

# Vertical Influence: The PR Playbook



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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the world of vertical influence — where *precision trumps volume*, and industry expertise is your golden ticket.

In the B2B SaaS PR space, there's been an undeniable shift that mirrors the above idea: One-size-fits-all PR strategies overly focused on Tier 1 don't move the needle anymore.

Why? Too much media noise, variation in mediums, and short attention spans. *There is power in your message when you speak directly to a specific audience.*

This is where vertical influence comes in. It's the art of becoming the go-to voice in your market and sub-verticals; the brand that doesn't just sell a product but *becomes an integral part of its ecosystem*. Vertical influence means tailoring your PR and communication efforts to resonate deeply within specific industry sectors — positioning your company as the thought leader, the problem solver, and the innovation driver in your chosen vertical.

In this ebook, we're pulling back the curtain on vertical influence by exploring:

- What vertical influence means and why it's your new PR superpower.
- How to identify and engage with your specific audience.
- The most effective channels for building vertical influence.
- Measuring the impact of your vertical influence efforts (because what gets measured gets managed).

## UNDERSTANDING VERTICAL INFLUENCE

Vertical influence isn't about blasting your message everywhere, even if it is tailored. Instead, it focuses on reaching the right audience most effectively. The ultimate goal is to transform your brand into an integral part of your industry's ecosystem, *driving trust, credibility, and business growth* within your chosen vertical.

We recently conducted a survey of 1,000 individuals to gain more insight into the importance of having a strong vertical presence. Here are the key findings:

**65%** of professionals get their industry news from nontraditional sources like podcasts, networking groups, and social media.

Roughly the **same number of professionals** get their industry news from industry-specific pubs or newsletters (15%) as from national business pubs (14%).

A whopping **89% of individuals** find it important to get news from various sources versus a single source, pointing to the effectiveness of a well-rounded PR program.

What does this tell us? To truly influence your vertical, you must be present where your audience is hanging out (across multiple industry-specific sources). Beyond having a great product, being part of the industry conversation is key.

# IDENTIFYING YOUR AUDIENCE AND LANDSCAPE

Knowing your audience is one of the most critical components of any successful PR strategy. That's even more true for vertical-specific campaigns because you need to go beyond basic demographics and dive deep into the *very fabric* of your industry. So, grab your favorite data analytics tool, and let's explore audience identification.

## KNOW YOUR CROWD

You'd be surprised by how many SaaS companies cast too wide a net when it comes to the audience to which they direct their message. To sharpen your focus, ask yourself these questions:

- **What industry-specific media channels or forums do your prospects and customers frequent?** Maybe it's that niche subreddit or an invite-only Slack channel. Find out where your audience lives and be there.
- **What keeps your audience up at night?** Deeply understand the unique pain points — like regulatory issues or other obstacles that influence decision-making — that plague your industry and tailor your message to help solve them.
- **Who has the megaphone?** Identify the key influencers and thought leaders in your specific niche. These are the people your audience deems authorities. What are they saying and doing that's driving engagement?
- **What metrics or outcomes are valued in your vertical?** Efficiency, compliance, improved user experience... value can look different for everyone. Understanding your audience's outcome priorities helps shape your message.
- **What is the buying process?** Is the buying process in your vertical a long, committee-driven marathon or a sprint decided by a single decision-maker? Your influence strategy needs to match their pace.

To get these answers, talk to your sales team, interview current customers, and dive into industry reports. The more specific your answers, the more targeted your vertical influence strategy can be.

## SIZING UP THE COMPETITION

Now it's time to scope out your competition. Feature sets and market share are important data points, but take it a step further by examining who has the strongest voice and the most credibility in your industry.

Here are a few ways to look at the competitive landscape:



### **Content audit**

Examine the content your competitors are producing. Are they dominating certain channels or topics? Search news, LinkedIn, communities like Reddit, and their website resources. Identify gaps you can fill.



### **Share of voice**

Determine which competitor gets the most mentions in industry media and social media conversations. We use tools like MuckRack, Cision, and Brandwatch to help us get an overarching picture of the industry share of voice.



### **Thought leadership**

Identify which competitor executives are frequently featured as expert sources, podcast guests or keynote speakers at industry events, and those who receive envious LinkedIn engagement. These are your key thought leader competitors in the influence space.



### **Customer sentiment**

Analyze what people are saying about your competitors. Survey your customers and prospects. Check out review sites. Platforms like MuckRack and Cision can also help with sentiment analysis.



### **Partner ecosystem**

Investigate who your competitors are partnering with, both on the technical side and on the communications/marketing front. These relationships can be crucial for expanding influence in your vertical. There are ample opportunities for partner co-marketing — ask to develop joint assets, webinars, and blog or podcast swaps.

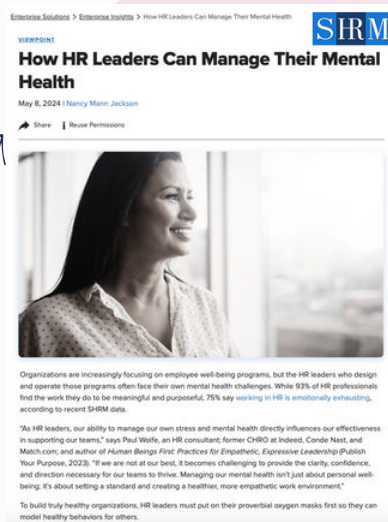
Want to crush your competition in the game of influence? A competitive analysis is your spyglass into your rivals' world.

## TAPPING INTO YOUR SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

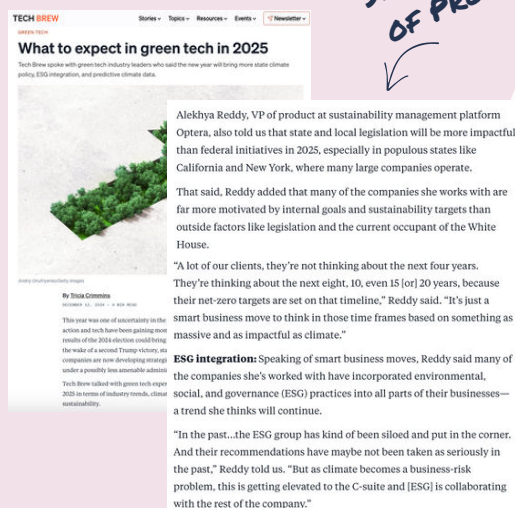
When asked who they trust most to deliver information, our survey respondents cited **respected business leaders** as the top answer, beating out reporters and influencers. This data shows that authentic expertise triumphs over general influence, making your internal subject matter experts (SMEs) invaluable assets in building credibility within your vertical.

To tap into your SMEs effectively, start by looking beyond the C-suite. From engineering to customer success, vertical media and the audiences they serve want to hear from business leaders with street cred in their specific industry vs. a CEO talking head lacking direct experience.

SME IS A  
CHRO!



SME IS A VP  
OF PRODUCT!



Create a matrix of your team's expertise and align it with the industry hot topics and pain points you previously identified. This will help you assemble your dream team of experts that can answer any opportunity.

Not all SMEs are natural public speakers or comfortable in the spotlight, and that's okay. Some experts might be best suited to contribute an article to an industry publication or newsletter, while others might thrive on a podcast interview or speaking at an industry conference.

Assess your SMEs' willingness and ability to engage in various activities, and consider providing media training or public speaking workshops to those who need and want to build confidence. Because **33% of our survey respondents still trust news reporters** for information delivery, preparing a few key SMEs for media interactions is a valuable investment of time.

## AVENUES TO VERTICAL INFLUENCE

If you've already established the above and are ready to roll, this section helps guide you on the formats and mediums that hold the most vertical influence.

There are about a million channels you could use to share your message, so which ones are the most important for influencing your vertical? Here are a few you may not have considered.

### TRADITIONAL MEDIA: DON'T COUNT OUT THE CLASSICS

Don't write off traditional media just yet. Our survey shows that over 70% of people still trust conventional news sources — which include print, online and broadcast formats of trade and national media — challenging the notion of widespread mistrust in established press. We found that respondents turn to industry trade media/newsletters and national business media in roughly equal numbers.

And don't forget: The power of vertical influence extends beyond trade mediums. There are industry-specific reporters at national business media that should be key to your media outreach strategy.

### COMMUNITIES: WHERE CONVERSATION HAPPENS

Industry associations, online forums, and in-person communities are vital channels for real-time interaction with your audience and peers. Our survey revealed that 33% of professionals use social media for work-related information. Sure, you could focus on LinkedIn (which is still important), but we're already seeing an influx of "LinkedIn influencers" that are making the platform crowded and, frankly, boring. Think beyond traditional social media.

There's a good chance your audience is living in communities on Discord and Slack or forums like Reddit — especially if you're in a more technical industry like DevOps. Don't miss the opportunity to engage there. Whether you launch your own community or engage with ones that already exist, actively participating in these communities can help establish your brand as a valuable contributor to industry discussions and keep you attuned to the pulse of your vertical.

From market research to recruiting to brand awareness, these communities have endless benefits for SaaS businesses. But engaging in them is easier said than done, as most of these communities push a "vendor-neutral" mentality.



# DO'S AND DON'TS OF *COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT*

## DO



Focus on a few core communities rather than spreading yourself too thin.



Assign community management roles — have specific staff members responsible for your community engagement efforts for consistency and train them on best practices.



Be patient — community building takes time & commitment.

## DON'T



Ignore group guidelines— can you share brand-related news? Who is allowed to join? Don't breeze over the basics.



Interact just to interact — make your participation about more than just your company and engage only in conversations where you can provide true value.



Hide your affiliations — participate using your real title and company name, not anonymously. Be open about affiliations. Build trust.

## CREDIBILITY BUILDERS: PROVE YOUR WORTH

Software review sites, customer stories, and original data are powerful tools for establishing authority in your vertical. These elements work together to build a comprehensive picture of your value proposition, backing up your claims with concrete evidence:


- Software review platforms like G2, TrustRadius, and Capterra showcase real user experiences, providing social proof of your product's effectiveness. The customer testimonials are public, so you can re-purpose them in sales decks, on your website, and in other marketing channels.
- Customer success stories demonstrate your practical impact, illustrating how your solutions solve real-world problems.
- Original research or data analysis positions your brand as an authority, offering unique insights that can't be found elsewhere. Original research also gives you a treasure trove of additional content, from a basis for speaking abstracts for industry conferences to commentary for media relations efforts.
- The effectiveness of each of these channels can vary widely across SaaS verticals, so always keep your audience and competitor research in mind when prioritizing them.

**TECHNOLOGY**

### Consumers have mixed feelings about AI in restaurants

Not everyone is convinced the technology is necessary, and many give it little margin for error, according to a new survey.

By Joe Gaszkowski on Sep. 04, 2024



18% of consumers said they're excited about using AI in the drive-thru. | Photo: Shutterstock

As restaurants speed ahead with artificial intelligence, they face a potential roadblock in their own customers.

A survey of more than 1,000 people by in-store music provider Mood Media found that consumers have mixed feelings about the technology, which is making its way into more restaurant drive-thrus, self-service kiosks and phone lines.

Restaurants see AI as a potential solution for their labor challenges and a way to operate more efficiently. But not all customers feel it's necessary, and they're not entirely sure they can trust it, according to the Mood study conducted last month.

**PolyAI**

### How Hopper scales phone support to millions of customers with PolyAI


Industry: Online Travel Agency

Use Cases:

- Frequently asked questions
- Call routing

Featuring:

- In-call AI at Customer Experience, Hopper



per is a travel agency that partners with airlines, hotels, homes, and car rental providers, serving users in over 100 countries worldwide. Travel brands can also partner with HTS – the company's business – to optimize their direct channels by leveraging travel and fintech offerings.

Challenge	Solution	Result
poly handles a wide range of unique, complex travel inquiries over the web, with instant and consistent phone AI.	A gentle voice assistant that understands caller intent, answers hundreds of FAQs, and seamlessly transfers calls to agents when needed.	PolyAI fully resolves 15% of Hopper's call volume, providing immediate support to travelers 24/7 and allowing Hopper to scale their phone support while maintaining a great customer experience.

**Bloomreach**

Search for software: call

Software Services G2 for Business \$ Data 4.9k Write a Review Join or Login

#BeLimitless Top 50 Software Buyer's Choice

**Bloomreach**

4.9k reviews | 8 discussions

Product Information Reviews Pricing Features

**Bloomreach Reviews & Product Details**

**Bloomreach Overview**

**What is Bloomreach?**

Bloomreach is a comprehensive commerce personalization solution designed to enhance the online shopping experience by leveraging real-time customer and product data. This platform enables businesses to gain deep insights into customer preferences and behaviors, allowing them to tailor their offerings and interactions across various channels. By unifying data and applying advanced analytics, Bloomreach empowers brands to create a shopping experience that resonates with the customer, ensuring relevance and engagement at every touchpoint.

The target audience for Bloomreach encompasses commerce businesses of all sizes that are looking to optimize customer interactions and drive sales growth. Its suite of products is

**Bloomreach Details**

Product Website: Bloomreach

Discussions: Official Bloomreach Community

**Language Supported**

Bengali, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, German, Greek, Estonian, Finnish, French, Irish, Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Albanian, Serbian, Swedish, Turkish, Ukrainian, Chinese (Simplified), Maltese

## MEASURING YOUR VERTICAL INFLUENCE

You've put in the work to build your vertical influence strategy, but how do you know if it's actually moving the needle? Like all marketing efforts, measurement is key to understanding your impact and refining your approach.

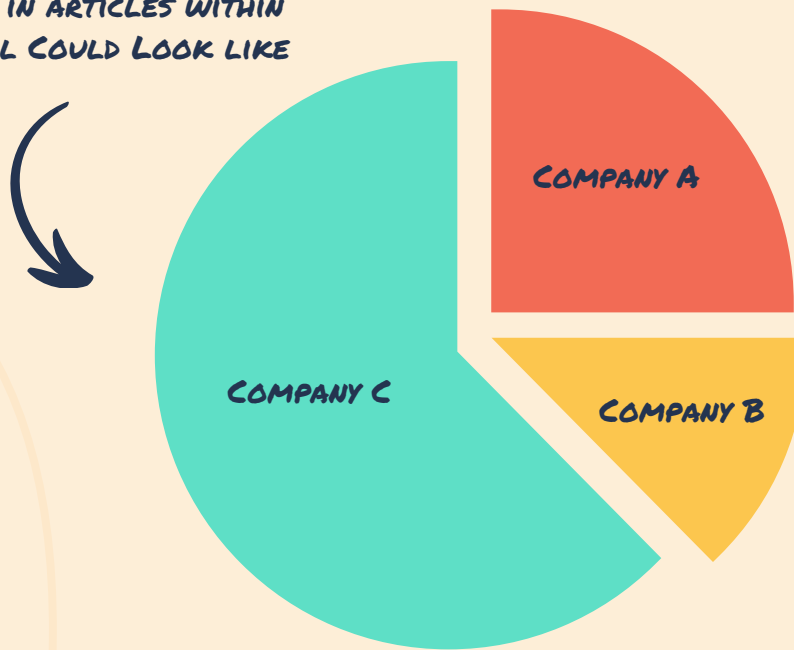
### VERTICAL PR EFFORTS: BEYOND IMPRESSIONS

Please stop measuring PR impressions as the only metric of success. When it comes to trade media, impressions can be low, but engagement is high. By looking at our client's website analytics, we've seen time and time again that a feature in trade press often drives more traffic than a quote in Tier 1 media. And the users are engaged — visiting multiple pages and spending a lot of time on site. That's vertical influence in action.

Session source ▾	+	↓	Active users	New users	Views	Sessions	Engaged sessions
l.facebook.com			58	56	117	75	39
Cloudtango			55	52	149	68	51
crn.com			54	51	117	63	50
storage.googleapis.com			48	48	48	48	0
indeed.com			47	45	158	56	43
partner.googleadservices.com			47	47	47	47	0
aws.amazon.com			45	44	111	67	35
techtarget.com			45	45	80	50	20
clutch.co			42	42	116	53	47

**Share of Voice (SoV)** in vertical media is another metric you can track to measure your vertical influence. Doing this monitors how often your brand is mentioned compared to competitors in industry-specific media. We often track this for our clients by creating a “wish list” of the most popular vertical publications among the industry’s professionals, including the outlets where your board and executive team are getting their industry info.

HERE'S WHAT SOV IN ARTICLES WITHIN  
A SPECIFIC VERTICAL COULD LOOK LIKE



**Awareness surveys** are also a great way to gauge vertical influence. Because... if you don't ask directly, you'll never truly know. Find a survey partner that can narrow down the respondent pool to your niche audience (if you work with a PR agency, they may already have a resource for this — we do!) and conduct these surveys on a regular basis to measure if your brand recognition is growing.

Of course, the ultimate measure of success is the **impact on your bottom line**. Are you seeing an uptick in the quality of leads that can be traced back to your influence efforts? Are BDR email open rates increasing? Your vertical influence strategy plays a part here.

Remember, the goal of vertical influence isn't to be everywhere, but to be in **the right places with the right message**. Regularly checking your pulse with measurement and analysis of these metrics will help you refine your approach.

# SUCCESS STORIES: VERTICAL INFLUENCE IN ACTION

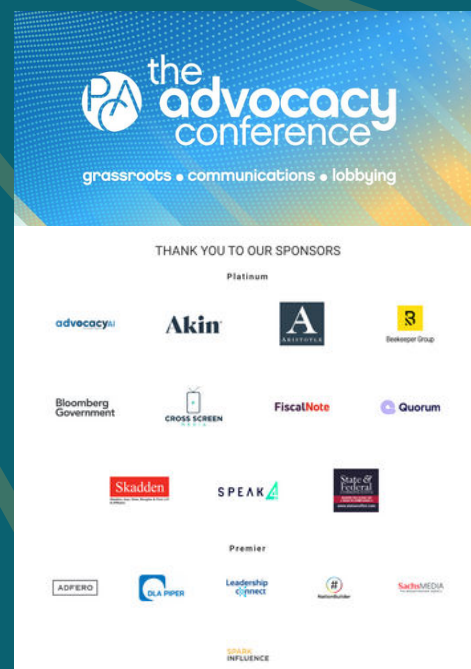
A vertical-driven strategy is a powerful PR play that drives real results. But don't take it from us. Look at how two companies in different industries leveraged unique approaches to enhance their standing within their target verticals.

## QUORUM: DATA-DRIVEN AUTHORITY IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Quorum, a provider of public affairs software, faced the challenge of standing out in the fast-paced world of political news. PANBlast's strategy focused on leveraging Quorum's extensive data to generate newsworthy insights tailored to their vertical.

### KEY VERTICAL INFLUENCE TACTICS

- Established a system to regularly analyze data for emerging industry trends.
- Developed the 2024 State Legislative Trends Report, analyzing activity across all state legislatures and Congress.
- Crafted customized pitches for different media tiers within their vertical.
- SME and customer participation at industry conferences like the Public Affairs Council's Advocacy Conference and the National PAC Conference.
- Sponsored or exhibited at industry conferences, such as the National Conference of State Legislatures, the NACo Annual Conference, and more.





## RESULTS

- 82 pieces of quality media coverage, surpassing targets by 35%.
- Increased SoV against industry competitors by nearly 40%.
- Targeted coverage in vertical-specific publications like American City & County and PolitiFact.

By positioning Quorum as a data authority, PANBlast elevated the company's status in the public affairs technology vertical, demonstrating the power of leveraging unique insights to speak to a niche audience.



BIZ DATA

## Is Your Government AI-Ready? An Interactive Tracker of AI Action

*Government Technology* dug deep into artificial intelligence policies, legislation and lawmaker-mandated projects across the U.S. to uncover what local governments are doing about the booming technology.

August 13, 2024 • Nikki Davidson



Human experts echo this sentiment. Erin Mills, chief marketing officer at Quorum, a legislative tracking software platform, noted the surge in AI legislation in 2024.

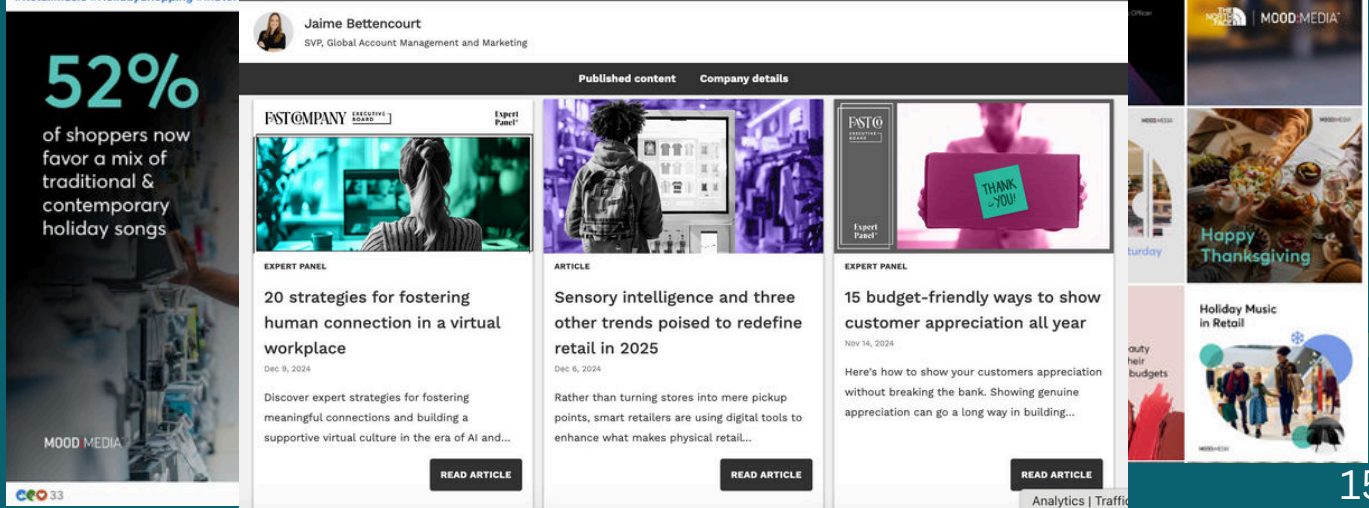
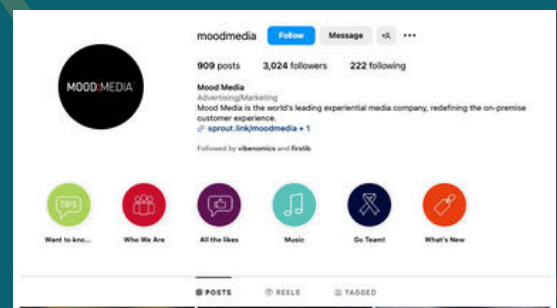
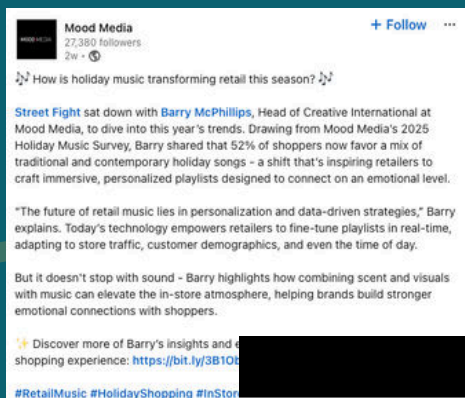
"I think there's a lot of concern, because there's all these core issues that the states have been focused on because the federal government hasn't been moving as fast as we may have liked," said Mills. "People are still trying to figure it out, we're still in the early days and understanding what the implications are for their jobs, and what the implications are for generated content."

## MOOD MEDIA: EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING EXPERTISE IN RETAIL AND QSR

Mood Media, a leader in customer experience solutions, aimed to boost its influence in the Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) and retail sectors. Their approach showcased how companies can apply vertical influence principles to specific industry segments.

### KEY VERTICAL INFLUENCE TACTICS

- Conducted pulse surveys on AI in the QSR sector, generating vertical-specific insights.
- Created content for LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram that included reacting to trending articles from vertical publications and journalists covering the QSR vertical at Tier 1 media and highlighting executives attending speaking engagements.
- Engaged with ICP targets on social media. For example, sharing or commenting on news and thought leadership surrounding prospects and their leaders.
- Developed an executive profile in Fast Company, highlighting industry expertise.
- Implemented an Account-Based Marketing (ABM) strategy featuring work with recognizable vertical brands.

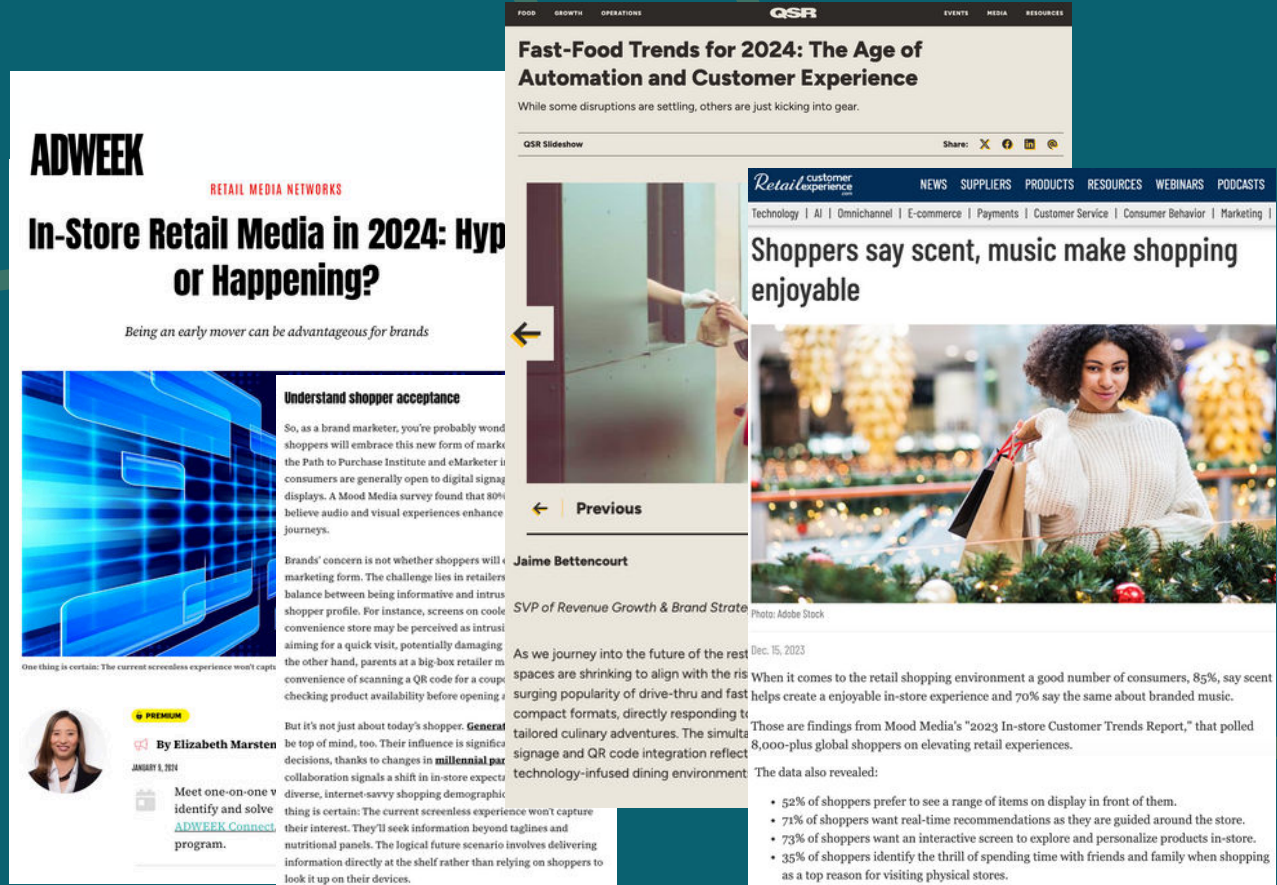


## RESULTS

- Increased brand awareness in the QSR vertical through data-driven insights with 83 pieces of coverage over a ~15-month period, 61% of which were high-impact pieces like quotes and features.
- Enhanced credibility via national recognition in key industry publications like Adweek, Chain Store Age, CX Dive, Retail Customer Experience, Restaurant Business, Nation's Restaurant News, Modern Restaurant Management, and more.
- Strengthened relationships with Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) brands in target verticals via media inclusions in publications like Retail & Restaurant Facility Business and Retail Touchpoints.

Mood Media's case illustrates how companies can leverage vertical influence strategies to strengthen their position in target industries through research, thought leadership, and strategic content.

Quorum and Mood Media know the secret sauce to vertical influence: aligning your superpowers with your target audience's kryptonite.





## THE BOTTOM LINE

Let's be real: Nobody wants to be another voice in a crowded room. But narrowing in as the go-to expert in your specific industry? That's when the magic happens.

Throughout this guide, we've shown how vertical influence can transform your brand from "just another tech company" into an essential part of your industry's conversation. Whether you're speaking at an industry conference, contributing an article in a trade publication, or participating in end-user communities, it's all about being intentional and authentic in your chosen space.

Ready to stop blending in with the crowd and start standing out as a major industry player? That's where we come in. [Drop us a line](#), and let's talk about how you can start influencing your vertical today with the right B2B SaaS PR partner.