

2024

PR AND MARKETING FOR THE TELECOMS SECTOR

Excelling in an unpredictable climate

BABEL



INTRODUCTION

The telecoms industry came into prominence during the pandemic as the demand for remote working surged, and reliance on networks intensified. Investments in network capacity and expansion paid off and service providers managed the increase in traffic. As we fast forward four years, the industry's landscape may appear more challenging, but there is reason for optimism.

The push to extend better connectivity to homes has spurred investment and competition, particularly in the fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) market. Yet this competition, along with extensive fibre overbuilds, has left many companies struggling to attract paying customers.

On the mobile front, the anticipated uptake of 5G has been underwhelming, with the lack of killer use cases dampening consumer willingness to pay more, especially amidst a cost-of-living crisis. Business uptake has also been slow, with many waiting for the roll-out of 5G SA to leverage the promised gigabit speeds and ultra-low latency needed for next-generation applications.

Combined with a cautious global economy, telecom companies are feeling the squeeze. European giants like Vodafone¹ and Telefónica² are resorting to asset sales and workforce reductions to bolster profitability and alleviate debt. Similarly, in the US, AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon have collectively cut about 8% of their workforce to navigate the evolving market dynamics³.



These shifts are reverberating through the vendor ecosystem, evident in Ericsson's recent earnings report, reflecting a decline in sales despite securing a \$14bn radio deal with AT&T¹ at the end of last year. Dell'Oro also recently reported that the RAN market has declined 15-30% in Q1 2024², and things aren't much better in the mobile core market, which is estimated to have fallen 10%³.

However, amidst this challenging landscape, there is reason for optimism.

AI, for example, presents a range of opportunities for telcos. By monetising network traffic and harnessing the power of automation to drive operational efficiencies, costs can be reduced to make telcos more competitive.

The telecoms industry is actively embracing cloud technologies and working with new technology vendors to help them operate with the same agility as hyper-scaler companies.

Crucially, internet traffic continues to increase at a steady rate across networks. So, as more customers sign up for the fibre services that have been deployed or are enticed by the prospects of 5G standalone, more capacity and infrastructure will be needed, driving growth.

RIDING THE HEADWINDS WITH A CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

PR and marketing strategies have a crucial role in reshaping the narrative and reinforcing the resilience of companies throughout the sector. By effectively communicating technological advancements, innovative solutions, and strategic initiatives, carefully structured PR and marketing can improve brand awareness and perception, attract investors, and improve customer confidence.

During these challenging times, marketing and PR budgets are often first on the chopping block. However, research points to the fact that sustaining communications activities is key to growth during times of economic uncertainty.



Looking at the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009, *"the companies that continued to market through the recession gained 3.5 times more brand visibility than those that cut budgets and waited it out."* (Little, 2022)

With that being said, only considered investment in the right PR and marketing activities will yield desirable outcomes. Companies must be discerning in their investment choices and cannot afford to engage with agencies that lack a comprehensive understanding of sector-wide opportunities.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN AGENCY

1. Sector-wide knowledge and understanding of the opportunities for your brand, in your area of the market.
2. Ability to turn PR campaigns into a pipeline, rather than securing coverage for coverage's sake.
3. Clear objectives and share of voice measurement to enable decisions based on data while maximising the effectiveness of investment.
4. An understanding of the marketing mix to ensure activities are integrated into the overall marketing strategy.

WHEN NEWS ISN'T AN OPTION: DRIVE AWARENESS THROUGH INSIGHTFUL THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

When investing in public relations, you must be confident that an agency is attuned to the major trends driving change across the sector and can help you carve out a differentiated and unique perspective on these topics. It should raise concerns if you work with an agency that relies too heavily on announcements as the primary means of engaging with media and analysts.

A good agency will assist in drafting and refining your announcements for maximum impact, but these should be viewed as supplementary activities to boost coverage. Instead, aim to generate steady coverage through thought leadership.

The media and the industry at large seek insightful commentary from experts on how technology is advancing, how the sector is overcoming challenges, and how to exploit new opportunities.

Classified as 'thought leadership', this type of content should be neutral (non-promotional) but designed to engage your target audience by providing industry insights related to the challenges and opportunities present in the market. This content will build trust in your brand, and encourage your targets to engage and learn more about your company. We discuss this in more detail later, but this underscores the importance of integrated PR and marketing – ensuring a seamless customer journey with content on your website that complements the messaging your audience encounters through third-party sources, such as media articles.

Thought leadership opportunities can take the form of contributed articles, comment opportunities, interviews, and newsjacking (responding to breaking news with concise and well-informed commentary, often very well received by the media and capable of generating significant coverage).



Success is based on the ability to offer interesting insights, with the right level of technical or high-level detail, depending on the media you're pitching to. Some publications and journalists – such as Iain Morris at Light Reading or Keith Dyer at the Mobile Network – will require more technical insights on major industry developments or trends. The same applies to analysts.

Conversely, journalists working for business or national publications (BBC, Bloomberg, CNBC, New York Times, etc.) may prefer less technical commentary, focusing instead on the impact of technology on consumers, particularly their wallets.

Knowing what content to provide to journalists, and the ability to develop both technical and high-level messaging to a high standard is crucial for telecoms companies aiming to reach a broad audience.



MAKING YOUR BRAND EASIER TO FIND

You can only make sales if people know who you are and what you do. PR is an excellent tool to make your brand easier to find while creating clear links to the problems you solve.

You can most accurately assess your market position (and the likelihood of your customers being able to find you) by looking at share-of-voice (SOV) and share-of-search (SOS), alongside conventional measurement metrics, such as coverage numbers, backlinks, message pull-through, etc.

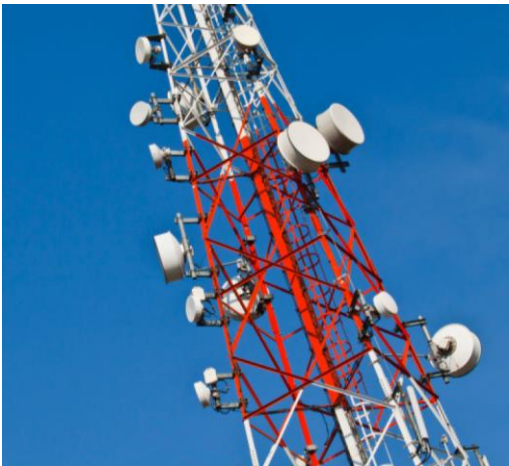
For PR, SOV refers to the level of coverage a company generates relative to its competitors. While it's possible to calculate SOV based solely on company names, the true value lies in assessing coverage on topics closely related to your core business objectives. In the media that cover these issues, this approach will drive impact, inquiry, and action. This approach ensures that the results match your business goals and offers a more accurate measure of what potential and current customers are looking for.



SOS, in the context of PR, is similar to SOV but refers to coverage *search rankings* on identified key topics. Beware of the pitfalls of coverage for coverage's sake. A 'more is more' approach is an excellent way to plough through budgets fast, wasting your time and funds on publications that don't resonate with your target audience. [Our research](#) found that 64% of decision-makers rely on technology and vertical trade media when consuming news, over the business trades (44%) and national news sites (43%) – showing that it pays to do your homework before pitching; selecting the best and most fitting publications, potentially over a household name.

At Babel, we use our proprietary SOS tool, RUMA (which stands for Really Useful Media Analysis), to identify which publications, in which geographies, rank particularly highly on Google for a certain topic. This enables us to be targeted in which publications we pitch and ensures coverage results are geared towards SEO performance and searchability.

By improving SOV and SOS you are effectively boosting your online visibility on Google and other search platforms. This makes it much more likely that a prospect will find you when searching for a product or solution to a challenge, or to exploit a new opportunity.



INTEGRATING PR AND MARKETING

Telecoms companies are increasingly making a significant impact on their target markets by integrating PR and marketing efforts. This approach helps brands to attract, nurture, and convert prospects through customised content, tailored to their audience at every interaction point. By leveraging all channels, companies can drive awareness throughout the buying cycle, offering a consistent narrative across every platform that buyers engage with.

As the image illustrates, initial awareness can be driven through third-party endorsements, such as media coverage and analyst reports. Additionally, content on social channels and advertising play crucial roles in generating initial awareness and building trust with your target audience.

When combined, these activities capture your customers' attention, moving them to the 'consideration' phase of the buying cycle, where they engage directly with the brand. At this stage, most buyers actively seek more information through a company's website and owned content, such as whitepapers, blogs, and videos. By gating assets like whitepapers, you can generate valuable lead information and it also allows for targeted follow-up and personalised engagement, building up your sales pipeline..

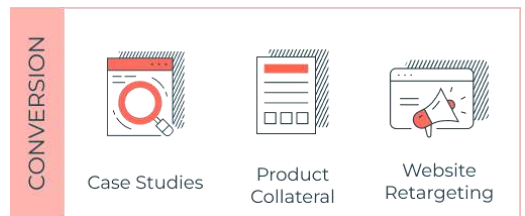
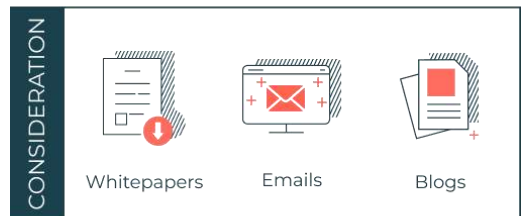
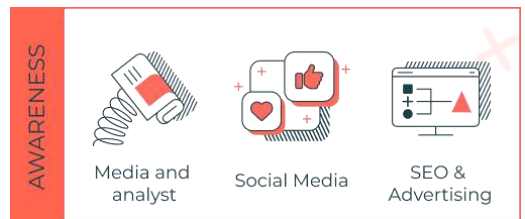
Employing multiple and varied touchpoints with your prospects, moves them through the stages of the buying cycle to the ultimate point of 'conversion' – where they are ready to make a purchase. At this stage, case studies and detailed product collateral ensure that they can feel confident in their purchasing decision.

While activating an integrated campaign may sound simple in theory, in practice, it requires considerable care and is best implemented with the support of an experienced agency. To give your integrated campaign the best chance of success, ensure that all elements of your strategy are aligned and developed using consistent messaging and tone of voice.

At Babel, we always consider the bigger picture, building campaigns and supporting content creation to achieve your company's ultimate business goals.

It starts with understanding your broader objectives and then building a campaign to achieve them. Whether the goal is to position your company as a leader in 5G standalone, AI, or automation, we work to define unique messaging on your key topic, identify available or 'creatable' data (organic or third-party research), and gather customer proof points.

This information is then built into a comprehensive PR and marketing plan for activities that typically run for a quarter of the year.



A MARKETING CAMPAIGN CENTERED AROUND RESEARCH, A WHITEPAPER AND BROADER MARKETING ACTIVITY

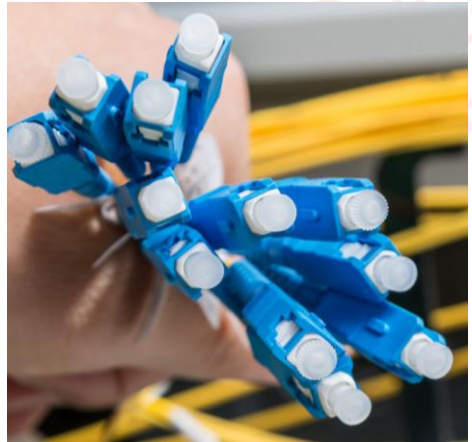
UNDERSTANDING THE OPPORTUNITY

TXO is a provider of critical telecoms network equipment and asset management services via the circular economy. It wanted to create a PR and marketing campaign that positioned it as a leader in equipment decommissioning and highlighted the drivers and benefits of this activity, which is a core component of its business.

CREATING THE CONTENT

Babel developed a survey investigating operators' views on decommissioning, also exploring how it can promote circular economy efforts.

This data informed our subsequent whitepaper on this topic, unveiling a range of drivers for decommissioning. The data and whitepaper key take-outs were then summarised in a press release. We also organised a media and analyst webinar to present the findings to a range of key influencers in the space, designed to generate debate and discussion around the research.



DELIVERING RESULTS

The research was covered by publications including Light Reading, The Register, Total Telecom and analyst firms Wireless Watch and Rethink Research.

We also engaged with Sheryl Lee, a reporter at Bloomberg, who was writing a feature about copper decommissioning. She spoke with TXO and featured the company heavily in her article, providing international exposure. **The article has been directly attributed to TXO being contacted by two telecoms companies** (one in the US and one in Europe) that have now engaged TXO's decommissioning services. The whitepaper has also been downloaded several hundred times, helping TXO build up its pipeline of prospects.

BABEL'S APPROACH TO DEFINING A CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

As you will have seen from the case studies above, our approach towards delivering campaign work, thought leadership and market leadership, is based on our working methodology; Understand, Create, Deliver.

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR MARKET

We want to know your ideal customer, what keeps them up at night and what challenges they are trying to solve. This helps us determine what they might be reading and what they are trying to educate themselves on.

We're further supported on this front by our own research, conducted to establish the psychology and processes behind your buyer's buying habits. You can read more about our findings [here](#).



STEP 2: CREATE THE CONTENT

We then look at creating stories, thought leadership and content, focusing on those challenges.

We maximise efficiencies by developing a position paper which then cascades across the different channels – from PR to social media, to email and your website.

STEP 3: DELIVER A RETURN ON INVESTMENT

We identify where we can have maximum impact and deliver our campaigns against those channels. You can't be everything to everyone, so we like to focus on where we're going to truly move the needle with our messaging. This is then measured via SOV and SOS, as well as internal measures (such as pipeline and revenue) to ensure the effectiveness of your campaign.

After almost 20 years of experience in the telecoms sector, we've learned a thing or two about how to craft integrated PR and marketing campaigns that deliver meaningful business results. Alongside our valued clients, we've successfully navigated choppy waters than those the industry is currently facing, which is exactly when you need a firm hand on the tiller.

If you'd like to discuss how Babel can help your organisation come out on top, please...

[GET IN TOUCH](#)

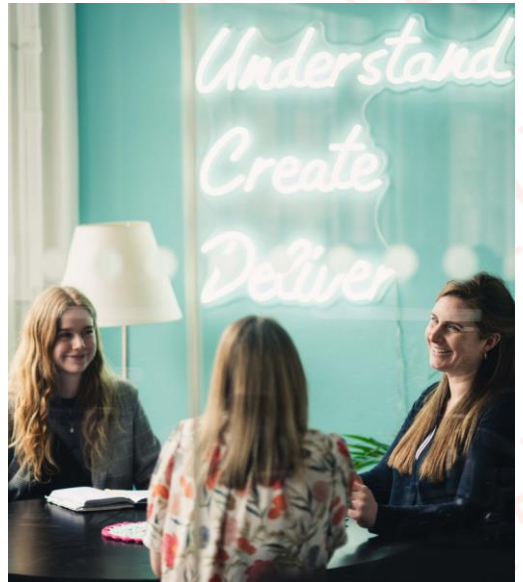


ABOUT BABEL

A proven partner for the telecoms industry to bring together your PR and marketing activities.

Babel boasts nearly 20 years of experience in the telecoms sector, covering both mobile and fixed networks. In the mobile sector, we have collaborated with companies specialising in RAN hardware and software, core networks, 5G fixed wireless, BSS and OSS, security, cloud, testing and validation, among other areas. For fixed networks, we have worked with global infrastructure providers, and vendors of optical, Ethernet, WLAN, and Wi-Fi technologies. This includes companies such as Amdocs, Baicells, BICS, Ciena, Exa Infrastructure, HPE/Aruba Networks, Neos Networks, Metaswitch, the Telecom Infra Projects, Totogi/TelcoDR, VIAVI and many more.

We are attuned to the major trends across the telecoms sector. In the mobile and wireless space, this includes OpenRAN/vRAN, 5G standalone, network virtualisation, and network slicing. For fixed networks, our knowledge encompasses optical connectivity (400G, 800G), Wi-Fi 7, network orchestration and automation, and everything in between.



We have long-standing relationships with media (business and trade) and analysts across the sector, evidenced by the 120+ media and analyst briefings we typically secure at Mobile World Congress each year.

Our deep understanding of network technology enables us to develop content such as whitepapers, webpages, and other digital assets, as well as a full range of media and analyst-focused content.

At a time when every investment must be a considered one, make sure you're choosing an agency with a proven track record in the sector. One that can understand your business and where it is going. [Get in touch](#) to learn more.



¹ <https://www.ft.com/content/57b53ba7-2329-4f41-8fb2-13d6542578a2>

² <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/telefonica-seeks-cut-5100-jobs-spain-by-2026-union-says-2023-12-04/>

³ <https://www.lightreading.com/ai-machine-learning/after-t-mobile-layoffs-big-us-telco-job-cuts-hit-28-100-in-2023>

⁴ <https://www.ericsson.com/en/press-releases/2023/12/att-to-accelerate-open-and-interoperable-radio-access-networks-ran-in-the-united-states-through-new-collaboration-with-ericsson>

⁵ <https://www.delloro.com/news/ran-market-still-a-disaster/>

⁶ <https://www.delloro.com/news/1q-2024-mobile-core-network-market-drops-10-percent-amid-economic-challenges/>