You already know that reality programming and citizen journalists are yesterday's news. Today's headlines are determined—and dominated—by the stars of Instagram and Snapchat and the brands with a nose for news-fluence.

That was one of the themes at a recent D&AD festival. Although it might seem to spell trouble for career communications professionals, that's hardly the case. Instead, PR firms have a massive opportunity to go way beyond the old practice of merely pitching existing news. The smartest among us can become masters of crafting the news. That means spotting trends and keeping up with what's developing in pop culture, then using those insights to put out routine news in more compelling ways, create opportunities and coattail on relevant breaking news.

Even though the idea of newscrafting hasn't been around long, its established practices are already being upended. In this age of sponsored content and native advertising, news is up for the buying. Money and creativity—I hope not in that order—are rewriting the rules.

Let's back up. What is news-fluence?

The short answer: using newscrafting to create influence. Admittedly, it's yet another dodgy new word, a portmanteau of a portmanteau, a step beyond hybrids like staycation, frenemy, famly, chillax and—close to my trendspotting heart—metrosexual. (My excuse: I'm an American. We have a history of playing fast and loose with language. Think of it as linguistic jazz.)
Trendspotting is a key component of news-fluence. Trendspotters draw attention to things that people might not have noticed and connect the dots between things they haven’t yet tied together. My agency, Havas PR, uses trendspotting to optimize visibility across the media landscape, creating opportunities for our clients to be the news.

To be sure, today’s marketers weren’t the first to create news to make a point: Check out Edward Bernays’ smoking women stunt in 1929 (“Torches of Freedom”) and Saatchi & Saatchi’s poster for the 1979 election (“Labour Isn’t Working” [see above]). But we do have it harder now, because it’s so much more complicated to understand what’s going on in the world. That’s where seasoned trendspotters come in.

“Metrosexual” is a word that has been with us for a while, but I mentioned it because it’s a classic example of news-fluence. Mark Simpson coined the term, but my team capitalized on it. We uncovered the little-known word as we worked through the puzzling findings of a survey on beer drinking for our client Peroni. Then we adapted (OK, hijacked) the term to fit what we were seeing. It hit the sweet spot—13 years ago, well before memes and viral videos—and became a global news item: PR gold.

This isn’t bragging. It sums up the interplay between trendspotting, newscrafting and news-fluence. Peroni made the news, our agency made the news, and we spotted metrosexual opportunities for other clients, too. It was one of the early bridges between two eras: PR people pitching the news and PR people creating the news.

News is whatever makes people take notice, from terrorist outrages to celebrity nudity to a friend’s lunch. And the Pew Research Center found that 63% of both Facebook and Twitter users treat these channels as sources of news.

How the news gets out is changing, too. Plodding PR is being replaced by sexy PR. There will still be press releases (eventually someone might read them), briefings, updates, editorial features and interviews, but the routine will get subsumed by the crashing waves of the latest whatever. It has been encouraging to see a sexier take on PR in pop culture lately, as in the Danish political drama “Borgen” and French political drama “Spin.” The TV shows are exaggerated, but they show communication as strategic and agile: stewarding and shaping the narrative in response to events.

That doesn’t mean it’s time for communications pros to ditch the idea of following a narrative line—Havas PR isn’t about to cut the Red Thread that has informed all its strategies anytime soon—but agility is the key to survival. The ability to move quickly and decisively, with balance and focus in real time, is an essential skill.

The rise of news-fluence leaves PR pros with five imperatives:

1. **Know the PR environment and its interconnected media streams.** It’s not enough to know about the existence of Snapchat and Periscope; we also have to know how they work and fit.

2. **Intuit the new PR environment.** That means developing all-senses intuition: an eye for it, an ear for it, a feel for it, a nose for it and a taste for it.

3. **Play the PR environment.** Use quick-witted opportunism, coattailing on breaking news and seeing opportunities to create news.

4. **Mind the narrative.** There’s still a need to communicate particular points, even while it’s important to remain agile and adapt to real-time events.

5. **Think news-fluence.** If we’re doing our work right, it’s newsy and engaging and entertaining, and it can hold its own in the flood of news updates. Our goal is to make it also influence opinions and behaviors in favor of our clients.

In short: Grab attention, expect trouble, master the media, know your story and spot trends. That’s news-fluence.