

The role of AI in PR: A cautionary tale from *Sports Illustrated*

By [Judith Middleton](#)

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Sports Illustrated was recently dragged through a protracted scandal after it was found that its publisher, The Arena Group, allowed content in the magazine that was generated by artificial intelligence (AI).



Source: unsplash.com

The subsequent fallout included its CEO being fired and a missed licence payment.

Though the magazine company has now received a lifeline in the form of a new publisher, Minute Media, the closure of this episode shines a bright light on the danger of AI-generated content shared broadly, and on brand – PR content specifically.

AI's effect on PR

There is no doubt that AI is playing, and will continue to play, an important role in supporting public relations (PR).

However, PR efficacy relies heavily on the trust of the media and its readers.



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If AI-generated content is passed off as original, it breaks all trust and can have serious consequences.

The importance of original content

There is no substitute for strong, original content and PR agencies simply cannot afford to betray journalists and editors with AI content passed off as original. Just as importantly, they need to protect the reputations of the businesses they represent.

Good PR specialists build long-term trust relationships with journalists and editors, inundating them with emails, WhatsApps and phone calls daily, relaying pitches for content they'd like to see published.

In this environment, where the media is under-resourced and more stretched than ever before, an editor must have full confidence that what they receive is genuinely original, insightful and valuable content for their readers.

AI detection tools

While it is unclear whether media desks routinely put content through AI-generated detection tools, it is likely to become the norm. Especially as the use of generative AI becomes more widespread.

However, it should be fairly easy for a seasoned reader to instantly pick up on AI-generated content through its over-reliance on US-dominant metaphors, style tropes and jarring sentence structure.

Beyond this, there are serious concerns about the datasets used to train generative AI algorithms.



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If content generated by AI includes or alludes to copyrighted content it raises a host of legal and ethical concerns.

A PR agency should protect its clients from wading into intellectual property storms, while potentially dragging a publication into such a fallout would destroy trust between the agency and the media.

Google's fight against AI-generated content

AI-generated content doesn't just raise red flags from a media coverage perspective; businesses are increasingly relying on digital platforms to build an online presence, drive referral website traffic, and potentially generate leads.

Many of the same concerns exist here.

It might be tempting to go all in on using generative AI tools to create the content needed to enhance organic search rankings, but this can result in content that is generic and lacks the viewpoint of an industry or domain expert.

To fight this, Google has warned against using AI to boost SEO, saying that the "use of automation, including generative AI, is spam if the primary purpose is manipulating ranking in search results".



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The company does not explicitly penalise blog posts generated by ChatGPT yet. However, it does have a policy against using automated content generators to create, duplicate or produce low-quality content.

If your blog posts are generated by AI, are not original or informative, and are subsequently ranked poorly, it negates SEO efforts. A recent core update by Google will reduce low-quality, unoriginal content in search results by 40%.

There is no substitute for original, thoughtful content that adds value to the lives of readers.

It is incumbent on an agency to ensure that all content it places in front of media, on social media and on business platforms, lives up to this standard.

Similarly, it is crucial to keep clients abreast of best practices and the risks technology may pose.

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