Metricomm®

Strategic insights about media impact

Search Advertising and SEO Depend on PR.

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Online media coverage produces a quantifiable uplift in search volumes. This means that PR contributes directly to the effectiveness of both paid search advertising and SEO spend

For as long as it has existed, the PR industry has lived in the shadow of advertising. Over the years, it was viewed by many – including those in the industry – as cheap advertising. PR measurement perpetuated the myth, with the infamous 'advertising value equivalent', or AVE, used to show what amazing value PR represented.

All of this could be about to change. Far from being the poor relation of advertising, new research from Metricomm shows that media coverage plays a key role in search advertising and SEO success.

For the first time, we reveal the extent to which the audience reading online media coverage contributes to a quantifiable uplift in search, directly influencing the effectiveness of paid search advertising. If there is no search, the advertising will have no effect. If media coverage can be used to generate higher levels of search, paid advertising has a greater influence on consumers, encouraging them along the path to purchase.

The story so far…

Previously, Metricomm identified a powerful relationship between the pattern of audiences generated by online media coverage and patterns of search volumes. It showed that media coverage is more powerful than people give it credit for, producing a measurable impact on audience behaviour. This is a real breakthrough for the communication industry, going way beyond traditional PR metrics, which are based on volume of coverage, or estimates of reach.

Metricomm's data closes the gap between comms activity and the audience-centric metrics that business executives are desperate for – evidence that media coverage is delivering hard business outcomes, including increased sales.

Our methodology allows us to confidently quantify the impact

1. Identify which media coverage actually influences the audience
2. Calculate the proportion of search for a brand that can be attributed to this media audience
3. See how the media coverage creates uplift in share of search over time for a brand, compared to key competitors
4. Understand which named media are having most impact on search uplift and therefore on search advertising and SEO effectiveness.

Case study: electric vehicles

As an example, we analysed online media coverage for UK electric vehicle brands. This sector has seen a massive slump in private sales during 2023. Building on previous work, we studied the data to see whether a similar powerful relationship between the pattern of audiences generated by online media coverage and patterns of search volumes could be identified. The results were compelling.

- A substantial fall in size of audience from online media coverage (-55%) corresponded with a sharp fall in Google searches for EV brands (-49%)

Of course, correlation does not equal causation and other factors have also contributed to the drop in private EV transactions, but the hard evidence tells us that such a dramatic fall in online media coverage will undoubtedly have been reflected in actual sales. Reading online media coverage is a major factor in prompting Google searches for more information about organisations, brands and products along the consumer journey to purchase.

- Over the first half of 2023 around 83% of UK consumer searches for electric car brands can be explained by the audience generated by online media coverage at a significance level of 99.9%

While there are other factors at play, not least political decisions, **an obvious way to alleviate falls in Google searches and increase the effectiveness of search advertising and SEO for EVs would be to increase PR spend.**

Identifying which media coverage actually influences the audience

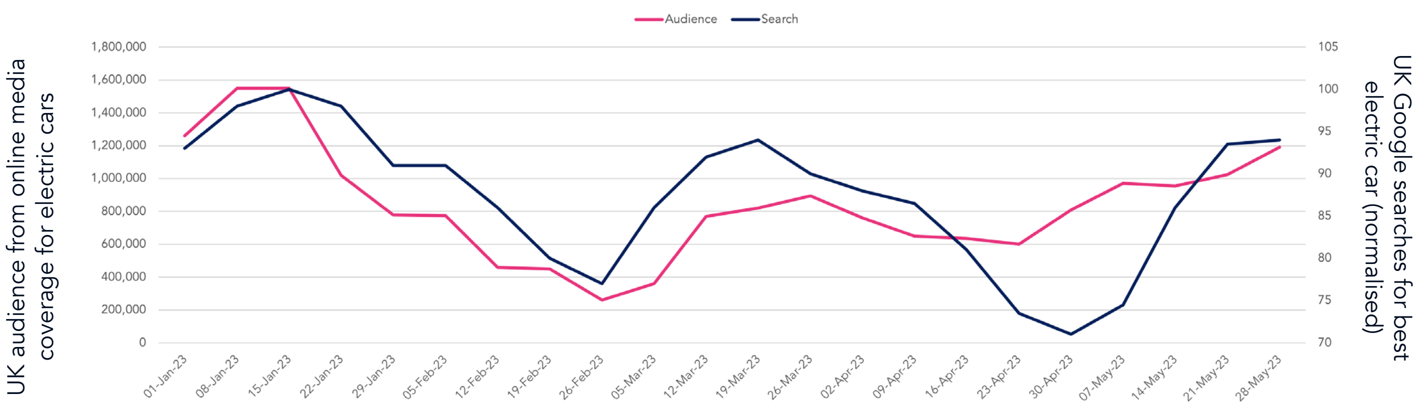
Taking a precision approach to media effectiveness entails using a robust methodology. This might seem a little technical, but we think it's important to show our workings, to prove that our insights are extremely reliable.

Metricomm combines rigorous statistical analysis and AI to identify the relationships between audiences generated by online media coverage and other consumer data sets. For the consumer data for this study, we used searches from UK Google Trends, which is a highly reliable proxy for consumer interest and a key business outcome for all brands.

First, we needed to identify the coverage most likely to have been read by consumers with a potential interest in purchasing an electric car between 1 January and the end of May, when the study was carried out. Unlike traditional media evaluation, we don't treat all coverage as equal. In fact, we frequently find that only around 20% of the coverage achieved for any brand or topic genuinely affects consumer behaviour.

The key is to discover which coverage is having this effect, so that communications teams can build this insight into their strategy and planning.

The chart below shows the output from Metricomm's platform that reveals a very strong relationship between the audience generated by online media coverage for electric cars and UK Google searches for best electric car over this period. Best electric car was chosen for this first part of the study because it is a popular generic search term for consumers interested in electric cars. It is also a term frequently selected by EV manufacturers for their search advertising.



The relationship between audience generated by UK online media coverage for 'electric cars' and UK Google searches for 'best electric car' between 1 January and 28 May, 2023 (data for left hand axis is pink and for the right hand axis is dark blue)

This represents far more than a coincidental pattern. Metricomm's methodology means that the strength of the relationship in the chart can be evidenced statistically. This analysis reveals that

- around 43% of the UK Google searches for 'best electric car' across the January – May period can be explained by UK online media coverage for 'electric cars', at a statistical significance level of 99.9%
- For the period between 1 January and 9 April, which encompasses the dates for new registration plates, 79% of UK Google searches can be explained by online media coverage at a statistical significance level of 99.9999%. In other words, the probability that this relationship just happened by chance is less than one in a million

We always need to be careful when interpreting these results because, as already stated, correlation does not necessarily mean causation. It is highly likely that UK Google searches for best electric cars increased over this period at least partly because of new plate registrations and we therefore needed to take account of this in the study. To achieve this, we took advantage of another output from the Metricomm platform, which identifies patterns in changes between data sets. For example, if there was an increase or decrease in audience generated by online media coverage did a similar and related increase or decrease also take place in UK Google searches for best electric car?

Asking that question produced very interesting results. Here, in fact, we saw an even stronger relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.91 at a statistical significance level of 99.9999%. In simple terms, this means we could be totally confident that the coverage we were analysing was representative of what consumers with a potential interest in buying an electric car were likely to be reading from January to May 2023.

The impact of online media coverage on consumer interest for EV brands

Having established the media coverage to be used for the analysis, the next step was to determine any relationship between electric car brands covered in the content and consumer interest over the period. As explained above, we can measure this using search data from Google Trends.

Given these are completely independent data sets, with no direct links between them, the only way that any relationships could exist would be down to the impact and influence of the media coverage on the consumer audience carrying out the Google searches for the different brands.

The audience impact of media coverage depends largely on what it is about. The relevance of named brands in the content therefore must be determined accurately and reliably. Metricomm's platform achieves this by splitting every piece of media coverage into its constituent parts. Each of these sections is analysed and the resulting data aggregated to provide a highly accurate picture of what the coverage is about, along with the strength (relevance) of any named brands within it.

We compared the share of UK Google searches for named electric car brands with the share of relevance/audience for the brand from the online media coverage about electric cars. The straight line formed by the data (as also shown in the chart opposite) tells us that a strong linear relationship exists between consumer interest for electric car brands and the share of relevance/audience for the brands in the media coverage.

Measuring the strength of the relationship reveals that around 83% of consumer interest in the electric car brands can be explained by the online media coverage at a significance level of 99.9999%, recurring. Once again, the probability that this relationship can be explained by chance is less than one in a million.

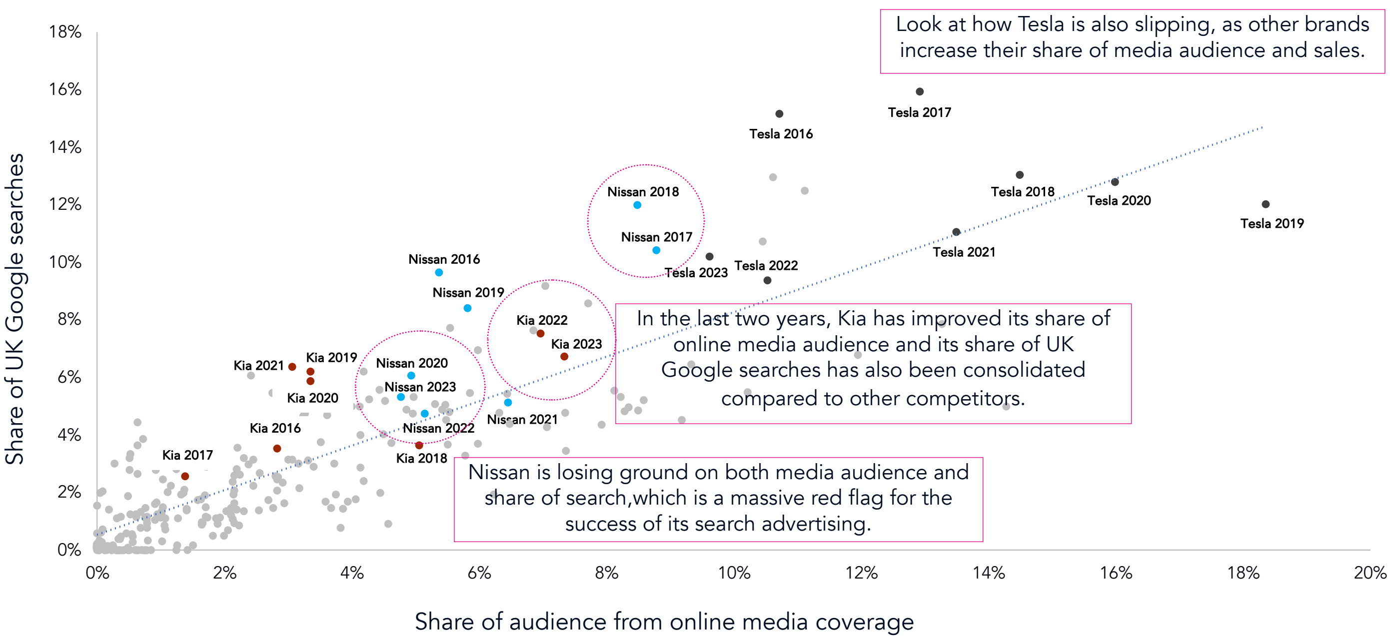
Quantifying search uplift and its consequences for sales

High-consideration products and services such as cars, mobile phones, holidays and white goods involve search at numerous points along the consumer path to purchase, while the cost-of-living crisis has led to many more searches for even the cheapest commodity items.

The automotive industry is fiercely competitive. Metricomm's data covered 29 EV brands on sale in the UK, all fighting for market share in the face of declining consumer interest. Our methodology allows us to cost-effectively compare the impact of media coverage on search uplift across all of these brands. This provides instant actionable insights, but also uncovers long-term trends that are strong indicators of brand health and likely sales performance.

"Search is not only a primary destination where consumers seek information, but also a bridge between above-the-line and lower funnel marketing. This makes it a crucial channel for us." Jane Fenn, Head of Brand Marketing, Kia UK.

Kia recognises the power of search in pushing sales leads through the funnel. Metricomm decided to test whether Kia's online media coverage has contributed to the effectiveness of this strategy. First, we compared the size of media audience to share of Google search for the 29 EV brands over the past eight years.



Audience generated by online media coverage for Tesla, Nissan and Kia vs UK Google electric car searches by brand: yearly from Jan-2016 to Jun-2023

As we can see, Kia's strategy is working. In 2022-23, its share of media audience and share of search have improved compared to its previous performance. This will help Kia maintain sales interest from consumers as the EV market dwindles. Compare Kia's results to two competitors and we can see how market leader Tesla is losing ground to champion challengers in the sector. Likewise, Nissan, a brand which has reiterated its commitment to electric cars, is losing share of audience and share of search. This is a warning that its paid search advertising will be less impactful. One way the brand could counter this decline in search is to invest more in PR to generate a larger audience.

Metricomm's ability to quantify the uplift in search generated by media audience allows us to drill down further, so we can see how every brand performs compared to its rivals.

Kia is demonstrably the most effective brand at generating search uplift from media audience. Its search uplift in May 2023 was 5.66% and in June a further 6.21%. Tesla, by contrast, is close to the bottom of the table with negative search uplift of -11.74% and -13.38% in the same two months. These percentages may seem small, but for brands generating tens of thousands of searches every month, the uplift achievable from PR and media coverage provides the marginal gains that reinforce competitive advantage and increase the chance of converting interest to sales.

Search Advertising Uplift: change between May and June 2023

Rank	Brand	May 23	Jun 23	+/-
1	Kia	5.66%	6.21%	↑
2	MG	3.41%	3.96%	↑
3	Hyundai	2.45%	2.25%	↓
4	Mini	1.69%	1.63%	↓
5	Mercedes	2.23%	1.63%	↓
6	Polestar	0.88%	0.80%	↓
7	Porsche	0.64%	0.61%	↓
8	Peugeot	0.27%	0.23%	↓
9	Skoda	0.24%	0.22%	↓
10	Genesis	0.23%	0.22%	↓
11	Cupra	0.22%	0.20%	↓
12	Lexus	0.04%	0.14%	↑
13	Fiat	-0.06%	0.09%	↑
14	Toyota	-0.76%	0.07%	↑
15	ORA	0.00%	0.00%	–
16	Land Rover	-0.03%	-0.05%	↓
17	Vauxhall	-0.05%	-0.07%	↓
18	Citreon	-0.10%	-0.10%	–
19	Jeep	-0.12%	-0.12%	–
20	Volvo	-0.11%	-0.15%	↓
21	Smart	-0.19%	-0.19%	–
22	Mazda	-0.23%	-0.25%	↓
23	Ford	-0.24%	-0.63%	↓
24	Jaguar	-1.78%	-1.71%	↑
25	VW	-3.34%	-3.68%	↓
26	Renault	-4.15%	-4.21%	↓
27	Nissan	-8.94%	-8.88%	↑
28	Renault	-4.15%	-4.21%	↑
29	Nissan	-8.94%	-8.88%	↓

Identifying which named media produce search uplift

We can take this analysis a step further, identifying which named online media produce the search uplift for each brand.

KIA

		Frequency			Search Advertising Uplift		
		All time	Last 12 months	Last 6 months	All time	Last 12 months	Last 6 months
1	www.express.co.uk	74.5%	100.0%	100.0%	3.0%	6.4%	7.5%
2	www.telegraph.co.uk	30.1%	98.1%	96.2%	2.2%	8.4%	7.0%
3	www.dailymail.co.uk	27.1%	90.4%	80.8%	1.8%	6.1%	5.9%
4	www.thesun.co.uk	63.8%	90.4%	80.8%	4.1%	6.2%	5.1%
5	www.bbc.co.uk	14.2%	50.0%	76.9%	1.7%	4.9%	4.0%
6	www.inews.co.uk	14.5%	51.9%	38.5%	0.9%	4.0%	3.2%
7	www.theguardian.com	61.1%	55.8%	19.2%	2.8%	3.5%	1.5%
8	www.independent.co.uk	22.7%	7.7%	15.4%	1.9%	0.6%	1.2%
9	www.heraldscotland.com	7.1%	21.2%	0.0%	0.9%	2.7%	0.0%
10	news.sky.com	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%
11	www.cnn.com	7.1%	44.2%	0.0%	0.5%	3.0%	0.0%
12	www.walesonline.co.uk	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%
13	www.mirror.co.uk	14.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%

NISSAN

		Frequency			Search Advertising Uplift		
		All time	Last 12 months	Last 6 months	All time	Last 12 months	Last 6 months
1	www.bbc.co.uk	46.6%	61.5%	100.0%	7.7%	9.4%	13.0%
2	www.independent.co.uk	41.9%	48.1%	96.2%	4.4%	6.1%	12.2%
3	www.telegraph.co.uk	47.7%	100.0%	100.0%	4.4%	9.2%	9.5%
4	inews.co.uk	42.7%	100.0%	100.0%	4.4%	9.0%	9.5%
5	www.dailymail.co.uk	21.6%	90.4%	80.8%	1.2%	3.9%	3.6%
6	www.express.co.uk	90.7%	80.8%	84.6%	6.0%	2.8%	3.0%
7	www.thesun.co.uk	49.0%	46.2%	30.8%	3.1%	2.3%	1.5%
8	www.theguardian.com	79.7%	9.6%	19.2%	5.9%	0.4%	0.9%
9	www.irishexaminer.com	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%
10	www.itv.com	14.2%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
11	news.sky.com	21.4%	7.7%	0.0%	2.3%	0.7%	0.0%
12	www.cnn.com	22.7%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%
13	www.scotsman.com	14.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%
14	www.dailyrecord.co.uk	22.5%	36.5%	0.0%	2.0%	3.5%	0.0%
15	www.ft.com	28.5%	26.9%	0.0%	1.6%	2.0%	0.0%
16	www.mirror.co.uk	31.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%

This actionable insight allows brands to focus their communication resources on the media that are most likely to be increasing search volume and improving results for paid search advertising and SEO.

Applying the findings to other sectors

Metricomm's approach to quantifying the impact of media coverage on search can be used equally well for other sectors. Here, we show the month-on-month uplift in search for a selection of UK universities. Although this is a different kind of category to consumer goods, we are still able to provide like-for-like comparisons between the results achieved by different organisations in the sector. This league table shows the universities for whom media coverage is driving additional searches for information and almost certainly bolstering traffic to their websites.

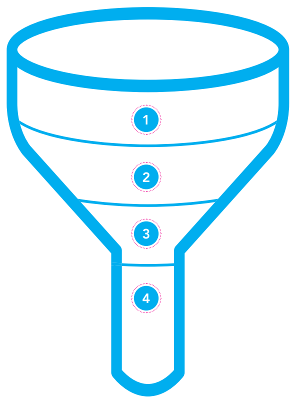
Number of months back = 1 month					
		Change in %		Change in position	
1	Bristol	↑	0.235%	–	0
2	Keele	↑	0.094%	↑	3
3	Surrey	↑	0.076%	–	0
4	Exeter	↑	0.075%	–	0
5	York	↑	0.034%	–	0
6	Southampton	↑	0.033%	–	0
7	Leeds	↑	0.026%	–	1
8	Leicester	↑	0.023%	–	0
9	UCL	↑	0.023%	–	0
10	Dundee	↑	0.015%	–	1
11	Portsmouth	↑	0.012%	–	1
12	Stirling	–	0.007%	–	0
13	Bournemouth	–	0.007%	–	0
14	Reading	–	0.004%	–	0
15	Swansea	–	0.003%	–	0
16	Loughborough	–	0.000%	–	0
17	Lincoln	↓	0.000%	–	0
18	Kingston	↓	0.000%	–	0
19	Coventry	↓	-0.001%	–	0
20	Northumbria	↓	-0.003%	–	1
21	Huddersfield	↓	-0.003%	–	0
22	Aberdeen	↓	-0.004%	–	1
23	Glasgow	↓	-0.004%	–	0
24	Sheffield	↓	-0.011%	–	0
25	Cardiff	↓	-0.011%	–	0
26	Worcester	↓	-0.012%	–	0
27	Essex	↓	-0.014%	–	0
28	Lancaster	↓	-0.014%	–	0
29	Leeds Beckett	↓	-0.018%	↓	-2
30	Sussex	↓	-0.022%	–	0
31	Hull	↓	-0.024%	–	0
32	Newcastle	↓	-0.029%	–	0
33	Bath	↓	-0.033%	–	0
34	Brunel	↓	-0.034%	↓	-2
35	Bangor	↓	-0.037%	↓	-3
36	Warwick	↓	-0.042%	–	0
37	Birmingham	↓	-0.046%	–	-1
38	Edinburgh	↓	-0.075%	–	0
39	Durham	↓	-0.108%	–	0
40	Manchester	↓	-0.122%	–	0

Similarly, the contribution of a named medium to search and sales can be uncovered for individual products in a wide range of categories. Our next example looks at whisky, something that consumers research and purchase more frequently than a car or a university. Typically, we include national media, regional media, consumer media, business and trade titles in our analysis. All of these will influence search outcomes to a greater or lesser extent; but the contribution of an individual medium varies by brand, product or service.

This example shows that dailymail.co.uk is the most influential publication in creating search uplift for the topic of whisky generically, as well as for Johnnie Walker. The level of media interest and frequency with which whisky-related articles are published mean that this is a very good publication to target in pursuit of search advertising goals. The proportion of articles carrying branded links – important in the world of digital PR – could be improved for Johnnie Walker, but the SEO potential of gaining coverage here is very high.

The summary of effectiveness allows us to see data from the last 8 years, compared to data from the last 6 months. This aids understanding of how things are changing compared to long-term trends. It also reveals that dailymail.co.uk produces on average 16,370 searches per month that are directly attributable to the online media audience. The subsequent numbers show how this translates into movement through the stages of the funnel to conversion, with about one third of the search generated by online media coverage expected to result in a transaction.

Summary for: www.dailymail.co.uk		
	Topic: Whisky	Brand: Johnnie Walker
Media influence	100	100
Media interest	Very high	Medium
Average weekly frequency: all time	170%	19%
Average weekly frequency: last 6 to 12 months	101%	34%
Average high relevance: all time	28%	8%
Average medium relevance: all time	34%	46%
Average low relevance: all time	37%	47%
Average high relevance: last 6 to 12 months	53%	4%
Average high relevance: last 6 to 12 months	37%	48%
Average high relevance: last 6 to 12 months	10%	48%
Branded links	15%	5%
SEO potential	Very high	
Total monthly average search volume		16,370
Information monthly average search volume		8,680
Navigational monthly average search volume		1,260
Commercial monthly average search volume		630
Transactional monthly average search volume		5,810
Monthly average search advertising volume		640



Funnel

1. Answer to question
2. Looking for specific content
3. Investigating brand or service
4. Conversion

Why this matters

The findings of Metricomm's research have significant implications beyond PR, especially for SEO and search advertising. UK organisations spend £13.4 billion per year on search advertising, almost three times the spend of TV advertising.

The effectiveness of SEO and search advertising depend on consumers carrying out searches in the first place. Here, for the first time, is powerful evidence that the audience generated by online media coverage creates higher volumes of search and therefore directly impacts SEO, search advertising and, ultimately, sales. The inescapable conclusion is that the effectiveness of SEO and search advertising relies on PR's ability to drive online media coverage audiences, which generate a significant number of the searches that are necessary for advertising to work. PR makes a hitherto unappreciated contribution to the success of other elements of the marketing mix.

It is easy to understand why online media coverage drives so many Google searches. Over 90% of consumers use Google when making a decision, including purchase, and the reason online media coverage is so effective at driving searches is that it's never more than a phone tap or mouse click away from the search engine.

The powerful relationship between PR and business outcomes has only just come to light because PR evaluation has always used volume metrics, which are very poor for measuring and tracking effectiveness. Metricomm uniquely determines the size of audience most likely to have found, read and been influenced by online media coverage, which is a far superior approach. It is this use of audience data that allows us to analyse the true impact of online media coverage, which is far more powerful than has ever been understood or recognised. It provides a new level of accurate measurement, but also an entirely new range of insights that can inform communication strategy and media planning.

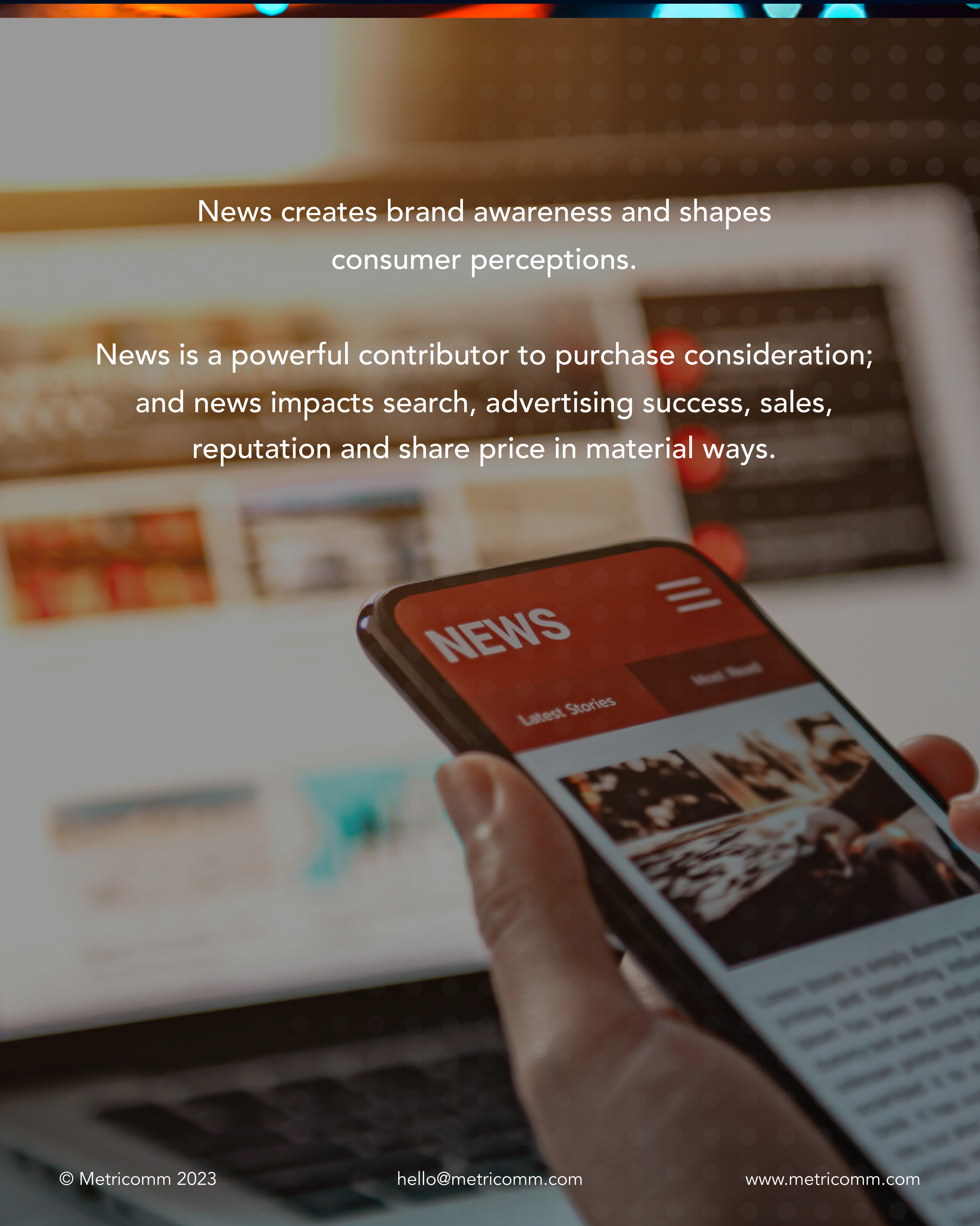
The PR industry should take advantage of this opportunity to demonstrate its effectiveness within the marketing mix. Far from being the poor relation, PR now takes centre stage as a fundamental requirement of any search advertising campaign and a demonstrable contributor to moving consumers through the sales funnel.

If you would like to arrange a more detailed demonstration of how Metricomm analyses search uplift from the audiences who react to online media coverage, drop us a line on hello@metricomm.com

Metricomm®

News creates brand awareness and shapes consumer perceptions.

News is a powerful contributor to purchase consideration; and news impacts search, advertising success, sales, reputation and share price in material ways.



Our approach

Metricomm's approach is very different because it focuses on the results generated by communication.

We use audience-focused data, which is particularly well suited to AI models and market-mix modelling and far more accurate than the volume metrics used by our competitors.

Metricomm is not a media cuttings agency – our system is designed to capture the coverage most likely to be found, seen and read by audiences. This means our numbers are realistic and not the silly ones produced by other methods, which might look good but are meaningless.

Our experience gained through work for clients has revealed that online media coverage is a far more powerful communication channel than has been recognised or understood, playing a crucial role in driving business outcomes directly, or by amplifying the effects of other marketing activities.

There are a number of reasons for this:

- Online media coverage and TV broadcast are by far the most effective communication channels at driving public interest and attention, with print media and radio playing much more minor roles
- This reflects how the majority of people get information in today's digital world, with over 90% turning immediately to search engines, especially Google
- Online media coverage inherently means that Google is just a phone-tap or mouse-click away for the reader, while many people also watch TV with or even on their smartphones, making it easy to search for additional information
- National online media attract audiences greater than 20 million per month – typically up to 25 times higher than their print versions – which is why online media coverage is so important for reputation
    - Print media and radio are still important, but very much in a supporting role
    - While TV coverage generates a lot of interest, this decays rapidly after the broadcast finishes
    - Online media coverage, however, generates interest over much longer periods, with stories often remaining on the web indefinitely and appearing frequently in top search results for many different search terms over long periods of time
    - URLs for coverage also play an important role in supporting SEO and other digital activity

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Metricomm®

Strategic insights about media impact

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