

O'DWYER'S PR REPORT

Bacon's becomes Cision

By Steve Newman

In 1932, Robert H. Bacon Sr. overheard two people at a restaurant discussing how difficult it was to find publications that were appropriate news outlets for their companies. Before he finished dinner, he had a brainstorm: why not put together a booklet of such publications, specifying the markets they served and the identities of their editors?



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Thus was born the world's leading media information company. From his garage in a Chicago suburb, Bacon compiled a book of media contacts with commentary

about how PR practitioners might influence editorial content. He quickly discovered that his new customers could also benefit from collection of their clients' news stories that appeared in print. So his newly named company, Bacon's Clipping Service, also began manually clipping copies of clients' coverage from newspapers across the country.

In 1952, Robert H. Bacon Jr joined his father and published the first Bacon's Publicity Checker, a compilation of newspapers and magazines in the U.S. with editorial content and their editorial contacts. In 1984, Robert (Rob) H. Bacon IV joined his father and shortly thereafter published the first edition of the Radio and TV Publicity Checker. The Publicity Checkers, subsequently renamed the Bacon's Directories, have been published each year and are now in their 55th edition.

In 1994, Bacon's began providing the content from the directories in an electronic version with software that greatly enhanced the speed and functionality of the media relations process. The initial product,

MediaSource, was available on CD-ROM and migrated to the Internet on January 1, 2000. The Bacon's Directories and Media Source have served thousands of PR practitioners through three generations.

Through the years, Bacon's evolved to provide a broad range of additional services that also include print, broadcast and Internet monitoring, press release distribution, and quantitative and qualitative measurement and analysis of the coverage clients received. It also acquired some of the top companies in the PR services business including MediaMap, Delahaye and Multivision.

Seventy-five years later, Bacon's – now named Cision – offers the same research, contact, monitoring and evaluation services as in its early years, but it provides them on a global basis using the latest technology to keep customers current with the media in real time.

Growing with PR

The story of Cision is more than that of a successful company. It is a story that parallels and brings to light the history of the public relations industry it helped create.

Robert Bacon's brainstorm came not long after Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee and other pioneers invented the discipline of PR. Before their groundbreaking work, there were "press agents" hired to publicize stories, but there were no true practitioners of the science of public relations.

As social scientists, Bernays and Lee put research-based understanding of consumer psychology and the effects of media on consumer behavior ahead of publicity. They were among the early believers in the dictum, "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it." Best practices in the fledgling PR industry, therefore, meant basing campaigns on professional research and rigorously monitoring results. Bacon's services enabled a new class of PR professionals to instill scientific methods and manage-

ment discipline in the public relations industry at its inception.

Further, as technologies evolved, so did Bacon's. From an era of handwritten letters and limited telephone communication, the industry evolved along with the expansion of the modern telecommunications network, dramatically speeding up communications and enlarging the universe of media that companies could interact with. And the dawn of the information processing age made it possible to track contacts more easily than ever before and plan campaigns based on analysis of historical results as well as sophisticated research identifying appropriate media to reach consumers with finely targeted messages.

Back to the future

Today, Cision's mission is the same as it was 75 years ago: make PR professionals more productive and effective, and enable documentation and measurement of their results. However, as the world has gotten smaller, the job of PR professionals has gotten bigger. The means of communication, and the audiences one must communicate to, have gotten vastly more diverse.

In an era of universal access to broadband connections and Web 2.0 social networking, the role of the PR professional has moved rapidly beyond that of an intermediary communicating the message of the client to a limited number of media outlets and other publics. Rather, PR professionals today must be participants in an ongoing digital conversation where perceptions about their clients are held – and shaped in real time – by a complex matrix of audiences.

The next step in media information services is toward integration of multiple, real-time information research, contact, and monitoring and evaluation services into a unified dashboard that makes real-time management more easy and productive than ever. It points to a future even more exciting than that envisioned by Robert Bacon the evening he overheard that fateful restaurant conversation in 1932. Stay tuned.

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