



# Bold Media Strategies, Better Brand Outcomes

V2's Guide to Media Programs That  
Create Long-term Brand Value



COMMUNICATIONS

# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Why Your Media Program Must Evolve with Your Brand	5
How to Build—And Grow—a Media Program That Fits Your Business Goals	6
What’s In Your Media Relations Toolkit?	9
How to Get the Big Media Wins	18
The Value of a Bigger Communications Engine	19
Conclusion	21

# Introduction

Media relations has always been the cornerstone of effective communications programs and a primary vehicle for brands to build awareness and credibility. For early-stage companies, media engagement often comes in the form of pops of activity that can generate brand “buzz” during major milestones like the initial launch or first round of funding. If and when that early news pipeline slows, activity often becomes centered on thought leadership—in the form of regular commentary and speaking engagements, a pipeline of bylined articles, and social or blog content—to maintain a presence in the market and enhance share of voice among competitors.

While it can certainly help shine a spotlight on a brand, this communications strategy typically does not sustain as the business matures. **To become a brand that “sticks,” you need to take a more holistic approach to communications and media relations.** Showcasing momentum, third-party validation, and big-picture thinking becomes a necessity, and driving thoughtful, strategic media engagements can make or break a brand.

Becoming a mature, admired brand means evolving your media engine to deliver on the high-impact, message-rich wins that map back to your business performance. **This eBook provides a foundation for marketing leaders and communications program owners to mature in a manner that makes sense for your company’s stage.** We’ll discuss the communications strategies behind successful brands and outline tactics to help organizations think critically about how to evolve their media programs to support business growth.



# Media Program Development

# Why Your Media Program Must Evolve with Your Brand

As a brand grows and matures, so must its media strategy—particularly to evolve from a focus on quick wins to more thoughtful, strategic engagements. There are countless cautionary tales of brands that neglected to consider how their communications strategies should shift in the face of change.

Take Peloton, a brand that was a media darling and reached celebrity notoriety during the run-up to its IPO. In just a couple of years, the highly praised fitness brand's acclaim had soured, thanks in part to a tone-deaf campaign during the holiday season and major distribution and delivery delays that made headlines.

Communications leaders must recognize any “shift” in their audience, market, or brand overtime. For Peloton, the overlooked expansion of their market and sociological shifts [allowed its sexist holiday commercial](#) to make airwaves, making it clear the company was more focused on capturing “buzz” rather than delivering—and communicating—value. Teams that can identify these shifts and reboot communication strategies—operational procedures, workflows, and success metrics—with new and often nuanced communications goals will succeed in avoiding PR catastrophes.

**Ultimately, businesses that shift with their brand and audience, redirecting communications efforts to focus on preserving and protecting their now well-established brands, will position themselves for continued market growth and longevity.** This requires a new level of thinking to establish scalable media programs that can evolve as brands (and their audiences) mature.

# How to Build—and Grow—a Media Program That Fits Your Business Goals

To establish and continue to expand on a successful media program, you should first consider the broader business goals that the company is seeking to achieve. For example:

- **To be known as a “Best Place to Work”:** focus on cultivating employee champions who will describe why your workplace culture is superior to all others; your executives’ mission to craft a culture that attracts and retains the top talent; and stats (such as retention percentages) or accolades (such as employee survey-driven awards) that further validate your company’s approach.
- **To create air cover for sales:** target vertical trades with thought leadership campaigns centered on solutions to customer challenges; identify ways to creatively announce even minor new features; and mine for customer spokespeople who will describe how your product has helped them.
- **To support the path to acquisition, IPO, or other exit:** be intentional with placements focused on customer value, growth, and the C-Suite’s vision; if an IPO is the goal, relationship-building exercises with key financial reporters should be part of the media strategy.



# How to Build—and Grow—a Media Program That Fits Your Business Goals, cont.

You should also consider what **Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals (BHAGs)** you can set with your communications team to obtain overtime and keep bold, creative ideas flowing. Maybe it's a focus on category creation, in which case educational content and market terminology will be critical; or upending an existing category to take down a big competitor, in which case you'll need third-party validation from analysts and customers.

Media relations can, and should, play a role in helping your company achieve these goals, but it's important to remember there's no one-size-fits-all model—especially as your goals evolve. While an early-stage company might be most concerned with generating brand awareness to support hiring and investments, a company in its Series B or later stage will also be considering accelerating the sales pipeline, positioning the brand as a market leader, and amplifying the executive vision.

The key to setting your brand up for long-term success is evaluating the common tools in every media relations toolkit and determining how and when you use them to reflect where your brand is today and where it wants to be tomorrow.



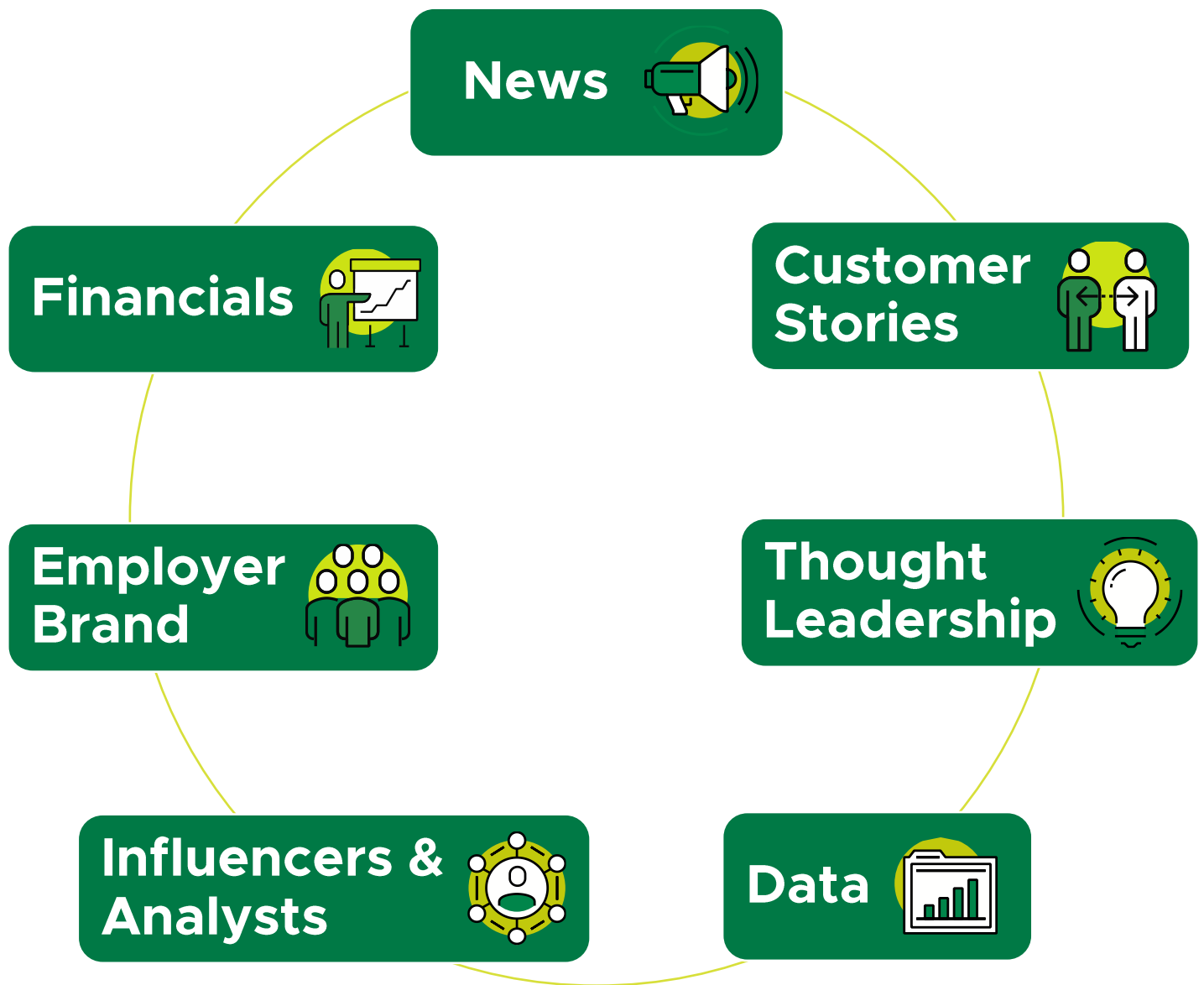
# Media Relations Toolkit



# What's In Your Media Relations Toolkit?

The most effective media relations programs leverage a number of strategies—though few companies can bring them all to the table.

Here is what should be in your mix and assessed regularly as part of PR planning:



# News

Creating a healthy news pipeline is key to a successful brand strategy because it can often provide the “hook” journalists need to convert interest to ink. In the early days of a company, having pops of news can create key moments for engaging press—from the first round of funding to the product launch, to the first momentum announcement. Over time, announcements become more than just media hooks: they’re signals to the market of the brand’s growth and vision. Being strategic—and creative—to identify news opportunities becomes even more important for maintaining share of voice and getting in front of your core target audiences.

More mature news strategies are focused on creating a rolling thunder of press releases that support the bigger narrative the brand is aiming to tell and using myriad types of announcements to support a cohesive story. For example, while analyst reports alone are unlikely to garner notable media coverage, a successful placement in the quadrants and waves of the world cements your brand vision and leadership, serving as the valuable proof point media often need to write a larger story. Similarly, awards releases can validate your brand’s growth, company culture, or executive team. These releases reflect opportunities to build a cadence of media touchpoints, keeping the brand top of mind.

If you’re coming up empty-handed on the news front, there are creative ways to manufacture news to maintain awareness. Is there a product feature you considered making a blog post that could be announced? Sounds like a great touch point for the tech press. Have you thought about issuing a survey on the key trends influencing your buyer audiences? That could be a press release to encourage report downloads and engage vertical media.



## V2 for tellus

When V2 and Tellus first partnered, the goal was to introduce Tellus to the market and position the company as the leading Decision Intelligence player. V2 used planned Series A and platform enhancement press releases to create media engagement opportunities, resulting in 17 total pieces of news-driven coverage from April-May, including a [TechCrunch feature](#). V2 also used the news to secure 6 interview opportunities, including introductory briefings with Fortune and Forbes—the second of which resulted in a [CEO profile](#).

# Customer Stories

Getting customers to speak on your brand's behalf is no easy feat—no matter what stage you're at. And it becomes even more critical as the brand matures. Educating the market and reporters on the value and vision your company is delivering requires third-party validation in the form of user stories.

## Is this customer story a fit for media? Yes, if:

- They are champions of your solution and have had a positive experience working with your team
- They have hard ROI metrics and/or anecdotal evidence of the value your solution brings to their organization
- They are a recognizable brand
- Their use case story ties into larger macro issues that the media cares most about—e.g., the recession, the pandemic, supply chain challenges

Building a sustained reference program early will make that challenge easier. The key to successful customer storytelling is to identify opportunities that bring value to your customer (and your brand, by extension). Approaching customers with small asks firsts—such as awards or blogs—can open the door for larger engagements down the line and help your team identify which customers are ripe for media engagement. From there, your PR team can create mini-strategies to build awareness for each customer, turning them into brand champions. It's a win-win—your customers are positioned as innovators investing in solutions that drive greater business results, while your brand is positioned as the power behind their innovation.

## V2 for NUANCE

As the leading provider of conversational AI and ambient clinical intelligence technology, Nuance wanted to continue to raise awareness for its DAX solution. With Nuance's team, V2 identified customer champions—like University of Michigan Health-West (UMHW)—who could demonstrate the power of the Nuance DAX solution in making a significant positive impact on the lives of healthcare providers and patients.

V2 amplified UMHW's story to help secure 17 pieces of coverage in key healthcare trades, including [a feature in HealthLeaders](#) – a top healthcare publication for Nuance.



# Thought Leadership

News and customer stories are essential strategies for pushing your company's innovation and value to key audiences—but they are not the same as positioning your spokespeople as experts. Thought leadership means pushing out unique perspectives on trending topics or issues that matter most to your audiences—not pushing out product messaging. Identifying experts who can speak to the trends happening in vertical and horizontal industries can lead to inclusion in stories that support the sales funnel while simultaneously making your brand and your people look smart.

**TL = Expertise on a given topic or a unique point of view**

**TL ≠ SEO terms, product messaging, company news, social copy, or award wins**

Thought leadership tends to be the primary driver behind media engagement for earlier-stage brands, leading to a pipeline of contributed content, commentary, and written Q&A opportunities focused on trends specific to core audiences. As brands mature, thought leadership should evolve from industry and vertical trends to include macro business issues—like climate change, policy, and the pandemic. It becomes even more important for brands to think critically about how they want to be viewed: are you a brand that's unafraid of commenting on controversial issues, or do you prefer to stick to topics that directly pertain to your business? In either case, you'll need experienced, media-trained spokespeople who are prepared to deliver key messages in every media engagement.



## **V2 for** **Panjiva** **S&P Global** Market Intelligence

V2 used Panjiva's expert perspective into geopolitical, seasonal, and breaking news topics with supply chain implications to position the company as the go-to source on supply chain and global trade issues and best practices. Panjiva's thought leadership on trending issues allowed V2 to secure [front-page New York Times coverage](#); inclusion in a stories on [the implications of trade wars in the Financial Times](#) and [brands sourcing products from factories known to violate human rights](#) in USA Today; and commentary about [How Alibaba Could Change American Business](#) in CNN Money.

# Data

Data is a powerful storytelling asset that can lend itself to various communications initiatives, including engaging reporters. Media often request data points that support trend stories, which creates ample opportunity for companies with proprietary, platform, or third-party data that can be shared publicly.

Some brands have the power to offer insights based on their product and customer behavior. This type of data can be used to infiltrate timely and anticipated stories or trend-jack breaking news coverage.

For brands unable to tap into their own platforms to provide insights, issuing surveys can be an effective alternative. When developing a survey report, companies should consider the types of headlines they'd like to see the survey generate—and then work backward to develop the right set of questions. Once the survey is fielded and the findings analyzed, the results can be announced via a press release (giving another news opportunity for the brand) and in a branded report that can be used to support demand gen. Similar to proprietary data, surveys can create media opportunities centered around the initial announcement, as well as a tailwind effect, as the data can be referenced in future trend stories or content assets.

## V2 for NAVEX GLOBAL®

NAVEX wanted to increase business press coverage, so V2 used the company's trove of risk signal data along with industry surveys tied to hot topics business press reporters were most interested in, such as ESG and IT security. With that data, V2 was able to exceed the 2021 business press coverage goal by 40%, landing NAVEX in [Bloomberg](#), [Forbes](#), and [The Wall Street Journal](#), among others.

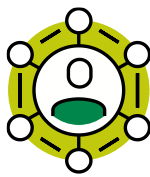




# Influencers and Analysts

Third-party validation is a key component of convincing the market to pay attention to a company's product, strategy, and vision. Analysts, in particular, have an incredible sway in guiding reporters on what emerging technology solutions they should be covering. While it can be hard to get the larger firms to participate in your media strategy, some analysts relish the opportunity to build their profiles with reporters—and those are the ones to prioritize engaging. Reporters at tech trades like TechTarget, ZDNet, and InformationWeek often request analyst perspectives around product releases; having a few in your back pocket can turn platform news into a major media moment for your brand.

Influencers, on the other hand, are typically academics, researchers, policymakers, authors, or consultants who are considered experts in specific topics or trends—like ethical AI, supply chain logistics, or the future of work. These individuals have large networks supported by a big social media following and oftentimes contribute to publications like Forbes, Harvard Business Review, or VentureBeat. Engaging this type of third-party validator requires a different, more personalized approach; you'll want to consider the type of activity you could work with the influencer on before reaching out. The possibilities for engaging influencers are virtually endless—though they can often come with a hefty price tag depending on the time commitment you're requesting. Be strategic about identifying and using influencers who can champion your brand to their networks.



## V2 for “DECIBEL.”

V2 tapped influencers to support Decibel's goal of being viewed as a leading provider for brands seeking to improve customers' digital experiences. Through customized engagements, the team secured influential guests to join Decibel's weekly webinar series—which supported the Account Based Marketing strategy and fueled the earned media program—and helped Decibel reach thousands of net-new contracts. Influencers also were core to the launch of the company's first-ever Virtual CX Summit—a 5-part LinkedIn Live event that drew 5000+ views within 48 hours.

# Employer Brand

Emphasizing your employer brand and the company's values and culture as part of the media program is a great way to secure meaningful coverage that will position the company as a great place to work and potentially a great corporate citizen.

In the early days of a brand, there is much less red tape around quirky, culture-focused storytelling. You might have an unheard-of perk that has kept your employee satisfaction scores up, or you might do inter-office challenges that boost engagement. These types of details can capture reporter attention, particularly if you can offer multiple spokespeople—such as employees who can confirm why your culture is the best.

As the company matures, this type of storytelling shifts—especially because most major brands are expected to create engaging workplaces. While unique perks and employee storytelling can be tremendous assets, company culture stories for later-stage brands tend to broaden in ways that are not just about culture but the company's role as a good corporate citizen—including ESG, CSR, and DEI efforts.

## V2 for GRAX

GRAX tasked V2 with securing CEO profiles and culture-focused pieces to drive brand awareness. The team used GRAX's recent summer outing—a virtual, company-wide visit to a goat farm—to draw attention to the company's unique culture. With the outing as a hook, V2 secured 2 local CEO profiles in Boston and the [Boston Business Journal](#), as well as an interview with Chip Cutter at the Wall Street Journal on keeping employees engaged during the pandemic, leading to [print and digital coverage](#).



# Financials

Business press reporters expect brands to disclose financials as they mature and oftentimes won't entertain an interview without understanding what growth stage the company is in. That said, the shifting market dynamics in the last year have made metrics like valuations somewhat obsolete. The concept of a "unicorn" does not hold the same cachet it once did. In fact, it is in the brand's best interest to lean away from that kind of terminology and focus more on business metrics that have real meaning—such as annual recurring revenue (ARR), headcount, customer totals, and so on.

These figures are also a requirement for going after some of the most highly coveted business awards a brand can secure—such as the Deloitte Fast 500, Forbes Cloud 100, and CNBC Disruptor 50. If providing hard numbers isn't possible, consider percentages that will still indicate how fast your company is growing.

Not every brand—particularly most private companies—will be able to share financial metrics. While that shouldn't deter the organization from approaching business and broadcast media, they should be prepared for how to address financial-related questions in a way that feels comfortable and honest to the brand. It's also less likely for these numbers to be requested from non-business press, which makes trade, vertical, and local outlets better targets when the company is not yet ready to disclose stats like ARR or specific headcount numbers



## V2 for UiPath™

UiPath was always transparent about growth metrics—including ARR, customer totals, employee headcount, and valuation—which was core to V2's ability to position the company as a member of the "tech elite" and the undisputed leader of the emerging RPA market. With these figures and the awards they helped win under their belts, V2 secured highly coveted placements for UiPath that positioned the company as one of the fastest-growing software vendors in the world, including the [September 2019 cover for Forbes Magazine](#).

A grayscale photograph of two women sitting at a table, looking at a laptop screen. The woman on the left is in profile, wearing a light-colored blazer. The woman on the right is looking down at the screen, wearing a dark floral top. A decorative graphic of diagonal stripes in green, yellow, and white is overlaid on the right side of the image. The text 'Big, Bold Media Strategies' is centered in the lower half of the image, underlined.

# Big, Bold Media Strategies

# How to Get the Big Media Wins

We've talked about creating (and iterating on) media programs that map back to company goals and having a toolkit that can successfully fuel a sustained media engine. But what about those highly coveted wins—or the BHAGs—like getting a mainstream broadcast feature or securing a cover story? In addition to the strategies we've already laid out, the most important consideration for bringing a big media win to life is time.

Encouraging your executives to spend time building relationships with reporters is one of the most important facets of securing national placements down the line.. Becoming a source for a reporter means putting in time to allow them to get to know your brand and its leadership team and becoming the target of their next profile means nurturing that relationship.

Once the interest is secured, you need to think critically about the story you want them to tell. How can you put the right resources forward to ensure the story is shaped in the best way possible? It is a bit like Tetris: you find the best fitting pieces and put them in front of the reporter before their deadline.

Ultimately, the time you spend building relationships with reporters and helping them shape their stories is time well spent. It leads to the bigger, hard-to-get stories that most brands dream of achieving—and that will put your brand on the world's main stage.

## V2 for simpliVity™

SimpliVity was on a mission to become the leader in a hot hyperconverged technology, though they were up against a bigger, edgier Silicon Valley brand. V2 used relationship-building with core reporters to steal the thunder from the competitor's IPO plans—both to insert SimpliVity into their stories and, more importantly, drive in-depth feature coverage of SimpliVity's own future plans. The results included a [CNBC Mad Money segment](#) and [a Forbes feature](#).





# The Value of a Bigger Communications Engine

While media relations is a critical component of a successful communications program and is often rightfully prioritized when it comes to communications resources, the most successful organizations invest in a bigger engine that fuels their brand strategies. This should include:

- **Messaging** — Brand messaging should be regularly reviewed as the company evolves to ensure consistency between the way the company's product, vision, and mission are being talked about internally and externally. Changes in messaging must reflect the direction the brand is headed in response to the competitive landscape, as well as business goals (e.g., when the company is seeking funding, planning to exit, etc.).
- **Content** — Content is the gas that keeps communications programs and media strategies revved up. A sustained content program includes the development of assets—both long- and short-form—that focus on topics and trends most pertinent to the brand's key audiences. The content can then be used to fuel other facets of the program; for example, an eBook chapter can be turned into a bylined article, while an infographic can become a social card. Brands should also consider the value of sponsored content as part of their communications strategies—particularly for cracking difficult outlets or extending the life of a piece of content to reach new audiences.

## Pay for Play—Yay or Nay?

While brands may have shied away from sponsored content in the past, it's now becoming an excellent tool for amplifying core messages to audiences (so long as it's executed in a thoughtful and strategic manner). From expert councils to newsletters and podcasts, to video-based storytelling, there are several channels where brands pay to elevate visibility and awareness for their expertise and product.

# The Value of a Bigger Communications Engine, cont.

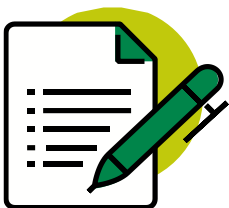
- **Social Media** — Social programs are a must-have for well-known brands, particularly for promoting company coverage and engaging with influencers. Channels like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow the brand to showcase its personality and—when run by an effective communications team—can lead to enhanced engagement opportunities with prospective employees and customers. It's also important to understand how to differentiate tone across these channels--particularly in the case of LinkedIn, where communications teams should encourage executives to spend their time promoting their companies and their own perspectives (another place where content can support in the form of LinkedIn articles).
- **Speaking and Awards** — While securing coverage plays a vital role in validating your brand and your executive's expertise, speaking and awards opportunities go hand in hand with media. For example, your company's placement on the Inc. 5000 might be the hook you need to get in front of a local reporter covering the region's fastest-growing companies. Being a well-known and well-thought-of brand means going after the speaking and awards opportunities that directly map back to your business goals.
- **Crisis Management** — Creating playbooks that support crisis communications is one of the most important investments a brand can make. Knowing how and when to respond to certain situations—particularly those that garner media attention—can be the difference maker in a brand's reputation. A brand can fall victim to many types of crises, from physical crises like accidents or fires to HR crises like layoffs or harassment claims. Having tailored communications plans specific to different scenarios can drastically minimize the impact a crisis could have on a brand long-term.

# Conclusion

As your organization evolves from an early-stage startup to a growing and successful brand, don't forget to evolve your media program, too. Advanced communications strategies involve the right mix of storytelling assets—from news, to customers, to executive spokespeople, and more—and thoughtful outreach to build relationships with the reporters and publications that reach your core audiences.

We've given you the tools to take your media strategies to the next level—but why do it yourself? **V2 is known for working with and creating disruptive brands**, and we'd love to chat about how we could help you turn your marketing and communications program into a well-oiled machine.

## Learn More



**V2 Insights**



**V2 Services**



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# 2



V2 Communications is the public relations and digital communications firm for disruptive global brands, redefining what it means to be a strategic communications partner. The agency helps brands navigate the complexities that define communications today to drive business success and growth. V2's skilled professionals combine a business mindset and creative thinking to provide the strategic counsel, campaign ideas and results that move businesses forward.

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[www.v2comms.com](http://www.v2comms.com)