

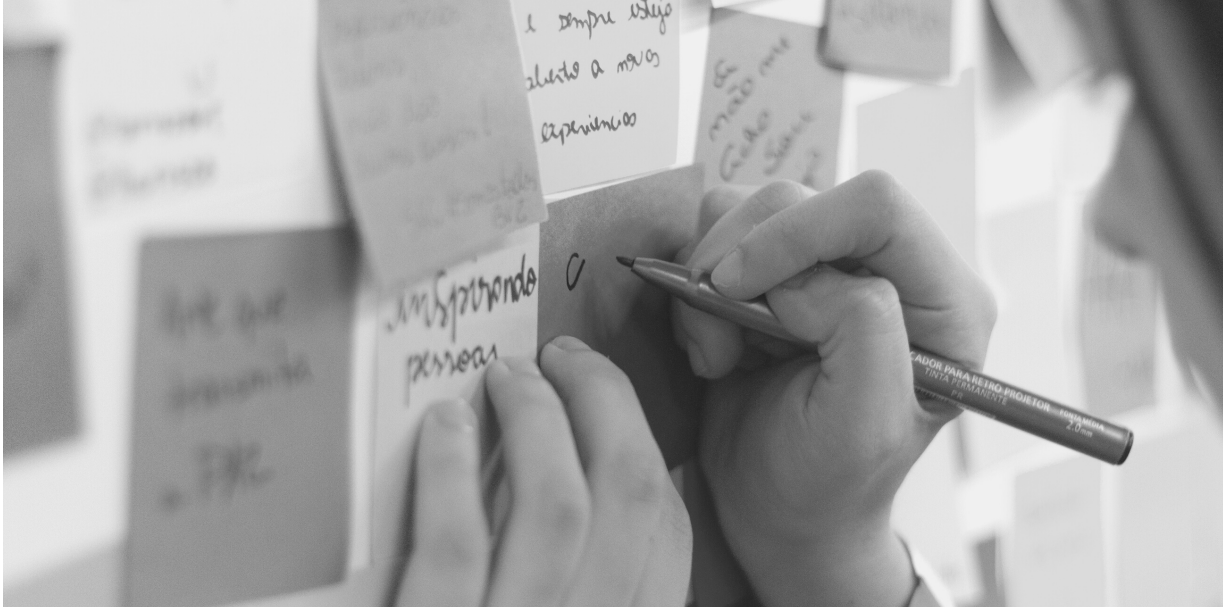
# IN SEARCH OF EFFICIENCY

## Software for Analyst Relations

By Peggy O'Neill



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Managing an analyst relations (AR) program encompasses a wide range of responsibilities.**

Based on interviews with analyst relations professionals at leading-edge AR programs, this paper examines the pros and cons of software options available for managing AR. These options include:

1. Not using any software,
2. Custom software applications,
3. Generic packaged software, such as off-the shelf CRM and PR applications, and
4. AR specialty software.

The report concludes that not using any software is no longer an option in today's dynamic and information-intensive AR profession. Companies' experiences with custom solutions are littered with failures. Generic applications (PR or CRM solutions) are hard to customize and require too many resources. **AR specialty applications** clearly are the most economically and operationally effective solutions.

The paper also examines the practices of the PR firms providing AR services and concludes that without an AR specialty application, the firms are passing on the high costs of their internal inefficiencies to their clients.

# INTRODUCTION

Analyst relations professionals are under constant pressure to respond to analyst requests, provide internal guidance and produce metrics, all while struggling with demands such as social media and bloggers.

Below are some typical scenarios that an AR manager might face on any given day.



**Scenario 1:** A regional AR manager in Sydney receives an email from the Asia general manager, forwarding a request from a U.S. analyst who contacted the executive directly. The request is time-sensitive, and the executive wants guidance.



**Scenario 2:** An analyst relations manager covering for a colleague is staffing a briefing between an analyst and a substitute spokesperson when the analyst references a previous request and asks for an update.



**Scenario 3:** The AR team receives an urgent email from the chief marketing officer for a list of all analyst interactions in the last year.

All of these common scenarios highlight key pain points in analyst relations. AR practitioners will attest that the function is inherently politically charged and time-sensitive, requiring AR to show a consistent front to analysts and their own organization.

Leading-edge AR programs look for ways to mitigate the problem of tracking analysts, interaction history, metrics and research – given that AR professionals are pulled in many directions, typically work on small teams, juggle strategic and tactical priorities, are in constant meetings and face frequent, near-term deadlines. As the AR profession matures, more AR programs look to software to save time, create efficiencies and improve AR program management. This paper will explore software options that AR teams are using today.



## A Day in the Life of an Analyst Relations Manager

**8-9am** – Briefing with London-based analyst. Action items: send analyst public-facing case studies, and schedule a follow-up call with two other analysts from the firm.

**9-9:15am** – Email to thank the analyst and send requested case studies.

**9:15-9:30am** – Reach out to analyst firm to schedule the requested follow-up call.

**9:30-10am** – Dig out of emails; return calls from yesterday.

**10-11am** – Prepare backgrounder for execs for an analyst call next week. Find analyst bio, past research, previous interactions from the past six months and analyst feedback.

**11-12pm** – Prepare for briefings and inquiries later this week; send newly published analyst report, mentioning your company, to relevant execs.

**12-1pm** – Eat lunch while finishing up emails.

**1-1:15pm** – Field call from analyst requesting a briefing. After call, review analyst's past research and decide whether to accommodate request.

**1:15-1:55pm** – Quick huddle with product marketing on new products to share with analyst community.

**1:55-2pm** – Receive urgent request from CMO to produce AR metrics by tomorrow morning.

**2-3pm** – Briefing with another analyst. Draft of Gartner MQ comes in mid-meeting.

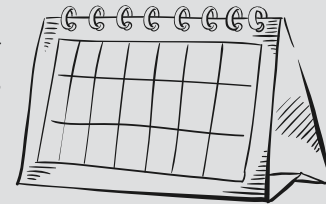
**3-3:30pm** – Review MQ; send to internal teams with thoughts and a request for further feedback.

**3:30-4:15pm** – Produce metrics for CMO.

**4:15-4:30pm** – Respond to recent emails.

**4:30-5pm** – Inquiry with analyst on company's upcoming product launch: messaging + strategy.

**5-5:30pm** – Review inbox; finish emails for the day; prioritize to-do list for tomorrow.



# BENEFITS OF AR SOFTWARE

Before diving into an assessment of software options, it's worth first posing the questions of whether software is needed at all and what benefits AR software provides.

While spreadsheets, email and institutional memory may be sufficient for young AR programs in the short-term, the push for metrics, the reality of staff turnover and the need to prioritize time inevitably take their toll long-term. AR managers who seek to transition from reactive to proactive inevitably look to software to save time, scale and streamline.

The most common benefits cited by users of AR platforms include the following:

- Easy metrics reporting
- Easy to find and identify relevant analysts
- Saving time on repetitive tasks such as email blasts or creating briefing books
- Maintaining an institutional memory
- Prioritizing AR activities
- Collaboration and communications across the AR team
- Quick tracking of analyst research, blogs and social commentary
- Keeping tabs on new and departing analysts, and changes in coverage areas

**Carter Lusher, AR pro and adviser** (former Gartner analyst and co-founder of SageCircle), says:

“ There is so much grunt work associated with AR. AR is so short of time in general, that anything that can help you is a godsend. ”

All AR managers interviewed for this paper regard software as mission-critical to their success. Once exposed to the productivity benefits, no one advocates a return to spreadsheets and email.

# AR SOFTWARE CHARACTERISTICS

Six basic components are needed in order for an analyst relationship management system to be effective. This paper will explore them in greater detail.

- 1 Analyst contact information**
- 2 Entering and tracking analyst interactions**
- 3 Reporting and trending data**
- 4 Coverage tracking made easy**
- 5 Email and calendaring synchronization**
- 6 Workflow automation**



### Analyst contact information

The foundation of the application is an analyst database, which typically includes:

- Analyst biography (often with headshot)
- Analyst contact information
- Analyst research coverage

The key challenge with in-house or generic packaged applications is maintaining this information or adding new and unknown analysts to the database when an AR program's footprint changes.



### Entering and tracking analyst interactions

Being able to enter interaction information is critical, as having a history of the interactions – along with the ability to centrally access and retrieve them, and apply them to generate reports – is what gives the application value over time.

Ideally, the analyst relationship management system allows AR managers to easily enter all types of interactions – briefings, inquiries, email exchanges, analyst days, social events, etc. More advanced systems allow meeting notes, attachments, perception ratings and custom fields (next steps, etc.).



### Reporting and trending data

The ability to easily report on – and view trends in – data is vital, as it helps AR programs produce metrics and manage their priorities. An analyst relations management system should allow users to conduct ad hoc queries, such as “How many briefings have we given Gartner as a whole in the last 3 months?” and “How many Forrester briefings do we have coming up in the next month?” It should also be capable of producing canned reports, such as weekly analyst activity by geography or business unit.



### Coverage tracking made easy

Are analysts mentioning your company in research and blog posts, and on social media? Are they discussing your business during media interviews? The frequency of inclusions is one barometer of AR program success – but this can be onerous and difficult to track manually. Leading AR software should automate this, highlighting inclusions across channels.



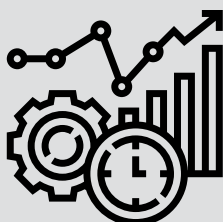
### Email and calendaring synchronization

If the AR application is not synchronized with the AR manager’s email and calendaring software, then AR managers will be forced to do double entry on their interactions. Automatic population encourages AR managers to keep their entries current.



### Workflow automation

Importantly, AR software should function to make AR professionals’ lives easier and save them time by automating onerous and repetitive tasks. Look for applications that help increase efficiency – populating and generating briefing materials, notifying you of upcoming project tasks, enabling you to pull up and email analyst groups, etc.



### Productivity Gains from AR Software

*Time savings from software, using an example of an AR manager's typical workday*

Activity	Time Spent (No Software)	Time Spent (Software)
Looking up prior history w/ analyst	30 min.	Less than 5 min.
Creating analyst backgrounder	60 min.	5-10 min.
Gathering AR metrics; producing visual report	90 min.	5-10 min.
Searching for analyst coverage of your company	20 min.	5 min.
Looking up add'l relevant analysts across major firms	30 min.	Less than 5 min.

**Total: 3 hours and 25 minutes savings** if using AR software, reducing time spent by 89% and freeing up AR’s time for additional and strategic priorities



# AR SPECIALTY APPLICATIONS

Analyst relations software is specifically tailored to the fast-paced AR role – helping AR professionals meet frequent demands and deadlines, better manage their programs and data, increase knowledge sharing with relevant analysts, and better “influence the influencers.” A longstanding player and market leader in the space is [ARInsights](#), with its web-based [ARchitect](#) software solution.

With millions of dollars in development since its inception in 2001, it is no surprise that ARchitect is the most widely adopted solution on the market today.

Originally developed by former Gartner analysts, ARchitect resembles a robust CRM system geared toward analyst relations. It has the most widespread adoption among analyst relations professionals, with thousands of users from 200+ companies.

ARInsights consistently updates and expands the ARchitect analyst database, employs dedicated development resources to support the application, provides extensive reporting capabilities and more – including offering AR support [services](#) and [partnering](#) with industry organizations and experts.

Its large user base gives ARchitect developers new ideas for functionality on a regular basis, resulting in advanced features. One such feature, the [Analyst Portal](#) solution, makes it quick and easy for AR pros to share content with key analysts and analyst groups. The Analyst Portal is an invitation-only, password-protected digital destination for analysts to view curated content – such as briefing presentations, case studies, solution updates, corporate information and more. Analysts can also opt in to get email alerts when new, relevant info gets posted.

Another popular feature, the “Word Briefing Book,” lets customers produce completely custom Word documents (briefing books for executives) that populate with any group of analysts and their relationship history from the ARchitect database. This employs one-to-many merging capabilities not ordinarily possible with Microsoft Office.

**[Longtime users of ARchitect say the application is mission-critical to their analyst relations programs.](#)**



Arthur Bailey, Senior Director of External Communications at CompuCom, noted:

“

*The SaaS-based tools and services that ARInsights provides are a must-have for any AR leader needing to maximize the value and economic return of their AR investments.*

”

Arthur has been an ARchitect user at multiple previous companies and now uses the software, along with ARInsights' services, at CompuCom as well. Other AR pros enumerate the efficiency gains they've seen through ARchitect. According to [Sharon Sulc, VP of Corporate Communications at Infor](#):

“

*It allows me to work smarter. I know where everything is, and I don't have to spend time looking for information.*

”

Infor has been using ARchitect for more than a decade. When Sharon, formerly Infor's Director of Global Analyst Relations (and now VP of Corporate Communications there), started using the application, it enabled the company to have an AR program that included regional analysts, even though they lacked AR resources on the ground in Europe and Asia.

ARchitect allows Infor to find, target and build relationships with regional analysts. With AR headcount limited and precious, the software allows the company to be strategic with staff and still execute a sound program.

At Cisco Systems, the need for insightful metrics was one of the key reasons for adopting ARchitect. Cisco had previously used a custom application that was so unpopular with its AR team that over time, no one was using it.

Now, with about 30 people relying on ARchitect, the AR team can easily automate many AR activities and provide metrics to management. Cisco also takes advantage of ARchitect's Analyst Portal solution to reach more analysts and keep them better informed. [Cynthia Leong, Corporate AR Program Manager at Cisco](#), said:

“

*My guiding principle, across all AR activities, is to bring value. We saw an opportunity to scale our program with the portal – providing helpful, timely information to a much broader community on a self-serve basis.*

”

# CUSTOM SOLUTIONS

Cisco's decision to abandon its homegrown custom application in favor of a packaged AR solution is not surprising, given that the company struggled to upgrade and maintain the application.

**Melissa Selcher, formerly Director of Analyst Relations at Cisco**, explained:

“

*It was an archaic system that was not integrated with our systems and not very user-friendly. More importantly, the system hadn't grown with our function. We learned it's not cheap to evolve a homegrown application over time.*

*ARchitect is so open to enhancements, design updates, everything we need to support and drive our function moving forward. We continue to test and push the boundaries, and ARInsights has proven willing to take on every challenge.*

”

Cisco's experience with its custom AR application is typical of many homegrown software development projects. Custom solutions frequently struggle with support, ongoing enhancements and upgrades, and they seldom deliver what the original scope of the project called for.

For years, Standish Group, an IT research and advisory company, has been doing studies about software development challenges, the results of which should strike a cautionary chord with AR teams who are considering the custom path. According to the Standish Group [data](#), only 29% of all software projects are successful (on time, on budget and delivering a satisfactory result); meanwhile, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) are considered utter failures. 52% are “challenged” (over budget, late and/or having an unsatisfactory result).

Another multinational technology company interviewed for this report built a custom analyst relations application from the ground up, but was limited in time and resources to extend it over time with functionalities that would differentiate its AR program.

The AR team hired summer interns to enhance the application to improve efficiency and foster internal collaboration. Unfortunately the application was prone to being buggy, which is more likely to occur with custom applications in general, as they don't enjoy extensive testing in different customer situations that one finds with packaged software. The software giant gave up with the custom application and is now an ARchitect customer too.

When talented corporate giants try building custom AR applications and then pursue other options, it's a clear lesson that the custom app route isn't viable.

In addition, some vendors lean on their outside PR agencies to assist with AR activities. AR teams who rely heavily on agencies would do well to pose the question of how the agencies create briefing books, gather metrics, and enter and track analyst interactions. Spreadsheets, email and no systems mean the agencies are slogging through these tasks manually and charging their clients for this inefficiency.

Agencies typically bill by the hour, so most lack financial incentive to adopt software for efficiency. AR teams who use agencies that have some kind of software infrastructure will see more of their budget dollars go toward influencing the analysts rather than back-office functions.

# GENERIC APPLICATIONS

In between the two ends of the spectrum of AR packaged software and custom solutions are generic applications, such as CRM systems or PR applications. They offer the reliability and scalability of packaged software but tend to come up short on AR-specific functionality and are not as flexible – given that they were designed for other functions and AR teams' requests are dwarfed by other customer requests.

The AR teams that adopt generic applications usually do so because the licenses are “free” and paid for by their PR colleagues, or their companies own the software, and there is motivation to promote their own technology.

Two multi-billion dollar tech companies initially took an organizationally convenient route in using their own software. However, both companies admit that they had to “tweak” their CRM systems and get their teams to adopt CRM vocabulary in place of AR. The database of analysts they tracked also had to be manually updated by the teams as analyst coverage shifted or contact information changed. Both companies are now ARInsights customers instead.

In addition, at a large security software company, the AR team also had to “tweak” PR-based applications such as Cision in order to serve its needs. The application was financed from PR resources, which was the primary reason the AR team used it.

A Senior Director for Worldwide Industry Analyst Relations at a large security software company noted:

“I’m a freeloader. If I ever had to use my budget to finance an application, I would look at something like ARchitect. Even though we’ve had access to Cision, it takes a lot of customization to use it for our efforts. I still have to custom build a template for AR. It is not geared toward AR.”

The AR professional went on to observe that sometimes PR-based applications don’t differentiate between financial analysts and industry analysts, and lack the support and expertise required for AR interaction tracking. “They’re very PR oriented; that’s their heritage,” he explained. “When you go talk to them about AR needs, they don’t really seem to understand why we want certain categories included for interactions or measurements.”

Software Options for Analyst Relations					
	Cost	Functionality	Support	Flexibility	Comments
<b>AR Specialty Applications</b>	Low	High	High	High	The best option for AR teams.
<b>Generic Applications (i.e., CRM, PR)</b>	Low	Low	Low	Low	Primarily used by vendors who own their own CRM technology or AR teams heavily dependent on PR resources. Expect customization and data management headaches.
<b>Custom Solutions</b>	High	Varies	Varies	Medium	The most expensive software option.
<b>No Software</b>	None	None	None	None	No longer a sustainable option for an AR program.

# DIFFERENTIATION IN ANALYST RELATIONS?

Can software differentiate an AR program? What constitutes competitive differentiation in AR? There are no secret recipes or exclusive suppliers in AR. The talent pool of AR managers is mobile. No laws or patents apply that raise competitive barriers. The analyst firms force standard processes when working with vendors to ensure a level playing field. In being evaluated in a Gartner Magic Quadrant, for example, vendors all go through the same process with Gartner.

Can you differentiate as a vendor on interactions such as briefings, inquiries and consulting days? Not really – again, standard policies from the firms limit creativity here. You can differentiate in the quality and frequency of your interactions, but that means you need thoughtful time to execute them.

Relationships are the competitive differentiator. A superior relationship means the analyst will help your company over your competitors. Does software help you with that? It can. For example, AR teams can use software to help prioritize and fortify analyst relationships – for example, tracking analysts to make sure they're briefing relevant and strategic targets, easily referencing interaction histories and recent research to strengthen the rapport, etc.

And while software functions such as building lists, tracking metrics, entering interactions and creating briefing books do not concern the analyst community, they are table stakes for AR. These back-office functions are akin to having a computer, electricity, email, etc. AR teams that use software to handle these back office functions will have more free time to tackle strategic areas – lobby for budget, fight internal political battles, do more briefings, attend more conferences, plan better consulting days, increase the quality of their interactions, whatever the case may be.



# CONCLUSION

The AR profession is strategic and expanding, yet many departments aren't using anything but spreadsheets and email to manage activities. Unless they come from a sales background, most AR managers lack experience with relationship management systems. They may know how to buy research, but they lack experience in using or buying software tools.

The best option is deploying an AR specialty application, with ARchitect being a leading choice. CRM and PR applications provide some functionality, but with customization headaches. Custom applications don't make sense because of the cost and maintenance associated with them, and usually they don't offer sufficient competitive differentiation.

The worst option of all is no software of any kind. It may offer the illusion that programs are saving money by not paying for software, but it costs substantially more in program inefficiency.

The good news is that because the market is underpenetrated, early adopters of AR specialty software applications are enjoying an advantage over their competitors.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



*Peggy O'Neill has been practicing analyst relations for more than two decades. She was recognized as Analyst Relations Professional of the Year in 2016, 2019 and 2020 by the Institute of Influencer and Analyst Relations (IIAR>), an honor determined by analyst voting.*

*Peggy currently serves as vice president for industry analyst relations at Informatica and has been a board member for the IIAR>. Previously, she held other senior AR roles, including heading Hill & Knowlton's U.S. analyst relations practice and leading Oracle's AR department as VP of analyst relations and market intelligence. While at Oracle, Peggy oversaw the development of a custom analyst relations application and later advocated abandoning it.*

*A former industry analyst herself, Peggy covered business intelligence and data warehousing at Gartner and Internet trends at Nielsen/NetRatings.*