

TOOLS **BLINDER**

PR and publicity remain essential parts of the marketing ecosystem, though both are often characterised by old-school forms of activity – reaching out to journalists and blogs, conducting interviews, pitching periodicals and so on.

Few parts of these relationship-based processes have been affected by digital to the same degree as other marketing fields, such as advertising, but difficulties remain.

Handling artists' personal contact details when arranging interviews, making sure interviews actually happen and ensuring calls take place at the right time are common obstacles from a PR management side. The actual recording of phone interviews is also one of the most annoying things imaginable from the perspective of a journalist (trust us on this one).

Blinder is a just-launched platform that addresses all of these issues. It stands out as an intuitive, user-friendly solution to the woes faced by all parties involved in phone-based PR.

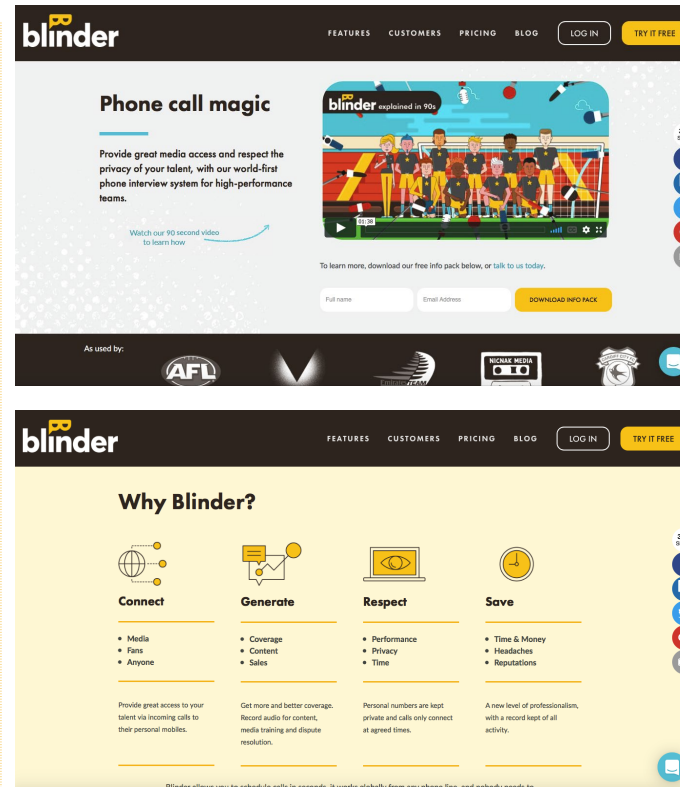
Blinder is a platform through which PR managers can set up the scheduling, calling, recording and reporting of phone interviews. Particularly suited for calls with talent, high-profile employees, investors and anyone else who feels their number should be protected from the likes of journalists (or other interested parties), the PR simply enters the talent's number into Blinder's dashboard, receives a Blinder phone number that can be adjusted to any country code and then provides this number to the journalist.

The PR then can schedule a call window in the platform – meaning the caller may only ring the talent within the selected timeframe. After the call has happened, Blinder notifies the PR that the call did in fact occur, preserving an audio recording of the call. The call itself can be made from any phone, whether the journalist prefers to use a landline or a mobile, and will go directly through to the talent's mobile.

Eamonn Forde, the editor of **sandbox**, regularly conducts high-profile interviews over the phone and has highlighted a few of the stand-out features of Blinder.

"The automated recording option is quite amazing as it takes away the jeopardy of your recording working/worrying the batteries are going to last. This also means you don't have to put your phone on speaker and use another recording device to record from that and pray the audio quality is good. Also, you don't have to wait for a PR to connect you, as often they call 10 minutes after they said they would. The background data is also good for PRs filling in their media report sheets, as they can track when interviews happened and ensure that writer X spoke to client Y at the time arranged, meaning they don't have to hound one or both of them to check it happened."

He added, "In its current form, this is a super-niche service providing a solution for a specific profession. But I can see this having a wider music marketing application by spinning it into a competition winner's mechanic where they can call the pop star 'direct' and it means the pop star's number is not made public. Uses like that could give it a wider life.



As it stands, it's a good B2B tool, but there's possibly a better consumer-facing application here that they perhaps haven't twigged yet."

One should consider how phone calls can be already used for marketing ends – Superphone, Twilio and even Google Numbers all have uses covered by **sandbox** previously. But none of these have the same level of control and privacy as facilitated by Blinder, and it's exciting to consider how this not-yet-a-year-old company might evolve to meet new marketing opportunities.

sandbox asked Ross McConnell and Caley Wilson, respectively Blinder's CEO and co-founders, to expand on where Blinder came from, the needs it's been meeting in its first few months of activity and the company's future.

sandbox We're intimately familiar with the needs that Blinder addresses, but where did the service come from? Why did you decide to build it?

blinder Sport is a big deal in New Zealand and Caley was the media manager of the New Zealand Rugby League team. His athletes included Sonny Bill Williams, who was the highest-profile athlete in this part of the world at the time. Caley did all media calls for his athletes through his own phone, but that was a major grind, especially over the 2013 Rugby League World Cup in the UK and France, where the team were trying to fill famous stadiums including Wembley [London] and Old Trafford [Manchester].

Caley didn't think it was at all correct to give out athletes' personal mobile numbers for media access; but not giving out numbers also proved a major headache. Rubbish option A versus shit option B was how his mind framed things.

That got him thinking, "What if you had a virtual team phone, that you'd somehow be able to just 'pass around' to the right athlete at the right time, wherever in the world they were?" That idea was bouncing around Caley's head during the World Cup tournament.

With those seeds in our soil, we did interviews with over 100 people from pro

sport, entertainment, media, politics, big business – all sorts. We spoke with people in key roles from Los Angeles to London. We wanted to understand how they were solving the ‘phoner’ challenge Caley faced – and work out whether Caley had just missed a trick.

But the responses were severely underwhelming, with most interviews concluding with the subjects asking us to keep them posted if we found better solutions. We didn’t, so we started talking with development heavyweights about building our own.

Through the interview process, we’d found a number of strong allies and our beta group that included publicists who represented Olympic champions to Grammy winners. And we were aware that by marrying accessibility and privacy, we were solving a problem that stretched right outside pro sport and entertainment.

We called the technology Blinder, in reference to people now having the ability to make a blind call – so being able to ring someone without having their number – and also to acknowledge our sporting roots. Having a ‘blinder’ is a playful complimentary term for a great sporting performance.

sandbox What’s your quick pitch?

blinder Blinder is a platform for the managers of high-profile talent and “newsmakers”. It lets you schedule media calls for your talent, it connects these calls directly to their mobile phones without sharing any personal contact details, and it keeps a record of everything, including call audio. Released within the last year, Blinder is already being used by teams managing Grammy winners to Olympic champions.

sandbox How often does Blinder update and what are the newest features?

blinder We release new features on a monthly basis. Our newest “feature” is a mobile app for iPhone, which is in limited release to selected beta clients. Our next major release will enable multi-party conference calls as well as our traditional 1:1 calls.

sandbox What are your goals for Blinder across 2018?

blinder We’ll continue to develop our offering for sports and entertainment clients. Our primary focus to date has been on the talent management side of the market, but in early 2018 we’ll release new features that will make life easier for journalists as well. Then we plan to enable video calls as well, to further enhance the value of the content that can be captured using Blinder.

sandbox And through to 2020?

blinder Our ambition is to develop the blind calling technology that we’ve created for sports and entertainment VIPs, making it available to anyone with a mobile phone. We’re ultimately solving a fundamental problem with phone numbers, which are impossible to “take back” once you’ve

shared them. Blinder will allow any mobile phone user to be accessible without sacrificing their privacy, by developing a virtual assistant that manages your calls and protects your phone number from inappropriate use.

sandbox What’s the quickest and best way for someone who manages talent to start using Blinder?

blinder Get a free trial account right now by signing up via www.blinderHQ.com. In under five minutes, you could be scheduling your first Blinder call.

sandbox Who are your noteworthy clients?

blinder We have clients ranging from Varrasso PR—led by a former PR director of Sony Music—to Australia’s national songwriters’ collective, to the Australian Football League, to the largest sports event the country will see this decade (the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games). Blinder cannot disclose who has made calls through the platform, though the level of talent represented by these companies include the likes of Post Malone, Sia, Zhu, Chase & Status, Olympic athletes and beyond.

sandbox How is Blinder primarily funded, and what kind of partnerships could be made?

blinder Blinder has raised approximately \$1m [USD] in seed capital so far, primarily through private investors based in the company’s home country of New Zealand. At the time of speaking, we have about \$250k [US] still available in our current round. In 2018, we’ll focus on finding a suitable strategic partner in the talent management and/or media space, who can help to accelerate our growth across their own networks and support the ongoing development of our platform. :)