



What are the **Most Popular KPIs in PR?**



Releasd

Introduction

Everyone who has worked in PR will have either heard or asked the following questions at some point in their career.

What are the most popular KPIs in PR?

How has measurement changed over the years, and how is it likely to change in future?

How closely does the industry adhere to best practices?

Many attempts to answer them are based on anecdotal evidence, hearsay or opinion - and for good reason. It's really hard to know how PRs actually measure their work behind closed doors, away from the prying eyes of AMEC and other industry standard bearers.

It occurred to us that we were in a truly unique position to answer these questions for the first time, using real-world data.

Since 2015, thousands of PR agencies, in-house teams and freelancers across the globe have been using Releasd to create highly customised reports that showcase the full breadth of their work. They've been sharing media coverage, social posts, event summaries, content, supporting activities and more in a visual, digestible way.

But key to this research is the fact that they have always had the ability to create their own, custom KPIs within these reports. And that's what they've done: over 400k of them in fact.

It's those KPIs that we'll mine in order to find out how PR professionals evaluate their work when nobody, except their clients or executives, is watching.



Richard Benson

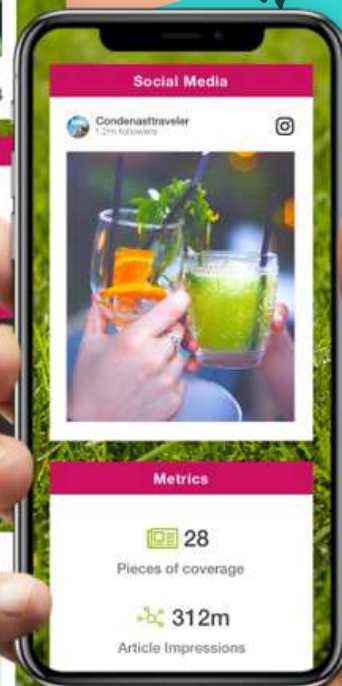
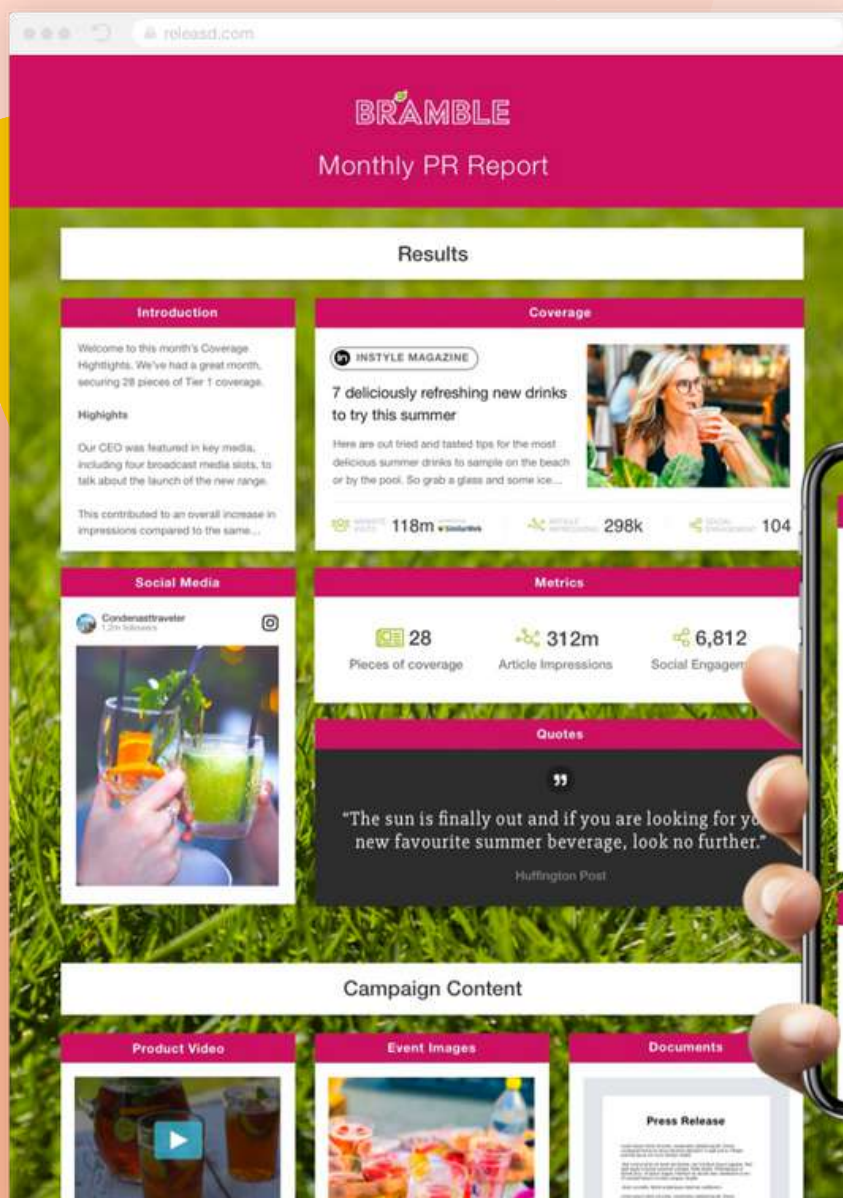
Co-Founder and CEO, Releasd

Who are we?

Releasd is a tool that enables agencies, in-house teams and freelancers to create fully customisable, visual reports that showcase coverage, plus the full breadth of modern PR activities.

Crucially for this research, users can create their own custom KPIs too. Since 2015 our users have been adding hundreds of thousands of data points giving us a unique insight into the KPIs that PR professionals - and their clients and stakeholders - really care about.

To find out more and create your own reports, visit us at [Releasd.com](https://releasd.com)



Methodology

We broke our approach into three stages.

The first was to harvest and understand the metrics added to the reports created by our customers over time.

This yielded over 400k individual KPIs from more than 100k reports.

Within those reports were 1.5million pieces of PR content (articles, social, posts, videos, images etc) which we could use to provide context.

Next, we compared the KPIs created in the full year of 2015 with those created in 2021, enabling us to identify historic and future trends.



100k Reports



400k KPIs

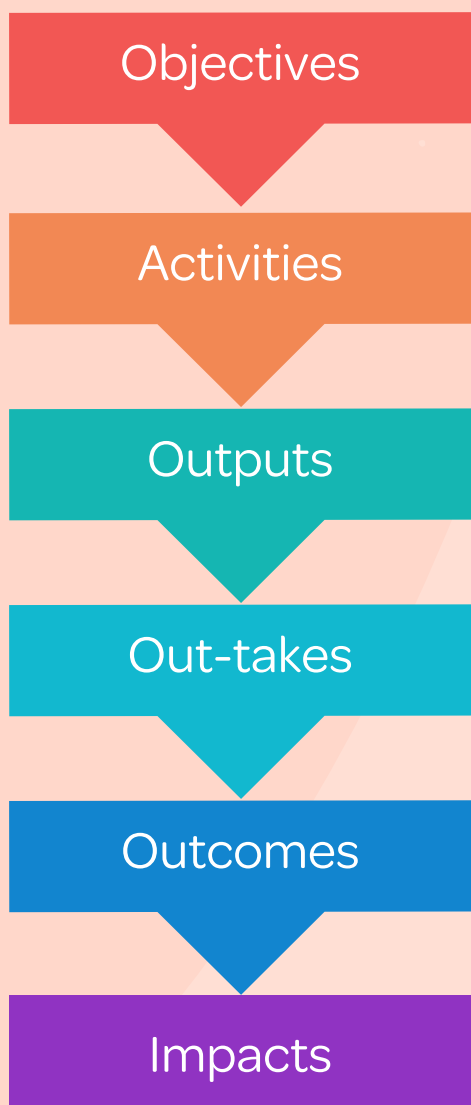


1.5m pieces of content

Methodology (continued)

Finally, we compared the KPIs added by our customers with the recommendations laid out by the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, or AMEC for short.

AMEC's Barcelona Principles, together with the Integrated Evaluation Framework shown here, give us a clear understanding of best practice relating to each stage of the PR process.

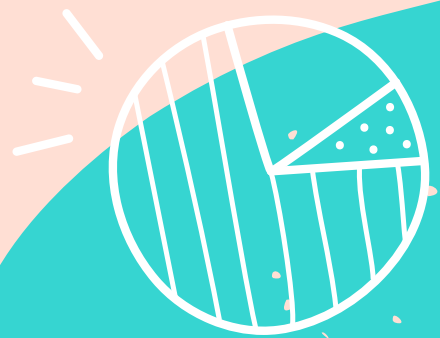


amec

International association for
the measurement and
evaluation of communication



Activities



Activity-based KPIs

The first pertinent part of the Integrated Evaluation Framework is the measurement of Activities.

Within AMEC's own taxonomy, Activities are described as 'Things you do to plan and produce your communication'. In other words, the work that's done before things go live.

Here, you can see some examples of custom Activity-based KPIs that have been added to reports created by our customers.



Press Releases Sent



Webinars confirmed



Blog Posts in Progress



Samples Shared

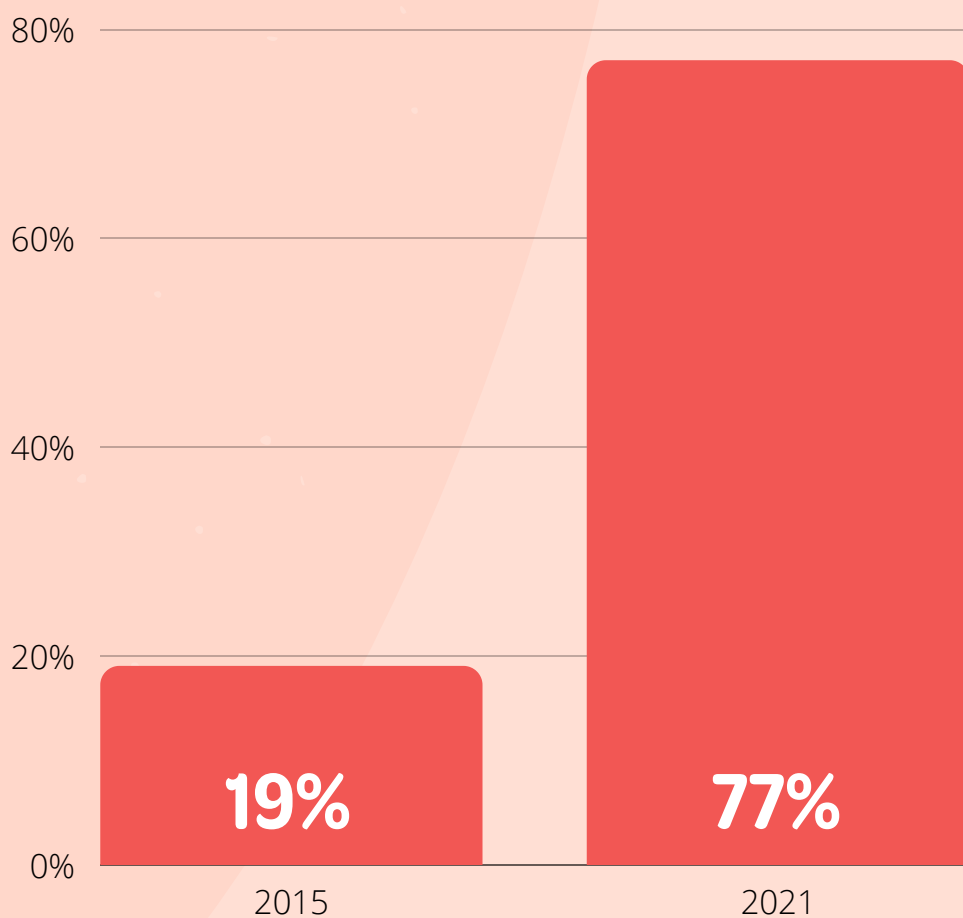


Award Entries Complete

Reports Including One or More 'Activity' KPI

Back in 2015, only one in five reports included an Activity-based KPI. This rose significantly to almost four in five for reports created in 2021.

Interestingly, KPIs relating to webinars, virtual events and podcasts have become much more commonplace, no doubt accelerated by the pandemic.



This increase demonstrates something important in terms of the journey that the industry has been on.

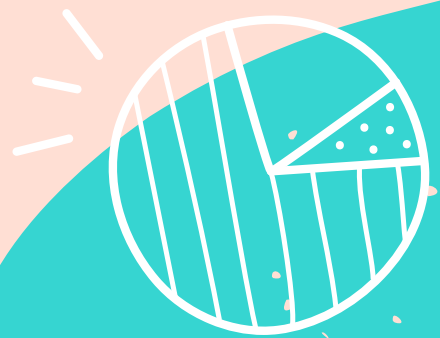
Agencies, in-house teams and freelancers have diversified their services over the years, seizing the opportunities offered in this new, more sophisticated era of marketing and communications.

There's every reason to believe that this trend is likely to continue, almost guaranteeing the long term health of the PR sector after a period of unprecedented turbulence.





Outputs




Output-based KPIs

AMEC describes Outputs as “What you put out that is received by target audiences.” In reality, the challenge with Output KPIs is that they often provide no evidence that a story will have been received at all - let alone by its intended audience. This is because they tend to involve simply counting the number of pieces of coverage that have appeared, or the total potential ‘reach’ of a publication.

Of course, the fact that a website reaches 1 million readers for example does not mean that a) all of those readers are in the sweet spot of a given target audience and b) that they will all see every story. The lack of genuine insight provided by this category of metrics prompted AMEC’s own statement on the issue: “It is vital to move beyond measuring ‘media outputs’ that largely sufficed for the last 20 years.”

 97

Pieces of Coverage

 324m

Total Reach

 8

National Pieces

 12

Regional Pieces

 41

Twitter Posts

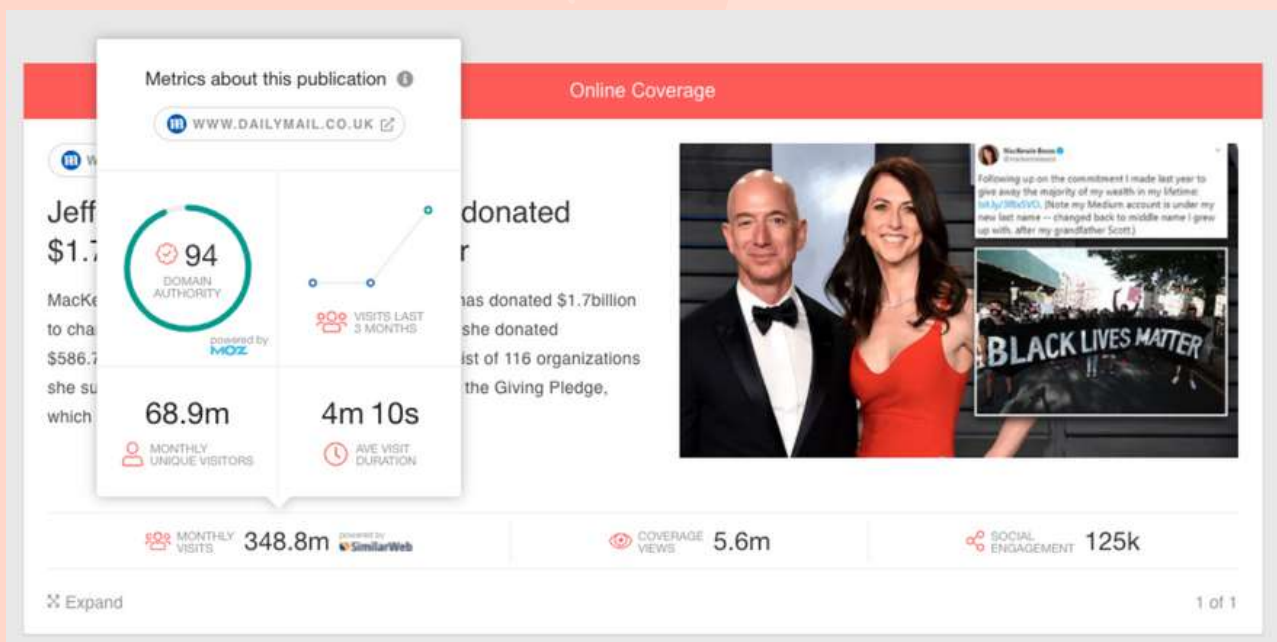
 6

Facebook Posts

Availability of Output-based metrics

Historically, obtaining even the most basic Output metrics has been expensive and challenging. Media monitoring services must be set up and paid for, whilst searching for outdated media packs or hounding weary journalists for some data - any data - was a commonplace activity.

Thanks to third party APIs offered by services like Similarweb and Moz, it's now both technically feasible and cost effective to obtain a variety of data points. Our users can choose to show Monthly Website Visits (AKA Reach), Unique Visitors, Domain Authority and Visits over 3 Months (to get a sense of popularity trends) for example.

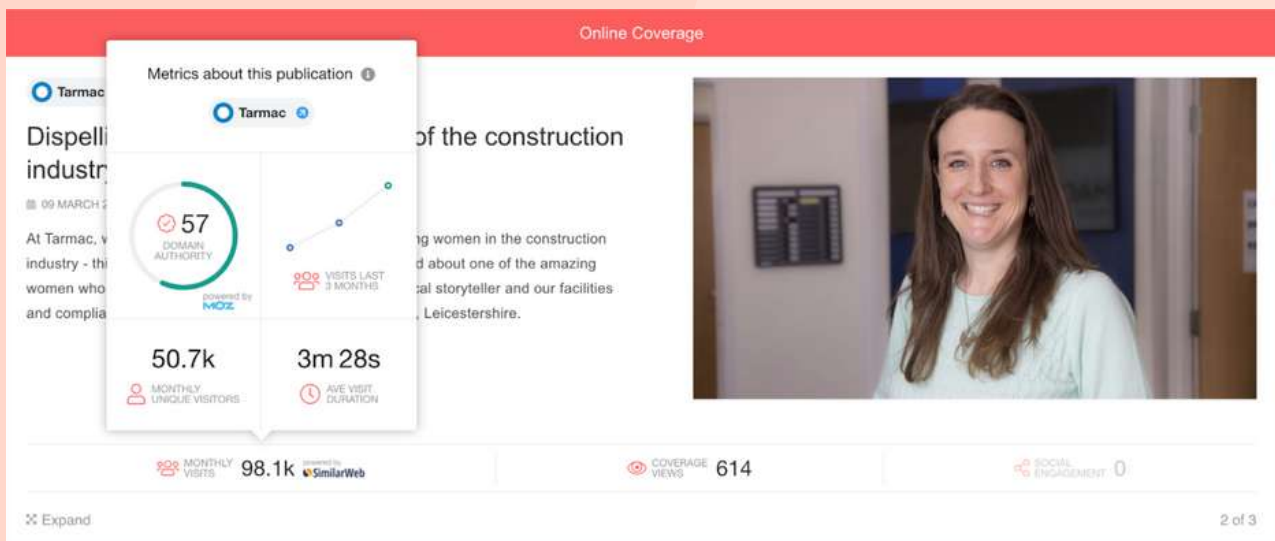


Automated metrics in the Releasd platform

Average Visit Duration

It's relatively rare to score coverage on a major global publication; smaller, niche websites form the long tail of available outlets. However these sites often have low Reaches and Domain Authorities. This may lead all parties to mistakenly conclude that a publication is not worth targeting.

Enter a website's Average Visit Duration. This has been a hugely popular KPI as it's arguably the best indicator of the quality of a website irrespective of size or search ranking. A high Average Visit Duration like the one shown here indicates that those who do visit the publication tend to stick around and read its content. It gives some much needed context and depth to the the Output KPI category.

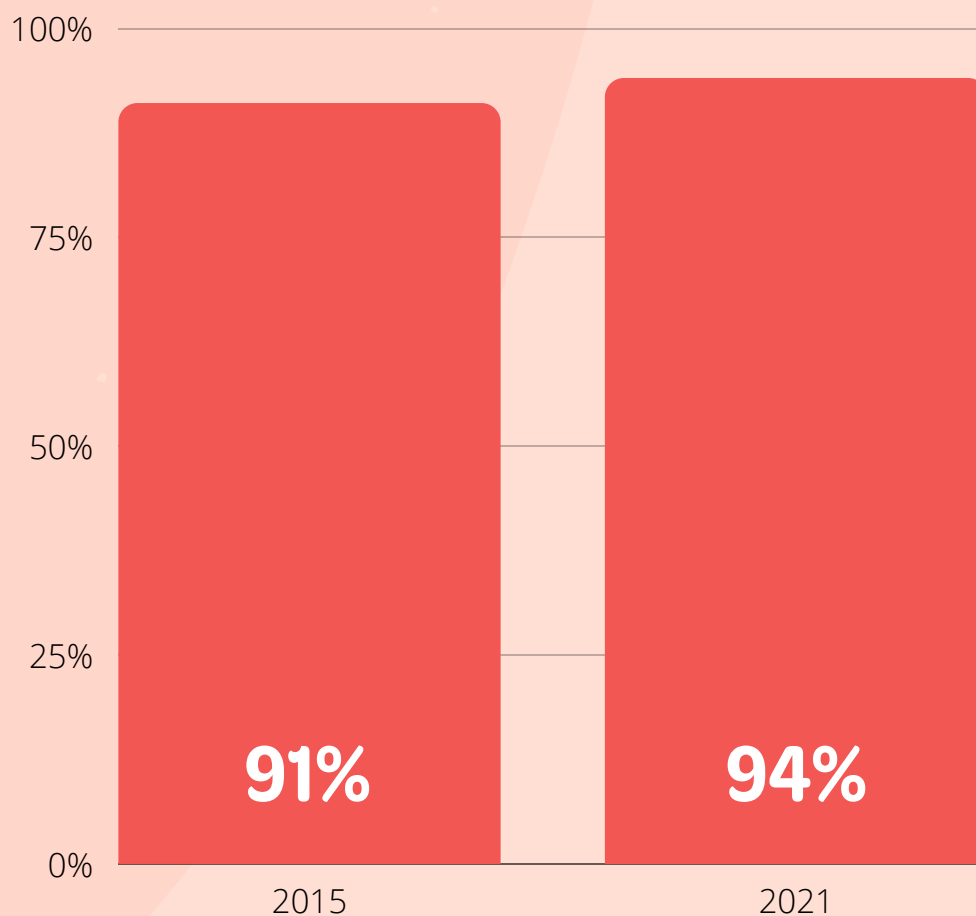


Average Visit Duration can be a great indicator of website quality

Reports Including One or More 'Output' KPI

Whilst AMEC's stance on the need to move on from Output KPIs is understandable, it's hard to imagine a future in which they are phased out entirely. For many clients and executives, raw numbers of this kind will always form an important part of the evaluation process whether we like it or not.

Our data backs this up. Output KPIs have remained consistently popular over the years, with a very small increase between 2015 and 2021. We expect this ubiquity to continue.



What about AVE?

We couldn't create a report about the most popular KPIs in PR without mentioning AVE.

There is a reason that this metric cannot be found in any stage of the Integrated Evaluation Framework. AVE has been roundly rejected by AMEC and a vast majority of the PR community for many years. We've written our own post about the topic.

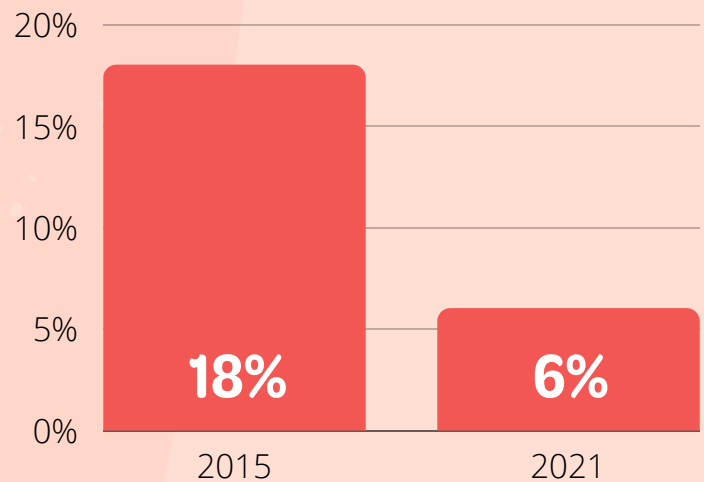
Our unique dataset provides an opportunity to see whether AVE has survived the campaign to kill it off completely, or if PR practitioners still employ it in their reports, away from the prying eyes of AMEC.



Reports Featuring AVE

Nearly one in five of all reports created through our platform in 2015 featured AVE.

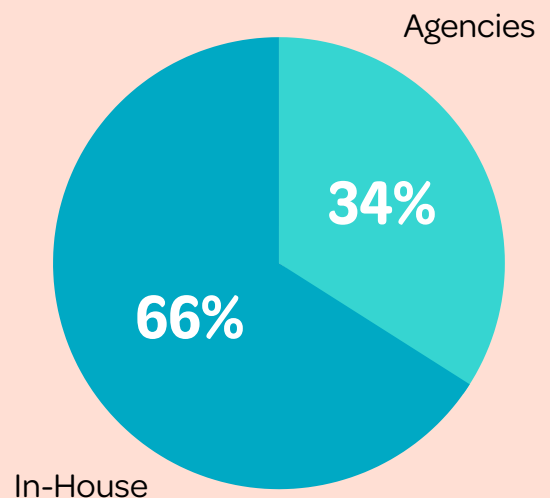
That number decreased to just 6% in 2021. In other words - It's alive - but only just.



Of the reports that did include AVE, 34% were created by agencies vs 66% in-house.

Why the discrepancy?

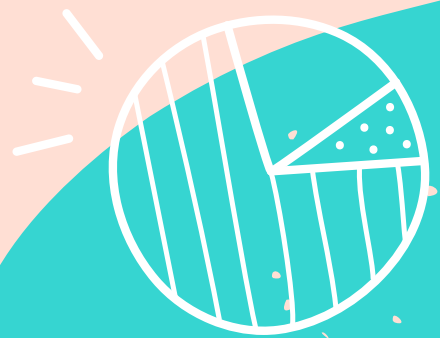
Based on conversations with customers, it seems that most PR professionals are aware of the issues with AVE. They talk about it in apologetic terms. Often it's the non-PR-savvy clients or executives, especially in larger companies, who insist on some kind of monetary value being placed on PR, and no amount of push-back and reasoning is able to change this.



It looks like we have to accept that it will take longer than we'd like for AVE to disappear completely, but we do have evidence that it is on its way out.



Out-takes



Out-take-based KPIs

AMEC defines Out-takes as “What audiences do with and take out of your communication”.

In other words, KPIs in this category should provide evidence that content has successfully engaged its audience. They form a vital part of the overall evaluation process because they provide the first inkling that the actions taken have caused some kind of reaction.

Examples of Out-take KPIs added to reports by our customers can be seen here.

 108

Comments



819k

Video Views

 56

Retweets



678k

Coverage Views



118

Shares



21k

Downloads

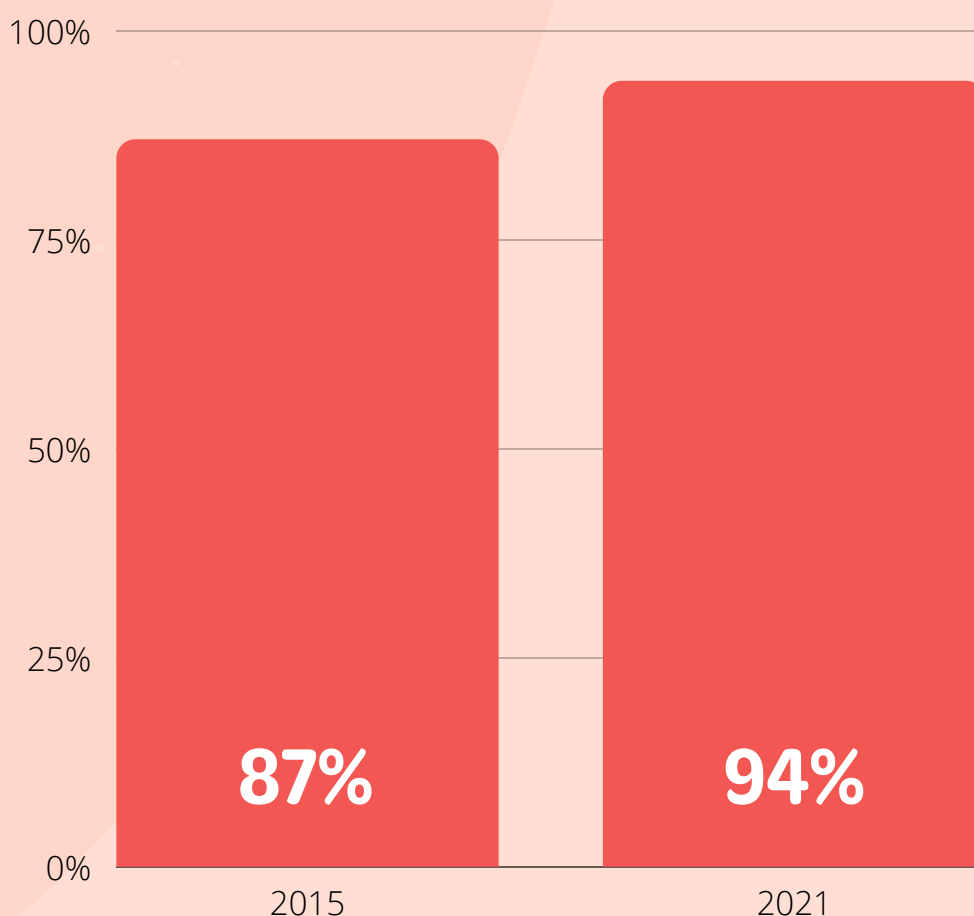
Reports Including One or More 'Out-take' KPI

Out-take KPIs have been a staple of PR reporting over the years.

Back in 2015, 87% of reports included one or more Out-take KPI. That number increased a little to 94% in 2021, closely mirroring Outputs.

But it's when we zoom in to the nature of those KPIs, we see how things have truly evolved.

In 2015, the Out-take metrics available to most of the market were rather limited. As with Outputs, there has been an explosion in the range and quality of data in this category too.

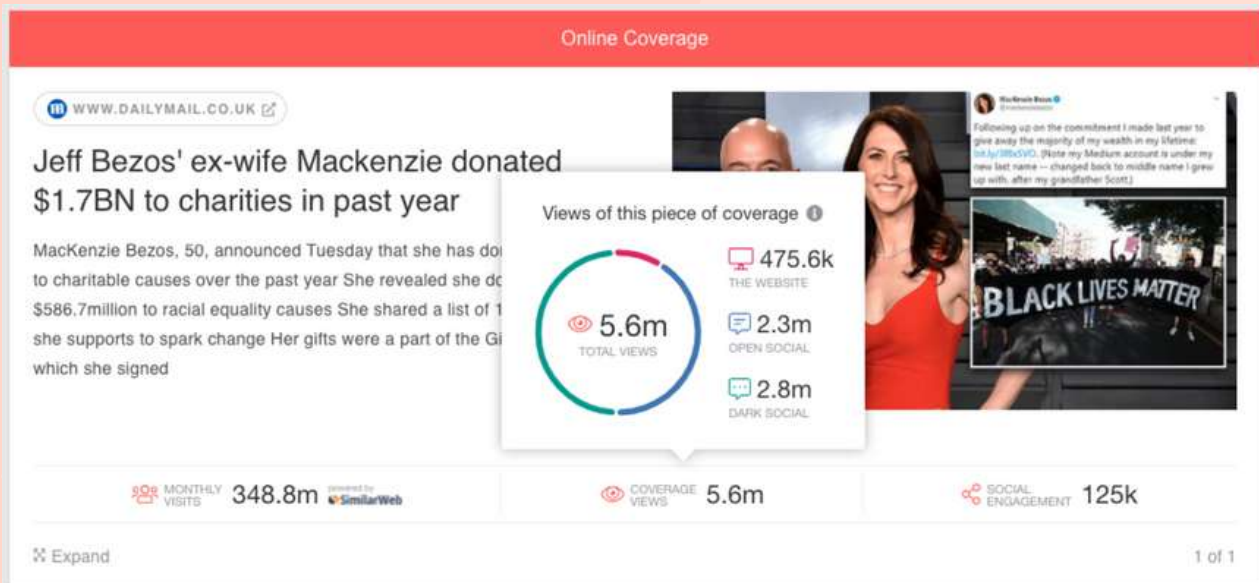


How many times has your coverage been seen?

Gaining an understanding of how many times a piece of coverage has been seen has always been a challenge for PRs. It's impossible to know this number for sure without access to a publication's website analytics platform.

However there are now means of estimating this figure, and breaking it down by the different places that modern coverage is viewed: on a website, in open social feeds, and within dark social channels.

You can read more about Dark Social, and how these metrics are generated, [here](#).

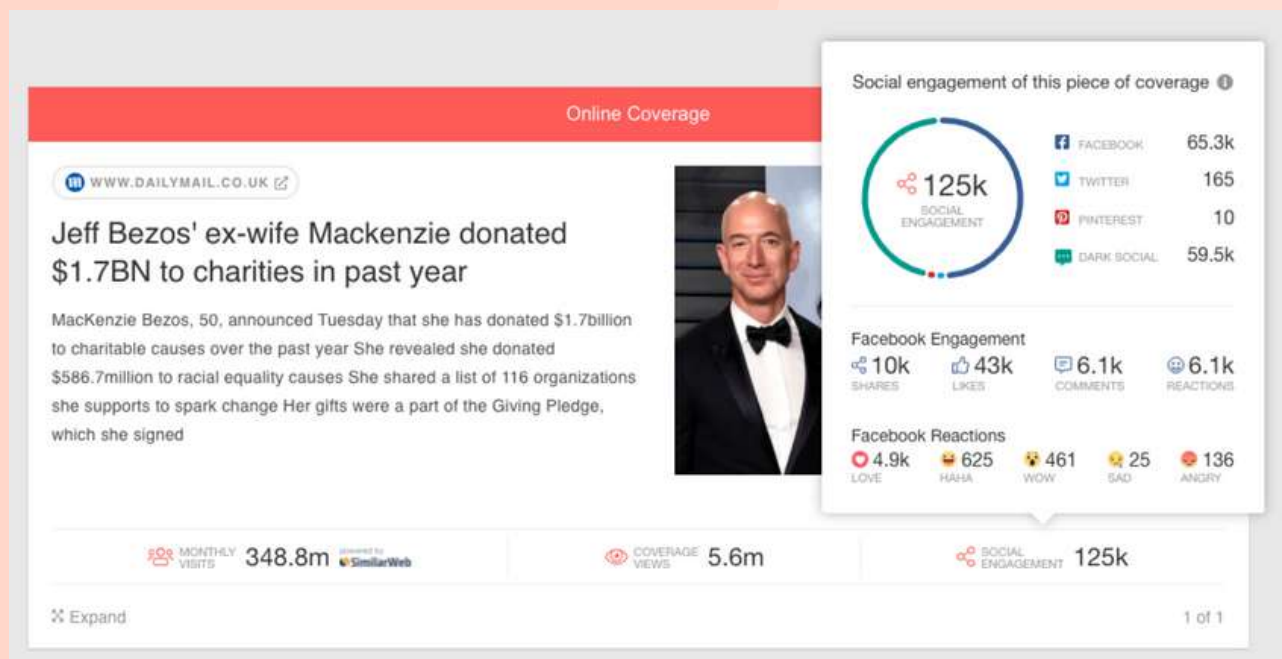


Coverage Views in the Releasid platform

Social Engagement

Social engagement can be another strong indicator that an audience has 'taken something out' of a story.

Again, the rise of APIs, like those offered by BuzzSumo, allow for the retrieval of a host of live social sharing data based purely on a URL. For consumer PR activity, metrics like Facebook Reactions show how people are feeling about a given story for example.



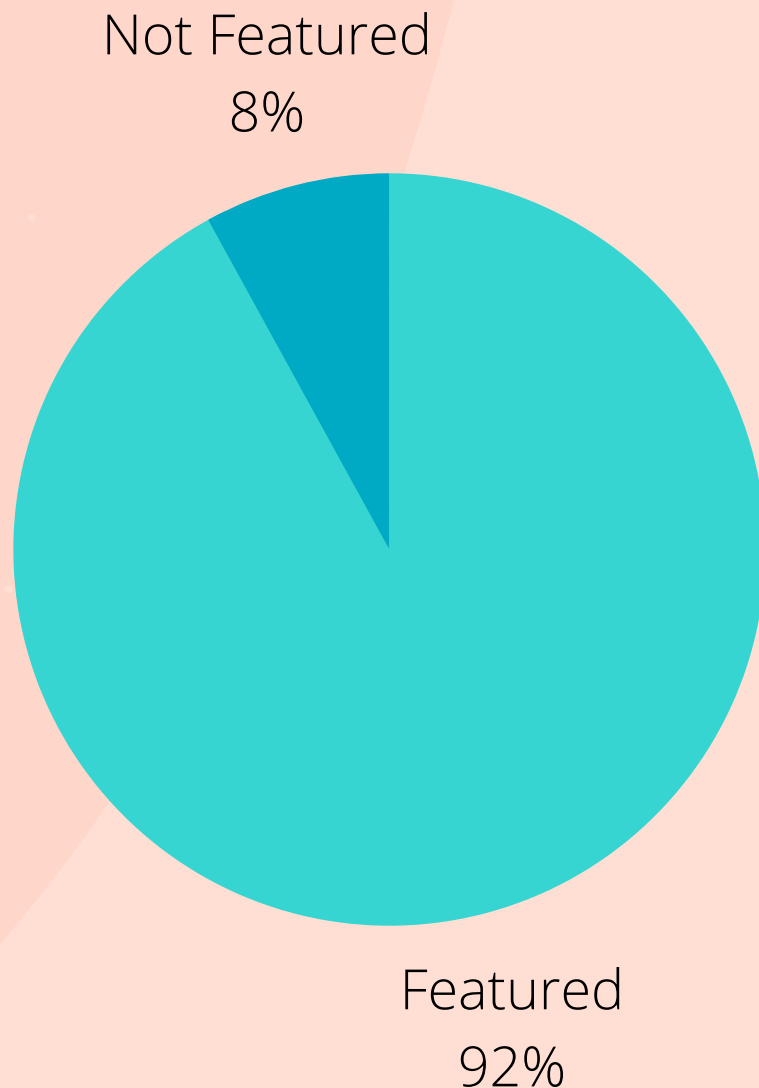
Social Engagement metrics in the Releasd platform

Reports that Feature Automated Out-Takes Metrics

The Out-Take KPIs integrated into our own platform have been immensely popular.

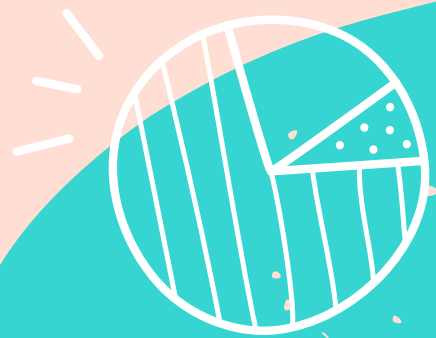
Since their launch in 2017, 92% of reports have featured them.

This, in some part, could be cover for the fact that it can be challenging to quantify business Outcomes and Impacts. Let's explore this in our final section.





Outcomes & Impacts



Outcome & Impact KPIs

Outcomes are described by AMEC as “Effects that your communication has on audiences” or, from another perspective, truly meaningful actions taken by those audiences.

Impacts are “The results that are caused, in full or in part, by your communication” or the business or social benefits of those actions.

Outcomes and Impacts are the holy grail of PR. They’re also seen as the hardest things to measure. You can see some example of such KPIs added to reports on our platform here.

 96

Marketing Qualified Leads



330

Webinar Registrations



4

New Partners



15

New reviews



£47k

Raised at Auction



11.2k

Footfall to Pop-Up

Requirements for Outcome/Impact KPIs

We set up interviews with some of the customers who had included Outcome or Impact metrics in their reports in order to get a better understanding of how this was achieved. We found three commonalities.

Awareness

Strong understanding of Comms

Aims

Realistic targets set upfront

Access

Access to tools and people

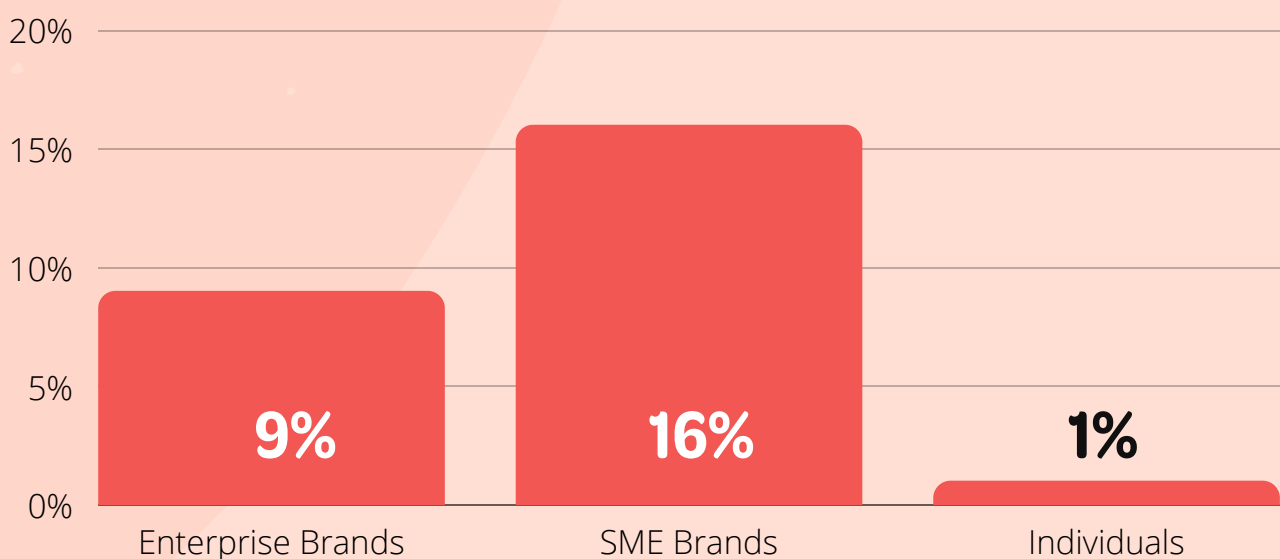
Reports that featured Outcome or Impact KPIs

The number of reports that featured Outcome or Impact KPIs back in 2015 was negligible. Examples of genuine Outcomes or Impact KPIs created by our customers in 2021 were also quite hard to come by, but the most interesting results were based on the type of organisation that the reports were being shared with.

SMEs tended to offer an environment most conducive to the measurement of Outcomes and Impacts. They are more likely to provide the relevant parties with access to the right tools and the right people at the right times.

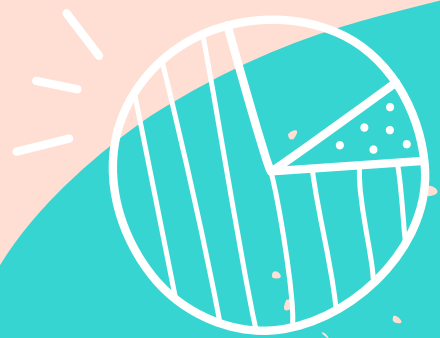
Conversely, common complaints from those serving Enterprise organisations centred around information sharing, siloed working, internal politics and speed of decision making - all of which can make Impacts or Outcomes very difficult to measure.

**Reports that Featured one or More Outcome or Impact KPI
vs Type of Org Reports were Shared with (2021)**





Summary



Summary

There are a number of positives to be taken from this research.

Firstly, we've seen an explosion in activity-based KPIs over the years. AMEC understandably warns that "PR professionals can't afford to run the risk of being seen as activity-based 'busy fools'" but I think the data shows that the industry has diversified and strengthened its offering. It's something we have certainly noticed when speaking to customers. Gone are the days when reporting on coverage alone would suffice - now there's a need to proudly showcase and measure the full breadth of modern PR activities. There's every reason to believe that this is a trend that is likely to continue, almost guaranteeing the long term health of PR after a period of unprecedented turbulence.

Output KPIs - the old school metrics of PR - have remained consistently popular over time and seem to be here for the long-haul. The depth and breadth of available data points has thankfully expanded, but AMEC is understandably insistent that the industry must "move beyond measuring just the content or 'media outputs'" and "look to show how PR and comms have driven the objectives that matter to the organisation."

So, is this being achieved?

Here, we enter a slightly grey area: Out-takes. Many PRs use Out-takes as a proxy for Outcomes and Impacts. It's easy to understand why. There are some groundbreaking Out-take metrics now available and they are extremely popular. It's now possible to estimate coverage views, show how stories are being shared in real time and even shine a light into dark social channels. Ongoing advances in technology, together with new suppliers, data-rich APIs and smart algorithms mean that the trend of ever more sophisticated Out-take KPIs looks set to continue.

Summary (continued)

However it's the final, crucial stage of the evaluation process where the biggest discrepancy between best practice and reality lies. According to our dataset, many PR professionals are still finding it challenging to effectively measure the Outcomes and Impacts of their hard work. Conversations with customers have provided some context.

Many mentioned a lack of awareness from clients or executives in terms of what Comms can actually do. "No, we can't get you on the front page of the FT every week", or similar, was a common refrain.

This lack of awareness presented a challenge in terms of setting realistic and achievable goals. Budgetary and time constraints were also regularly raised, with many PRs feeling pressured to "Just get on with it".

Finally, a widespread lack of access to the right tools and people was a major hindrance: "Everyone works in silos here" exemplifying this, especially in larger companies.

However, the encouraging aspect of our conversations was a widespread awareness of best practice and desire to do things right. In other words, most PR practitioners are pushing themselves, their clients and their executives in the right direction. That's backed up by the data; Outcome and Impact KPIs were negligible in 2015, but noticeable in 2021.

I think that's cause for optimism. Let's see if the trend continues next year.

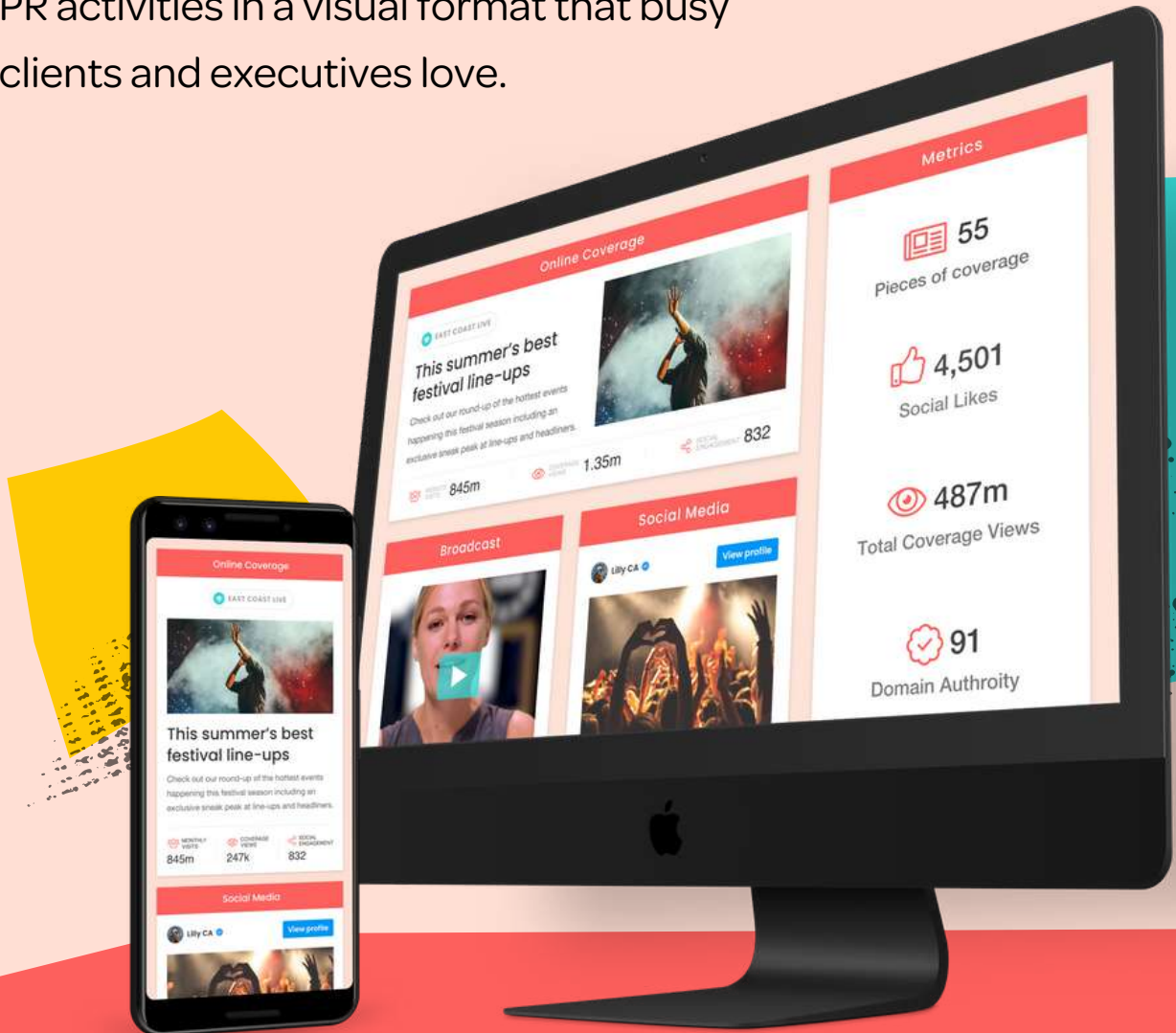


Richard Benson

Co-Founder and CEO, Released

Create **next generation** coverage reports

Showcase coverage plus the full breadth of modern PR activities in a visual format that busy clients and executives love.



More Control

Quickly tailor layouts to showcase your work, your way. Just drag and drop, it couldn't be easier.



More Scope

Include the full breadth of your activity: coverage, social, metrics, plus supporting content and more.



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No more scrolling through screenshots. Reports look fabulous, and they're much easier to absorb.