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– Heath Shackelford, PR Manager

### Challenge

The two-person PR team at American Healthways needed to automate tasks and reduce the time spent on tactical work to focus on strategic communications and increase coverage for the growing company.

### Solution

With Vocus, American Healthways streamlined media contact management and list development, distributes personalized news releases directly to reporters, and easily keeps up with about 1,000 clips every month. All activities and coverage are stored in a centralized location for easy analysis.

### Results

American Healthways PR team builds media lists in half the time with twice the accuracy, and saves time managing its contacts, giving PR more time to plan and implement proactive PR strategies. As a result, the company’s media coverage increased 60 percent, without adding to the department’s staff or hiring an outside PR firm.

## Vocus a Shot in the Arm for PR Team at American Healthways

### Customer Profile

American Healthways is the nation’s leading and largest provider of specialized, comprehensive disease management, care enhancement and high-risk health management services. The 23-year-old public company has more than 1.3 million patients under its care nationwide. Its comprehensive approach to care supports and supplements the physician-patient relationship with programs that coordinate and integrate the health care needs of patients with diabetes, cardiac disease, respiratory disease, end-stage renal disease and other chronic conditions.

### Challenge

Media reports these days are filled with stories about rising health care costs. That’s good news and bad news for American Healthways’ PR team. On the plus side, rising costs, reaching nearly \$1.7 trillion in the United States in 2003, illustrate a serious need for the company’s disease management services. On the other hand, PR has to cut through the clutter of health care stories and fight for media attention.

With a staff of just two professionals, the two-year-old PR department must keep up with more than 1,000 clips a month on the company, its clients, the industry and competitors. Previously, the small department was hard-pressed to manage its volume of clips, much less share and analyze that coverage. It needed a centralized PR management system to expedite everything from list development to news management – to allow it to proactively pitch stories and maintain its standing as the industry thought leader. “We had to find a way to be bigger without increasing our staff or having to rely heavily on external firms,” said Heath Shackelford, PR manager of American Healthways.

### Vocus Solution

The team chose Vocus’ online software for public relations to automate and centralize activities like contact management, list creation, and news distribution and management, to give PR more time to work on pitching specific stories.

“Vocus is the most complete resource for us and the most appropriate for what we’re trying to do from a communications perspective,” Shackelford said. “The biggest benefit is that it automates tasks, makes tactical work more manageable and allows us to extend ourselves throughout our organization.”

## Lists in “Half the Time, Twice the Accuracy”

Prior to Vocus, American Healthways created media lists in Excel. With Vocus’ extensive media database, PR now easily keeps up-to-date contact information for all media, has detailed journalist profiles with which to pitch stories, and builds targeted media lists in less time. Plus, PR has a complete history of all interaction with each journalist.

“With Vocus, we’re able to put together media lists in half the time with twice the accuracy,” Shackleford said. “Having all the information on our contacts in one place, where it’s manageable and searchable, has made our department more organized and more effective.”

American Healthways also distributes news through Vocus, customizing releases to individual contacts. Direct email distribution in Vocus, branded with the sender’s name, offers a more personalized approach, fostering better media relationships. “The more we personalize releases for each contact, the more reporters feel like we took the time to understand what they cover,” Shackleford said.

Instead of sifting through, organizing and generating reports on company and industry media coverage, American Healthways now receives clips electronically from Factiva via Vocus’ News Gateway. With all coverage in Vocus, PR sends daily news updates, in an attractive email, to executive leadership in a matter of minutes.

“Any five minutes I can carve out of my day is time I can direct to a proactive, strategic activity,” Shackleford added. “Some of our better placements were the result of either my colleague or me having some extra time to do creative PR, where we were setting the agenda rather than reacting.”

## Put to the Test, Vocus Makes Difference for Major Campaign

American Healthways’ PR department put Vocus’ comprehensive functionality to the test to publicize a patient-physician recommendation document that came out of a conference with Johns Hopkins. The document provided advice on how to improve the relationship between doctors and their patients.

For the campaign, PR managed a large media list and tracked all health care news, trying to catch every mention of patient-physician relationships to pinpoint follow-up opportunities with journalists who had an interest in the subject. The campaign resulted in coverage in the *Wall Street Journal*, *American Medical News*, and a number of other important trade publications. The Web site created for the campaign received more than 9,000 hits.

## Results: Shift from Tactical to Strategic Increases Coverage 60 Percent

Vocus allows the two-person PR staff, with limited external support, to develop and implement communications strategies proactively, rather than spending all their time on tasks. American Healthways PR cut the time it takes to build media lists in half, and significantly streamlined news management.

“Vocus allows us to play the media relations game on a larger scale than we would ever be able to without it,” Shackleford said. “It’s like having a third staff member on our team.”

American Healthways’ media coverage increased by 60 percent after it implemented Vocus. And, the PR department planned and implemented a PR campaign so successful that it’s being featured in *PR Week*.



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### About Vocus, Inc.

Vocus is the global leader in on-demand software for public relations and government relations. Vocus offers Web-based software that helps companies to meet today’s local and global communications challenges, and to build and manage relationships with reporters, analysts, elected officials and other key audiences. Our award-winning software helps customers manage media relations, news monitoring and analysis, interactive email campaigns, online newsrooms and government relations activities. Vocus software is delivered as an easy-to-use and cost-effective annual subscription, with no need for internal hardware, software or IT support. Vocus has received broad industry recognition and is used around the world by more than 1,000 organizations in five languages. Vocus is a privately held company with headquarters in metropolitan Washington and offices in North America, Europe and Asia. For more information please visit [www.vocus.com](http://www.vocus.com) or call 800.345.5572.