

# Applying marketing and communications strategies to IR websites

Stretching the scope and appeal of your IR site

**A**rash Adnani, president of Blender Media, based in Vancouver, challenges IR practitioners to make their IR sites more memorable by using online tools to reach more investors.

## What is the current state of IR websites in North America?

Right now most of the IR sections are template-driven: companies post filings, news releases, links to webcasts and stock info. Some companies may have social media feeds, but most use a template-driven set-up for their IR sections.

## In your opinion, which public companies are making the most of their IR websites?

There's a huge difference between the IR websites of large caps and small to mid-caps – which, believe it or not, use way more marketing techniques on their sites. Small companies that aren't generating revenue – essentially, those in R&D or companies that have a new application that hasn't yet been to market – don't have revenues and cash flow, so they have to rely on marketing to attract investment capital. They have to tell the story of where they're trying to go and sell that vision to investors.

Larger companies focus more on filings, earnings and the online reporting process. Let's look at Nike,

a company known for innovation in marketing and advertising. I've been a Nike admirer all my life and an investor for the past 15 years. It is a brilliant company with such a solid brand, and I believe if it applied the same marketing strategies and attention to its IR section as it does the rest of its site, it would really make an impact on investors. For example, Nike was recently in a bidding war with Under Armor to sign basketball star Kevin Durant, and ended up signing him to a \$300 mn deal. As an investor, I'd like to know what that means for the company, and additional strategies to the IR page could lay this information out in a way consistent with the Nike brand.

I understand there are limitations to what you can say and the timing of certain announcements, but there's still an opportunity to say something meaningful while remaining onside. Although your customers and investors are two different demographics, both audiences benefit from the art of storytelling. People like to be communicated with in a certain way, and how information is being packaged and delivered is the difference between a captive audience and a massive yawn. Unfortunately, too many IR sites are missing out on the opportunity to implement more advanced strategies

in conveying key messages and explaining developments.

Investors don't want to flip through the tedious PDFs companies post; there are so many ways to extract the information from these PDFs and make more accessible. Investors are short on time. If they're on the IR site, everything should be accessible and easy.

## Is any firm getting it right with online investor communications?

Apple's webcast of the iPhone 6 and Apple Watch announcement is a perfect example of what public companies should be doing – and it's very easy and cost-effective. While the video was playing, Apple had a live blog. So while Tim Cook was speaking, there were blog posts that were updated every minute, highlighting what Cook was saying. The posts were a series of short and crisp messages, only one or two sentences long, which reiterated the key points. This could be done for earnings calls or any webcasts companies do.

## Where should IROs begin to apply marketing lessons to the IR site?

Instead of following lists of best practices, companies need to understand that each firm is unique and what it's selling to potential investors is different, so how it communicates has to be

tailor-made – it has to fit that company’s corporate identity and brand. IROs also need to remember that there’s a lot of noise out there; investors and analysts are following so many companies. Your main objective should be to engage and fight for mindshare. You don’t stand out by looking and sounding like everyone else – you have to set yourself apart.

### Can IROs do this themselves or do they need outside expertise?

You need to see what resources you have internally first. If those resources aren’t there, you have to speak to agencies. We’re online marketing guys, but we work in the capital markets so we understand everything that goes along with disclosure, corporate governance and the regulatory demands on companies for how they manage and update their websites.

We’re not just a bunch of creative types pitching ideas; our senior staff have been working with public companies for years. I’ve taken companies public, been involved with IR initiatives. I’ve even helped with the financing process so we understand the investor thought process.

Imagine someone who’s never heard of your company comes to your IR section and all you have displayed are links to PDFs, stock charts and an audio file for webcasts. For someone not familiar with your company, that’s a very passive way to present. What you could be doing instead is showing a short video that speaks to investors and

explains the company’s recent performance. You could also create a really simple-to-read infographic that talks about the investment opportunity out there. There are so many things you could do to better engage and tell your story.

Once companies see that investors will take notice, what’s beautiful is that by using online technology to market yourself, there’s so much news by way of analytics: you can track and see what’s working and what’s not. You can constantly improve, analyze and improve again.

### What else might IROs provide on their websites as content that they don’t currently provide?

If the company is a leader in some space – for example, mobile games or pharmaceuticals – it should provide more educational information and content on the IR site. I’m not talking about selling itself, but rather providing information that will educate investors on its space. By doing that, it’s establishing itself as an opinion leader and, indirectly, it is selling itself to investors as the go-to guy for the industry. That’s so simple to do; IROs already have the information, but they’re not putting it to work.

Investors like easy access to information. They may want a refresher on a firm and what it does. Consider how many different companies analysts follow. If a firm provides an analyst with more user-friendly information, won’t the analyst appreciate that? Of course he or she will.

### Two or three years from now, how will IR websites differ from how they look today?

Technology has forever changed how we communicate; it’s made us connected and made it easier to share ideas. There’s already a shift toward more innovation and strategic presentation of IR information by using new technologies and marketing techniques. This type of transition takes time to develop, but I’m already seeing more IROs inquiring and willing to step outside the box. ■

#### ABOUT BLENDER MEDIA

**BLENDER**  
WEBSITES THAT INSPIRE  
INVESTOR CONFIDENCE

Blender is an interactive agency specializing in investor marketing solutions. In the last decade we have worked with more than 500 publicly traded and private companies providing web strategy, design, development and campaign management. Through our content management system and updates team, we provide a full suite of web applications for TSX, NYSE and NASDAQ listed companies. We are also the aggregator and publisher of the Canadian Financing Bulletin, one of the premier research publications on financing activities in the Canadian market since 2005, which is used by leading investment firms across North America.

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