hook other systems in to the same endpoints as your newsroom.

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Conclusion

Before building, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are you able to build a system that's easy to use for your communications teams?

2. How will we support multiple languages, and teams in multiple countries?

3. Do we have enough dedicated engineering capacity to maintain the public-facing newsroom? And to maintain and add updates to the platform?

4. Are we able to support and train communications teams, and answer questions they might have?

5. How agile is our team? Will we be able to make both a newsroom, as well as the software within a reasonable time frame?

When building makes sense:

1. **When you're an early stage start-up** (no PR manager, or communications team). When you're just starting out, and PR and external communications is not yet an integral part of your marketing strategy, investing in a tailor-made newsroom solution is probably not yet the right choice. (might want to check out our Essentials package, though!)

2. **When you need an on-premise solution.** As a Software as a Service company, we believe in cloud hosting, and do not offer on-premise solutions. Do give us a call if you're interested to chat about our private hosting solutions, or other enterprise grade security solutions.

Questions?

For technical questions, you can reach out to:
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For any commercial, product or project-related questions, reach out to:
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