

A large, yellow diamond-shaped sign with a black border is the central focus of the image. It is tilted slightly to the right and set against a background of a grey brick wall. The sign has the words "IPO" and "AHEAD" written in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters, stacked vertically.

**IPO
AHEAD**

Brand Building for a Successful Exit

**The Ultimate Guide for Cybersecurity
Companies**



Brand Building for Success

How to get in front of business press and industry analysts on your journey to IPO or acquisition, featuring insights from CNBC and IT-Harvest

For cybersecurity companies, an IPO or acquisition is the milestone towards which they strive. While the market may have dampened in 2023, \$10.05 billion of funding still went into the industry in the past year. As noted by the esteemed analyst, author, and creator of [The Analyst Dashboard](#), Richard Stiennon, this level of investment remains “phenomenal compared to the past 25 years of cybersecurity”, with dozens of vendors ready to IPO and waiting on the market to rebound, indicating that things may pick up in 2024.



For companies eyeing an exit, a communications program that supports their growth ambitions is paramount. When developing a PR campaign, it's important to understand what the company's vision is in a year, in five years, and even in ten years, so that PR can support both long-term and near-term goals. But how exactly can communications support your path to exit? How can you best pitch and engage press and analysts? And what makes them want to cover a company?

To get to the heart of these questions, Eskenzi PR sat down with two leading authorities in the space, **Ryan Browne, Tech Correspondent at CNBC, and IT-Harvest's Chief Research Analyst and Founder, Richard Stiennon**, to produce the ultimate guide to successful cybersecurity comms to support an eventual exit. While communications in the months before an IPO are driven by investor relations and legal teams and must adhere to strict guidelines, this whitepaper is focused on how cybersecurity companies can engage press and analysts in the years before they exit to build media coverage, momentum and mindshare.

Why are PR and AR important in the years leading up to an exit?

*“Planning for an IPO is like a high jumper. As they get ready to make that jump – in this case the IPO – you can see they’re planning each step along the way. But to clear the bar, they need the momentum to carry them over.” – **Richard Stiennon***

Creating a stream of positive media coverage and inclusion in analyst reports is instrumental not only in building this momentum, but in building trust, and ensuring that the market sees your brand and its spokespeople as reliable, knowledgeable, and credible. In securing positive editorial coverage, your company receives valuable third-party endorsement from informed and influential journalists; as a result, earned coverage is considered to be between 10 and 100 times more valuable than an advertisement.

PR can also be leveraged to build thought leadership platforms for your spokespeople, which can further demonstrate trust. The adage “people buy people” remains true even for sizable companies working towards an IPO, so in creating engaging thought leadership for key individuals within your organization, you can not only demonstrate their expertise but also build confidence and recognition.

With analyst reports another key way of demonstrating credibility, regularly briefing industry analysts – and knowing how to successfully brief analysts – is paramount. As Stiennon commented, cybersecurity companies frequently cite their position in analyst reports in their S-1 IPO Filings, which must be filed with the SEC ahead of an IPO in the US, and must explain the company’s business model and how it competes with competitors. Given that S-1 registrations have to be completely accurate, this shows how analyst reports are increasingly being leveraged to demonstrate a company’s success and market share – making it vital that any cybersecurity companies working towards an eventual IPO build relationships with analysts years in advance of the IPO itself.

How can cybersecurity vendors get in front of the business press?

*“Cybersecurity is one of the most relevant sectors to the world today.” – **Ryan Browne***

Media appetite for cybersecurity-related topics is booming – as reflected by the fact that in the US, [coverage of cybersecurity-related topics in business and national media increased by 76%](#) from H1 2022 – H1 2023. This landscape presents a significant opportunity for cybersecurity vendors to build relationships with key journalists – and build media coverage – well in advance of an IPO. Browne commented that CNBC is always looking for comments on major breaches from vendors, with informed and well-timed insight a great way to engage with business media.

Browne also highlighted the value of threat research, and how it can be a particularly valuable tool for smaller companies to leverage. “Cybersecurity is one of the most interesting areas of tech we come across,” he stated. “A startup could have uncovered a bug in a major global company that no one else is aware of, for example, or there could be important cyber threats that the media aren’t aware of, which will be really interesting.”

Browne referenced the importance of a “feedback loop” between cybersecurity companies providing insight and journalists writing stories, and the more interesting data companies can provide the more press will cover them, and the more established they’ll become.

Browne explained that CNBC does have a threshold for covering company stories, and usually requires organizations to be post-Series A and with a certain degree of market penetration. However, he explained that it’s still valuable for CNBC to get to know companies early on in their growth journey, even if there isn’t an immediate opportunity for coverage.



How the trade press supports the path to exit – and what they want

While business press coverage is frequently seen by cybersecurity companies as the gold standard, Browne's comments also hint at the valuable role trade press can play. With the business press frequently wanting to see that a company has a presence and credibility before they'll look to cover them, building visibility in trade media can be a valuable first step to increasing brand awareness and building thought leadership. Given the focused nature of the trade media, trade titles also provide an excellent way of getting your brand in front of cybersecurity decision-makers to support your business goals.

So what are the trade press most interested in? Eskenzi surveyed key trade journalists at the likes of Computer Weekly, Beta News, and InfoSecurity to understand more about their preferences, with the top five results highlighting the huge appetite for research and thought leadership:

Top 5 Most Interesting Stories



The analyst view – What makes an analyst want to cover a company?

“Analysts are sponges for knowledge, and they just want to know what’s going on,” Stiennon commented. He did stress that a company’s economic situation is also key and that for him, “funding is super, super important. A company can have the greatest product in the world, but because they’re different and don’t fit in a bucket, they struggle to get funding.” That said, he explained that an analyst will still want to know more, will talk to you just because you’ve got a new approach, and can be easier to approach than a journalist. However, “analysts can be a little curmudgeonly,” he added. “If you start talking to them about the same thing that you hear from absolutely everyone, they won’t find it interesting.”

Stiennon added that analysts are generally receptive to pitches, and will be looking to talk to companies to get to the heart of their offering. For him, the best briefings are those without slides, with the spokesperson being the founder or a very good marketing person capable of really spelling out what you do, and who is really good at delivering the message.

Stiennon also stressed the importance of knowing analysts’ personalities and building relationships:

“That’s why PR and AR firms are important, as they have people with those relationships already, or can build them and have the personalities to build them, and they can become the point person between the company and the analyst firms – more so than the CEO, founder, technical expert etc – because the PR or AR person can sidestep any difficulties that the analyst might have with the company, because it’s a personal relationship.”

For many cybersecurity and technology companies, analyst relations are seen as beginning and ending with Gartner and Forrester. But specialist analyst firms have a valuable role to play – and must be treated as an important step along the path to exit. However, Stiennon stressed that companies shouldn’t engage with independent firms as part of their strategy to influence Gartner, as that can ultimately create a negative pushback: “I’m former Gartner, and if another analyst says something, the Gartner analyst is going to take the opposite tack.”

Stiennon also highlighted the importance of building customer advocacy - particularly amongst CISOs:

"In the early stages, you need all sorts of influencers, in what I call the influencer pyramid. At the very bottom are customers, and there are a lot of them, and you need them talking about your product, and that's where social media comes in. Amongst those customers are CISOs, who you want talking about your product, and in particular, you want them talking to the industry analysts. The final influencer is then the analyst who writes the analyst report - and you want to make sure they think you're the best."

As companies look to demonstrate customer advocacy in their path to exit, [Gartner Peer Insights](#) can be a valuable way of demonstrating industry endorsement for your product, which is widely recognised by influencers and the market.



Crafting messaging that cuts through

*“Be very careful when you open your mouth in front of a journalist, because if you have something interesting to say, it may very well end up on the news.” – **Richard Stiennon***

For businesses thinking about an eventual exit, getting the right messaging in place is critical. Companies must ensure consistency of messaging so that everyone's singing from the same hymn sheet. Media training is particularly important for spokespeople getting in front of press and analysts, so that spokespeople can convey brand differentiators, come across as experts that journalists will want to write about, and avoid mistakes that could damage the brand.

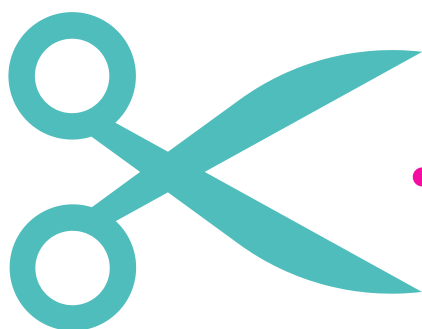
As companies grow, building out different spokespeople who own different subject areas can be valuable to amplify media opportunities and avoid having a bottleneck with the CEO or CTO. This is something increasingly recognised by cybersecurity companies, with [57% having multiple spokespeople](#) for different topics.

For business press journalists, having spokespeople and PRs who understand what they need is key. As Browne observed “it can be a problem when people aren't trained on how to interact with journalists and analysts, and when people aren't on the same page, which is particularly pronounced when it comes to layoffs. As journalists, we want to be accurate, and have the right information, so it's super important to ensure accuracy.”

Browne also implored cybersecurity companies to feel for the journalists reporting and covering the story. “We know the subject, we know different kinds of malware, the threat vectors, and have ingrained all kinds of different terms, but we sometimes get press releases that are just absolute gobbledygook and we have no idea where to start with some of the language! Having a basic understanding of comms strategies and how to target journalists effectively is quite important as well.”

When it comes to engaging with press and analysts, nuances in language matter. Words like “leading”, “the best”, and “wholistic” are too often used by companies, which can create scepticism and journalist mistrust. Browne commented:

“Too often companies make it sound like they’re the cream of the crop in their particular field, and while it’s understandable that you want to do that, if you’re going to say you’re the “leading” company, you need to back it up. If that really is the case, show us the numbers, show us what you’re benchmarking against to define that position, otherwise you’re not substantiating it.”



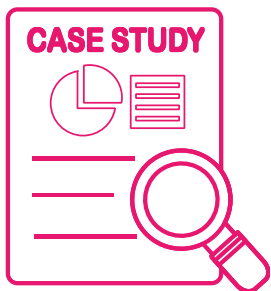
Marrying PR, AR, and IR – and setting up for long-term success

*“Too often companies go quiet after the big splash when they go public.” – **Ryan Browne***

In the years before an IPO, PR and AR teams should play the leading role in building a company's visibility in core titles and outlet reports. However, in the months immediately preceding an IPO, investor relations teams will likely take over, leading investor roadshows and ensuring any communications from the company adhere to strict guidance. For this to be successful, PR, AR, and IR teams need to work together seamlessly. All are part of the same ecosystem, and PRs should treat it as a relay race, handing over the baton to IR teams when the time is right.

Post-IPO, however, it is important to maintain the momentum you built in the years before. As Browne noted, organizations should continue to be as communicative as they can once they're public. “Too often companies go quiet after the big splash when they go public,” he observed. “While they no doubt have bigger fish to fry in terms of the public market and reporting, it's important to keep the communication going.”

While the IPO market might have slowed in 2023, it will gather pace again – and even if an exit seems years away, cybersecurity companies must ensure they have a communications plan in place that will set them up for success in the long term, supporting their path to exit and beyond.



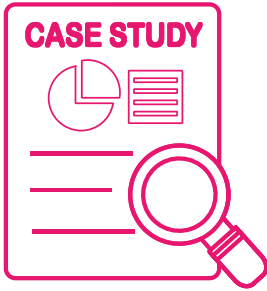
How PR fueled KnowBe4's IPO and \$4.6 billion acquisition

When KnowBe4 started working with Eskenzi the company was a unicorn but lacked the visibility its size warranted. Eskenzi launched a hard-working PR campaign in the UK and the US, securing blanket media coverage for KnowBe4 through a combination of news, data-led insights and creative campaigns, including setting a Guinness World Record for the 'Most views of a cyber security lesson video on YouTube in 24 hours. The programme propelled KnowBe4 to first place for share of voice, driving crucial brand awareness for the company to support its growth ambitions. In 2021, the company IPOed on Nasdaq, with its shares opening at nearly 25% above its offer price. KnowBe4's growth continued post-IPO, resulting in the company's 2023 acquisition by leading global investment firm Vista Equity Partners in a transaction valued at \$4.6 billion.



KnowBe4

Human error. Conquered.



Alienvault's journey: from unknown startup to \$600 million acquisition

Eskenzi began working with AlienVault when it was a small unknown company from Spain, helping it to become a household name and paving the way for its acquisition by AT&T.

Central to the campaign was establishing a differentiated and memorable brand for the company to set it apart from others in the market. To achieve this, Eskenzi developed messaging, branding and imaging, positioning the company as an open, collaborative security vendor leading the SIEM and unified security market.

Eskenzi then harnessed AlienVault's threat intelligence to drive media engagement and built thought leadership platforms for its key executives, CEO Barmak Meftah, CTO Roger Thornton, and Jaime Blasco, Chief Scientist. As a result of the PR campaign, AlienVault's spokespeople soon became featured whenever a major news story broke, with the company being regularly quoted in tier-one publications including The Times, BBC, The Daily Mail, LBC Radio, CNN, SC Magazine, Computer Weekly and many more, supercharging its visibility.

This brand-building set the stage for AlienVault's growth, with the company being acquired for a huge \$600 million, and forming the operators' new cybersecurity division, AT&T Cybersecurity.

For more information about how Eskenzi PR can build your brand to support your growth journey, please do not hesitate to contact us at the below:



CONTACT

Yvonne Eskenzi, Co-founder

PHONE

+44 20 7183 2833

EMAIL

yvonne@eskenzipr.com

WEB

www.eskenzipr.com