

## PESO and the Buyer's Journey



**How to leverage two powerful marketing concepts  
to better engage with prospects and efficiently  
turn them into customers**



Spin Sucks set in motion a powerful trend in marketing and sales with the introduction of its PESO<sup>®1</sup> model. By linking paid, earned, shared and owned media, the PESO model creates a dynamic platform that amplifies the reach and impact of any marketing campaign.

But simply knowing the range of PESO tools is not enough to develop an impactful campaign. Take, for example, a marketing introduction of a new technology. What tools do you use to help customers recognize they have a problem that needs to be solved with the new technology. They are operating just fine, because they

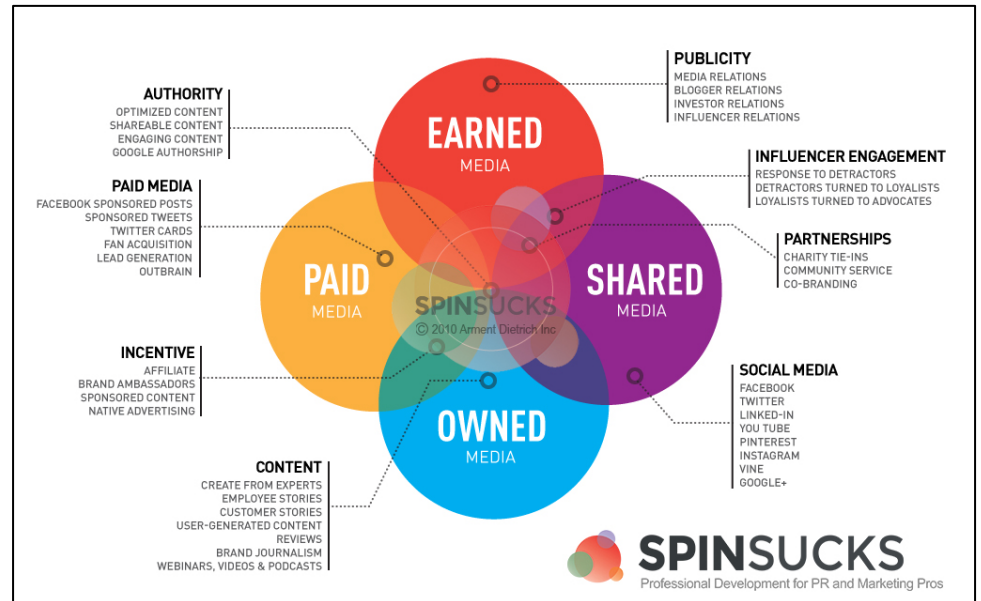


Figure 1: The PESO model shows how four media strategies work together to build awareness and educate prospects.

don't know that their operation or life could be made better or more efficient. Matching the PESO tools to the buyer's journey is a way to determine which tool is best for your company. As shown in Figure 2, that journey starts with problem awareness and continues through a research stage, followed by purchase and product advocacy stages.

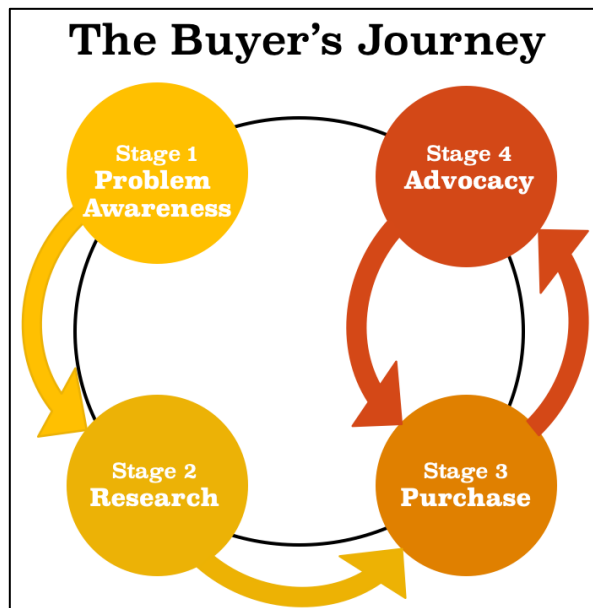


Figure 2: Outline of the four stages of the buyer's journey.

This paper reviews how to structure a PESO program to meet the needs of prospects at each stage of the buyer's journey. In most cases, a company will encounter prospects in all stages simultaneously. By understanding how PESO tools impact each stage, it's possible to ensure the right mix of PESO tools for maximum impact. To get started, let's review the PESO tools.

<sup>1</sup> The PESO Model and graphic are copyrighted by Spin Sucks and used with permission.

## What PESO Is

**Paid Media:** As Gini Dietrich, the developer of PESO model [explains in a blog post](#), paid media isn't listed first because it's most important, but because the acronym PESO is easier to remember than if the media types were ordered differently in the diagram. Still, paid media has an important role to play.

Paid media helps drive awareness and build audience. As your audience grows, paid media helps promote new content and increase web traffic. Paid media may include various types of advertising — sponsoring a LinkedIn or Twitter post, running a Facebook ad, or working with a particular media outlet to promote and distribute a piece of content, such as an eBook or whitepaper. Working with social media influencers or thought leaders to promote a product or service is another form of paid media.

**Earned Media:** Earned media used to be called public relations and involves engagement with external editors who serve as gateways to their readers. These editors evaluate content submissions to ensure they offer news or educational value. Cultivating earned media builds credible promotion for new products and company initiatives.

A touchstone of earned media is outreach and relationship building with key media contacts. Ways to earn media include press releases, story pitches, contributing an article written by a company executive to a publication, or by proactively reaching out to a media contact as an expert source on relevant newsworthy topics, sometimes known as “news-jacking.”

Conference speaking, which requires following event calls for speakers and submitting a speaking abstract is another form of earned media. Building relationships with industry analysts (for B2B companies) is another very important tactic.

**Shared Media:** Shared media is organic social media — that is the content posted by a company on its feeds. Shared media is used for community engagement and as a channel to promote new content to an existing audience. Shared media usually happens through social media sites including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube, but may also include interactions between a company and its community on forums.

**Owned Media:** Owned media is exactly as it sounds: Content that a company has created itself and controls, and that it posts to its own web properties or distributes via email. Owned media provides SEO benefits, educates web visitors and provides source content that can feed into the other media types discussed above. Examples of owned media may include a blog written by a company executive, a single topic microsite, an infographic, videos, podcasts or webinars.

## What PESO is Not

Overlap between the different media categories occurs with every marketing campaign (as shown in Figure 1). As such, one tactic might fit in multiple categories. Even so, while PESO can solve many marketing communication challenges, it does not represent the entire tool kit for a marketing program. Messaging, for example, is not a part of the formal PESO model, but rather an input

to the process. Nor is PESO the main tool used for an overarching branding campaign. Instead, online, television and display advertising remain critical tools for reaching a mass audience with a branding message (PESO can support, but not replace, these activities).

### **PESO at Each Stage of the Buyers Journey**

The buyer's journey replaces the traditional marketing funnel as the way to understand what is going on in the mind of the prospect as he or she moves closer to a purchase. While most people agree on the stages of the journey, there is no a consensus as to the number of steps. Some models present three steps and others seven steps. For simplicity, this paper uses the commonly defined four stages of the buyer's journey.

#### **Stage 1: Problem Awareness**

*Problem Awareness* is the first stage of the buyer's journey and often starts with the prospect discovering a problem or need. This discovery could arise because of a change within the company or an external requirement that creates a new need. In other cases, a company has an existing process, but discovers an innovation that can reduce costs, improve functionality or streamline operations.

For example, many companies happily used email as the backbone of their organization-wide communications. Then team-messaging applications came along and exposed the limitations of email for certain types of communications.

The job of the marketing team, at this stage then, is to awaken the customer to the issues in their companies or lives and show them how

### **PESO for Problem Awareness**

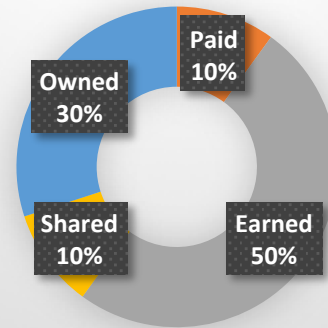


Figure 3: PESO for the problem awareness stage.

to solve the problem. Until customers know they have a problem, they are typically oblivious to other marketing programs.

#### **PESO Tools for Problem Awareness Stage**

**Paid Media:** One of the marketing challenges of using paid media for prospects in the Problem Awareness Stage is this: Until the customer knows there is a problem, it's unlikely that customer is going to pay attention to an ad, much less click on it. If paid media success is measured by ROI metrics, then these campaigns will not be successful. Paid media can be used to promote content that helps identify the problem, but expectations should be set appropriately for ROI.

**Earned Media:** Earned media should be aggressively used to tackle Problem Awareness. Especially effective are contributed articles, conference speaking and newsjacking. Why? Because earned media provides a broad audience and is a great fit for educational information on new ways of solving problems and new technologies. Editors appreciate this

content and so do conference organizers. Industry analysts also react well to this content because they must advise companies on key decisions with an eye toward the future.

**Shared Media:** Shared media is great for community engagement, but most prospects in the Problem Awareness Stage are not yet in your community. They need to be brought in. As such, shared media can play a role in promoting articles, conference speaking, and the other fruits of earned and owned media with hashtags used to expand the readership. Another shared media tactic for the Problem Awareness Stage is creating dedicated, shared media feeds to build a community of users who face the same challenge – with limited company branding.

**Owned Media:** Owned media plays a significant role in Problem Awareness because blogs and websites are great places to publish in-depth content addressing the underlying challenge companies are becoming aware of through the articles they've read and conferences they've attended. Owned media provides the space and resources for deep-dives into the issues using blogs, videos, graphics, etc. The challenge with owned media is discovery and overcoming the perception that it's a biased source of content. This can be mitigated, however, by holding selling messages to a minimum in this content or by posting content based on market research or developed by well-known third parties.

## Stage 2: Research

The web is a critical aspect of the research stage with [72% of B2B buyers using Google to find product information, according to Pardot](#). These searches often lead to the downloading of sales literature, such as data sheets,

whitepapers, product videos or visiting microsites. The buyer is comparing offerings, so marketers must ensure such content both educates the customer on features and positions the product and company as the right choice.

How important is the research stage? [SiriusDecisions states that 67% of the buyer's journey is done digitally](#). Only after that do buyers begin a serious sales conversation. Sales people can be helpful during this Research Stage as a conduit and source of product information. The PESO approach in the Research Stage balances authoritative content with maximized findability of that content and of the company's solutions.

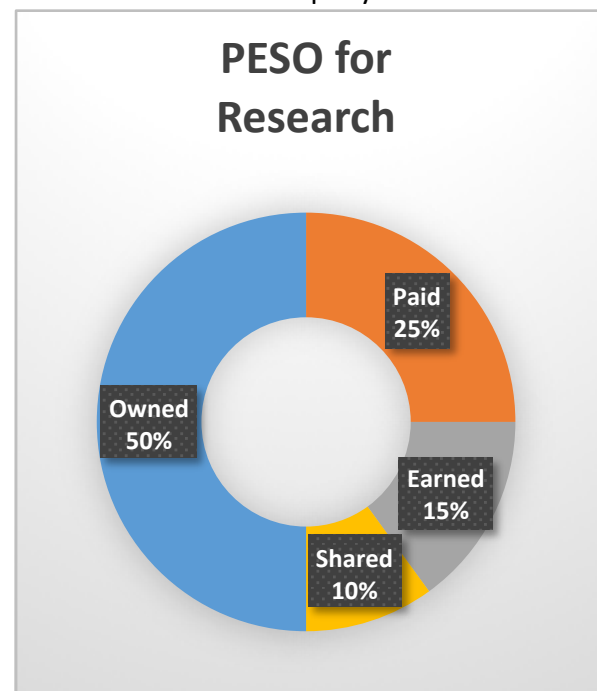


Figure 4: PESO for the research stage.

## PESO Tools for Research Stage

**Paid Media:** Paid media is a critical channel for distributing content to prospects. Advanced demographics of this audience are available,

and that makes it an important tool for reach and repetition. Using paid media to draw customers to whitepapers or other content is the key way to use this tool, with the ROI being higher as these targets are actively searching for product information.

**Earned Media:** Earned media tactics for the Research Stage include product launches, product-related partnership announcements and contributed product features in industry publications. The value of earned media in this stage is leveraging the circulation of publications to get the product information in front of readers, as well as the organic SEO that is generated from these articles. Where relevant, working with industry analysts and being a part of their research reports is an important and high-value way to secure product comparisons. Those reports also can be purchased and distributed as owned content. But earned media has a limited opportunity to “promote” products because editors resist running articles that border on advertising. Thus, it’s not as useful in this stage as it was in the Problem Awareness Stage of the journey.

**Shared Media:** Shared media as a tool to promote sales-oriented content has the same benefits as paid media, but with a lower cost, resulting in a better ROI. Often, shared media campaigns are tied closely to owned content campaigns, helping to raise awareness of the content and improving its findability.

**Owned Media:** Owned media is the heart of the PESO model during the Research Stage. Owned media campaigns that balance shorter content pieces, or webpages that serve as introductions, can be combined with industry-

specific case studies, more detailed application notes or whitepapers.

### **Stage 3: Purchase**

The Purchase Stage begins when the prospect turns into the customer. With the research done, preference established, and sales folks engaged, now is the time to ensure a smooth transition from prospect to customer. In traditional thinking, the Purchase Stage is the “finish line,” where marketing fully hands off the prospect to the sales department.

But a role for PESO tools remains even now. The role of marketing at this stage is to ensure other executives from the buying company have the information they need to approve the purchase and to help communicate the value of any additional features or customer support packages that could be added onto the sale. The other key role for PESO is to provide the information needed to properly onboard the customer.

### **PESO Tools for Purchase Stage**

**Paid Media / Shared Media:** Paid and shared media don’t have much of a role in this stage of the buyer’s journey since the customer is known and is engaging with the company. The customer also has high interest, so the need to convince the customer to watch content is not as acute.

**Earned Media:** The primary job of earned media is complete in terms of educating the prospect on products and features. However, the Purchase Stage is often a time when the buyer, who specifies the solution, may need to include the approval of others in the company, including their manager, finance executives, or even the CEO. These executives are likely to research the company for a sense of its



reliability, success with other companies and high-level product background. Working with journalists on company stories and managing the corporate reputation is needed for these executives who want to know more about the company.

with their peers. At this stage of the buyer's journey, the role for PESO is to encourage new sales and to leverage the excitement from the new solution into owned content that can be used for other prospects who are making the journey.

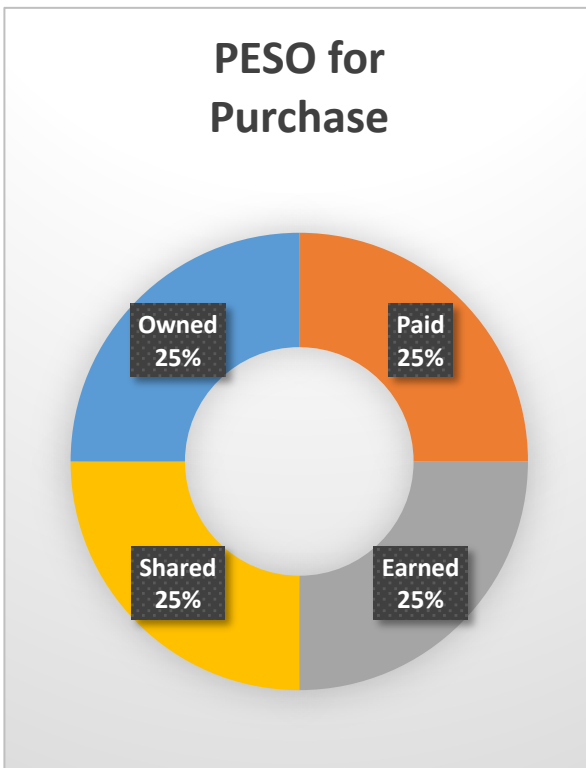


Figure 5: PESO for the purchase stage.

**Owned Media:** The owned media for the Purchase Stage should focus on the information the customer needs after having made the purchase — installation, maintenance, proper operation, upgrades etc. This media could be on an intranet just for customers if there is a need to keep certain product details or competitive features private.

#### Stage 4: Advocacy

Satisfied customers naturally want to share their good experience and newfound expertise

One consideration for the Advocacy Stage is to use one-to-one communication tools to create a club-like intimacy. Another is to allow communication of special pricing, advance access to products or other limited distribution information.

#### PESO Tools for Advocacy Stage

**Paid Media / Earned Media:** Paid and earned media have little impact on the advocacy stage of the buyer's journey since they are mass communications tools not suited for communicating information to a defined audience.

#### Shared Media

Shared media that can facilitate a closed group can be an excellent way to create a user group or otherwise communicate with satisfied users. Using these closed groups, new posts and information go into a commonly checked information stream.

Some risk is possible in a two-way forum. Namely, disgruntled users might disrupt the group esprit de corps. It is also likely you will need to augment these closed groups with other information resources to reach users who do not access these tools in order to ensure communications with the highest number of users.

#### Owned Media

Owned media tools, such as a newsletter, intranet and sales collateral, are important

ways to connect to customers with updated information. It is important to use these channels for product launch activities

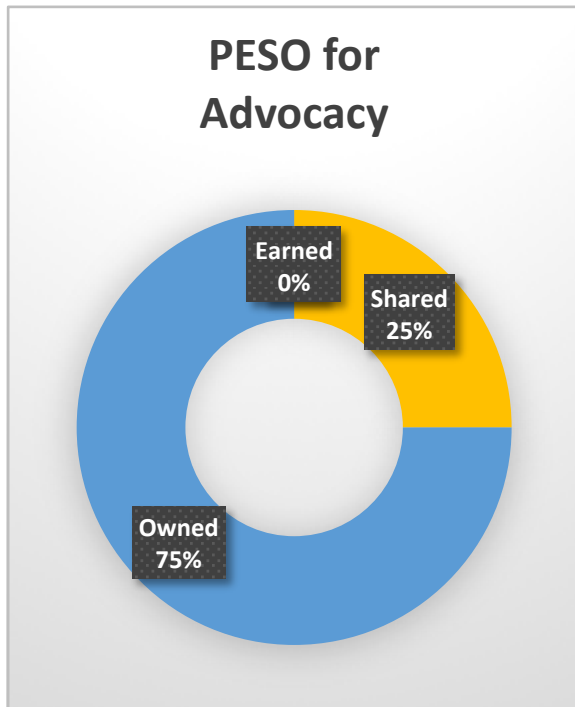


Figure 6: PESO for the advocacy stage.

customized to happy customers, because much of their buyer's journey has been completed, and they likely are closer to buying the new product.

### Conclusion

The buyer's journey is a great way to understand the mindset of prospects at the various stages of purchase. Each stage of the journey brings the need for new and different information. By applying the right PESO tools at each stage of the journey, it is possible to optimize a communications strategy that will ensure the prospect has what is needed to become an active customer ... and remain a loyal, long-term customer.

### About the David James Agency

*Click, call, consider, inspire, email, buy – our mission is to create communications that inspire action, and these are the customer actions that we strive for with every project we undertake. The David James Agency (DJA) provides a full range of media and analyst relations, thought leadership, content marketing and shared/paid media programs based on the PESO model. To see how we've helped technology companies, ranging from multinational market leaders to innovative startups, email us at [dja@davidjamesagency.com](mailto:dja@davidjamesagency.com) for our capabilities brochure, or go to <https://davidjamesagency.com>.*