

Reputation

TODAY

A magazine for Public Relations and Corporate Communications Professionals

The official magazine of

PRACIS 2022

FUTUREPROOFING PUBLIC RELATIONS



INSIDE

- 20 Global Indians
- 30 Top Corporate Communication Teams
- 40 Young Turks

PRAXIS 2022 Schedule

#PRAXIS9

www.praxisonline.in

Day 1 – Friday, 5th August

12 noon: Summit Check-in & Welcome Lunch
2:00 pm: SCoRe Convocation
2:30 pm: Indian Public Relations Annual Survey (IPRAS) Report by SCoRe Insights
2:45 pm: Felicitation
3:15 pm: Inaugural Address
4:00 pm: Magazine Unveiling
4:30 pm: Break for Group Photograph
5:00 pm: Welcome Address
5:15 pm: Keynote Address 1
6:00 pm: Keynote Address 2
6:45 pm: Keynote Address 3
7:30 pm: Keynote Address 4 – A Power Talk
8:15 pm: Super Night – Cocktails, Conversations & Dinner
9:15 pm: Live Concert by Euphoria
11:00 pm: End of Day 1

Day 2 – Saturday, 6th August

7:30 am: Breakfast in Respective Hotels
9:00 am: Lucky Draw & Open Mic
9:50 am: Panel Discussion 1 with Global Indians
10:50 am: Panel Discussion 2 with New-Age PR CEOs
11:40 am: Keynote Address 5
12:25 pm: Keynote Address 6
1:15 pm: Lunch
2:30 pm: Keynote Address 7
3:15 pm: Keynote Address 8
4:00 pm: Keynote Address 9
4:45 pm: Closing Remarks & Vote of Thanks
5:15 pm: 120 minute break
7:00 pm: Fulcrum Awards Night organised by Promise Foundation & PRMoment India
7:30 pm: Doors Open to Regency Ballroom for Awards Ceremony
9:15 pm: Cocktails & Celebration Dinner
11:30 pm: End of Day 2

Day Three – Sunday 7th August

7:30 am: Breakfast in respective hotels and Check Out
Individuals are free to explore the city of Chandigarh on their own

PRINT LINE

PUBLISHER



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TEAM

Roshan Alexander - Business Head
Anubhuti Mathur - Content Director
Ameeta Vadhera - Knowledge Manager
Gurbani Bhatia - Communications Associate
Amith Prabhu - Co-founder

DESIGN

**KRITICAL
EDGE**

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good connections by air to several other cities. However, City Beautiful like most other Indian cities has limited options when it comes to large conference halls within hotels. We thought that given that the pandemic is still in force there would be a luke-warm response. We were caught by surprise by the interest shown. What was being planned as a scaled down version has ended up being full-blown. The overwhelming response of delegates as well as partners has been an eye-opener. It could be a case of pent-up demand as well as the love people have for this annual summit. So, here we are. You are holding another edition of Reputation Today - a magazine that was born at PRAXIS.

The break from physical events also gave birth to several digital initiatives. PRIME TIME and SPECTRA were two of several online platforms that took shape. This year we propose to launch three more physical events. Two of them will be like mini versions of PRAXIS. In November 2022 we propose to have SPECTRA in Mumbai (we ran two digital editions of the same in 2020 and 2021) and in January 2023 we are planning REPRISE in Bangalore. These events will run from noon to sunset and include lunch and high tea with half a dozen sessions in between. They will be followed by Super Nights on the same day. We are also preparing for the third edition of the Innovation First Communication Conclave (in September 2022) and FUSE - the regional communications conclave (in March 2023), both in NCR and exclusively for in-house professionals. Stay tuned for more.

This is the ninth edition of PRAXIS and it has been put together painstakingly by a team of full-time staff as well as volunteers. There are nine keynote sessions, nine networking breaks* (4 on Day 1, 4 on Day 2 and 1 on Day 3) and nine special items curated as part of the delegate bag. This is what we call an event that focuses on learning and sharing. The theme is Futureproofing Public Relations. The focus will be on what we professionals need to get equipped with, in order to ensure the practice of Public Relations. We have tried curating something different. Four women leaders who will share insights on The Fast-moving World of Business, The Focus on Culture, The Fascination for Customer-centricity and The Frequency for Data Crunching. We have five other leaders speaking on The Face of Journalism Changing, The Feistiness of Purpose, The Force of Metaverse, The Future of Public Affairs and The Faith in Reputation Building. We have two power packed panels with young CEOs as well as global Indians. We thank our speakers for choosing to be with us, in person.

FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK



It feels surreal to be back with PRAXIS. When we declared the eighth edition closed on 29th September, 2019 in Goa, we had announced that the subsequent edition would take place in September 2020 in Kolkata. The deal was struck and the token money was kept aside to be paid on April 2nd the following year, as is always the case. No one imagined that less than six months later the world would come to a standstill and we would see a hurricane of volatility, ambiguity, chaos and uncertainty. Now, it seems like the worst is behind us. And we can only hope for better days.

We were asked throughout this 24-month period if there was a plan to organise PRAXIS. Whenever we thought we had clarity a new variant would show up. We finally saw a milder strain early this year and decided to take the plunge in late February. We had half the time to plan. We had to zero-in on a date and place. We decided to hold on to Kolkata for a couple of reasons. We felt it was only right to organise it in the north as the last two editions had taken place in the South and the West. We wanted to ensure it was in a new city as per tradition. The usual suspects - Jaipur and Agra had to be ruled out. We figured Chandigarh would be ideal as it was driving distance from NCR as well as had

We are grateful to our many partners.

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Special Partners: Ford India, FleishmanHillard India & Renault India.

Lastly, we remain grateful to you – the PRAXIS delegate. PRAXIS is unique in every sense. We as the organising team are merely custodians of this intellectual property. We believe it belongs to each one of you who attends the summit and makes it what it is. May this event be an enriching experience. We hope you go back with nine new connections.

The Promise Foundation Team



Amith Prabhu, Gurbani Bhatia, Anubhuti Mathur, Ameeta Vadhera, Roshan Alexander



Honouring Public Relations Excellence

Technique Awards

Best Use of Content (A1)	Organisation Name Afcons MPL MSL India Tata Motors Weber Shandwick	Campaign Title Chenab Railway Bridge Arch Closure Video Campaign Fan Bann Jaaoge Cocoa Life - People Behind India's Most Loved Chocolate: Cadbury Motor Mentors Rallying men and boys to create a bold and united force against gender based violence	Client/Consultancy Name Mondelez India Tata Motors Son Rise - Vibha Bakshi
Best Use of Creativity and Innovation (A2)	Organisation Name Edelman India Pvt Ltd First Partners Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (BBLUNT) MPL Pizza Hut India	Campaign Title Doritos BoldChoice Hyundai Celebrates Its Silver Jubilee with India's Super 25! Boycott Boycut Fan Bann Jaaoge Momo Mia Influencer Launch Campaign	Client/Consultancy Name PepsiCo India Hyundai Motors Schbang
Best Use of Event (A3)	Organisation Name First Partners Kommune Brand Communications MPL Six Degrees BCW Six Degrees BCW	Campaign Title Hyundai Celebrates Its Silver Jubilee with India's Super 25! Tech Mahindra Unveils TechMVerse to Drive Commerce in the Metaverse Fan Bann Jaaoge IKEA India's first city store in Worli Mumbai The T20 Pavilion -An Ultimate Cricket Stay India	Client/Consultancy Name Hyundai Motors Tech Mahindra IKEA India Booking.com
Best Use of Digital (A4)	Organisation Name AvianWE Columbia Pacific Communities Godrej Industries Madison PR Organic by MSL	Campaign Title #LeaveNoOneBehind #ReplyDontReject Bharat Hoga Kamyab Har Din - An Anthem of Hope NIVEA Soft Fresh Batch #DeliverThanks	Client/Consultancy Name Harpic World Toilet College-Reckitt Famous Innovations Creativeland Asia, Adfactors PR PvtLtd NIVEA India Amazon India
Best use of Integrated Communications (A5)	Organisation Name Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd Archetype Agency Pvt Ltd First Partners Holcim India Group - ACC & Ambuja Cement Schneider Electric	Campaign Title Sprinting towards gender-equality Switch Off #NursesMidwife4Change - War cry for Dignity of Nurses Change The Story Green Yoddha	Client/Consultancy Name Senco Gold & Diamonds vivo India JHPIEGO (John Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics) Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd
Best Use of Public Affairs (A6)	Organisation Name First Partners First Partners SPAG SPAG Weber Shandwick	Campaign Title #NursesMidwife4Change - War cry for Dignity of Nurses Waging a War Against Single-Use Plastics City-to-City COVID-19 Learning Exchange platform CoVLEx Varian A Siemens Healthineers company Rallying men and boys to create a bold and united force against gender based violence	Client/Consultancy Name JHPIEGO (John Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics) ITC Ltd PSI Varian (A Siemens Healthineers company) Son Rise - Vibha Bakshi
Best Management of Crisis (A7)	Organisation Name AvianWE First Partners First Partners Ford India MSL India	Campaign Title Crisis Communication Waging a War Against Single-Use Plastics #NursesMidwife4Change - War cry for Dignity of Nurses Committed To Serve - Ford India Business Restructuring Cadbury Gelatine Issue	Client/Consultancy Name BharatPe ITC Ltd JHPIEGO (John Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics) Mondelez India
Best Use of Internal Communications (A8)	Organisation Name 20:20 MSL L'Oreal India Lupin Ltd Max Life Insurance PhonePe Pvt Ltd	Campaign Title FineTune Innovation and optimism leading to success Reconnection - Back to the Future of Work at L'Oreal India Reinforcing a Values-Driven Culture Building a Stronger Swifter Workplace in the post pandemic world Empathize, Inform and Engage	Client/Consultancy Name Dell Technologies Digital Driftwood Edelman India Pvt Ltd
Best New Product Launch (A9)	Organisation Name AvianWE MPL Pizza Hut India Ruder Finn India SKODA AUTO India	Campaign Title Establishing Carens as a Disruptive Game Changer with a compelling Product Centric Narrative Billion Cheers Jersey Launch Momo Mia Influencer Launch Campaign Building The Payments Infrastructure of the Future Not Just a Brand New Car - SKODA KUSHAQ	Client/Consultancy Name KIA Pine Labs
Best Use of Media Relations (A10)	Organisation Name &TV, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd MSL India Ruder Finn India Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title Bhabiji Ghar Par Hain Winning over Investors for RateGain Pepperfry2.0 #PoochnaZarooriHai - Criminal Justice Behind Closed Doors Reimagining Stock Broking For The Millennial India	Client/Consultancy Name Genesis BCW RateGain Travel Technologies Pepperfry Disney+ Hotstar Angel One
Best Use of Community Outreach (A11)	Organisation Name &TV, Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd AvianWE First Partners PCA (MSL) Vistara	Campaign Title Baal Shiv Show Launch #DettolSalutes - Building hope in times of fear Don't Forget Leprosy Voicing A Desperate Plea for Attention amidst Pandemic I'm vaccinated National Relief Program	Client/Consultancy Name Genesis BCW Reckitt Sasakawa-India Leprosy Foundation OkCupid India AvianWE

Best Regional Campaign (A12)	Organisation Name Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd AvianWE Edelman India Pvt Ltd Hill+Knowlton Strategies India Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title Tata Tea Chakra Gold Regional Campaign Social and Behavioral Change Communications Campaign SBCC Launch of Flipkart's Shopsy Enriching farmer lives #InitForFarmers Growing with the growers in the most sustainable way	Client/Consultancy Name Tata Tea Chakra Gold CARE India Flipkart Corteva Agriscience Agoro Carbon Alliance
Sector Awards			
Best Hospitality and Travel Sector Campaign (B1)	Organisation Name First Partners Genesis BCW Six Degrees BCW Value 360 Communications Vistara	Campaign Title Hyundai Celebrates its Silver Jubilee with India's Super 25 Making A 6E Recovery The T20 Pavilion - An Ultimate Cricket Stay, India Switching India's gear towards car subscription with Zoomcar Rebuilding Passenger Confidence	Client/Consultancy Name Hyundai Motors IndiGo Booking.com Zoomcar AvianWE
Best Automobile Sector Campaign (B2)	Organisation Name First Partners Ford India SKODA AUTO India TVS Motor Company Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title Introducing India to World Rally Car DNA with Hyundai i20 N Line Committed To Serve - Ford India Business Restructuring Not Just a Brand New Car - SKODA KUSHAQ TVS Motor Company - Harnessing the Electric Mobility ecosystem The Inception of Future - Launching India's 1st SUV with AI Inside	Client/Consultancy Name Hyundai Motors MG Motor India
Best Luxury Campaign (B3)	Organisation Name Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd Asian Paints BMW Group India PR Pundit Public Relations Pvt. Ltd.	Campaign Title Sprinting towards gender-equality AP Furnishings Babyasachi for Nilaya Launch of the Press Launch - BMW 3 Series Gran Limousine Bobbi Brown Celebrates 30 Glowing years	Client/Consultancy Name Senco Gold & Diamonds Asian Paints Bobbi Brown India
Best Technology & Telecom Sector Campaign (B4)	Organisation Name Kaizen MPL RF Thunder Value 360 Communications Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title Mercer Mettl Enablers of Next-Gen online examination skill assessment MPL - Fan Bann Jaagoe Unlock The True Convenience Building Setu to connect with the unconnected: XraySetu Sound-wave Technology Enabling extraordinary experiences across businesses Bridging the last mile in Financial Inclusion	Client/Consultancy Name Mercer/Mettl MPL Oppo Artpark Tonetag
Best Healthcare & Pharma Sector Campaign (B5)	Organisation Name First Partners GCI Health India PR Pundit Public Relations Pvt. Ltd. Sanofi India Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title #NursesMidwife4Change - War cry for Dignity of Nurses Berok Zindagi Unstoppable Life Fitterfly Pro Diabetes campaign Sanofi 100 Insulin Stories Connecting the Unconnected at the time of need XraySetu	Client/Consultancy Name JHPIEGO Cipla Limited Fitterfly Edelman India Pvt Ltd Artpark
Best Consumer Products & Retail Sector Campaign (B6)	Organisation Name AvianWE Kaizen Media Mantra Six Degrees BCW Weber Shandwick	Campaign Title Dettol Salutes Building hope in times of fear Meeting India's Meaty Needs Empowering little minds with new-age technology IKEA India's first city store in Worli Mumbai Drishti nahi Drishtikon - A Vision for illuminated roads	Client/Consultancy Name Reckitt FreshToHome PlayShifu IKEA India Signify
Best Not-for-Profit and Association Sector Campaign (B7)	Organisation Name AvianWE Chase India (AvianWe) First Partners First Partners GCI Health India	Campaign Title Reaching The Unreachable UdyamStree NursesMidwife4Change - War cry for Dignity of Nurses Don't Forget Leprosy Voicing A Desperate Plea for Attention amidst Pandemic People of Action Rotary Responds	Client/Consultancy Name CARE India EdelGive Foundation JHPIEGO Sasakawa-India Leprosy Foundation Rotary International
Best Food and Beverage Campaign (B8)	Organisation Name AvianWE Genesis BCW Kaizen Pizza Hut India PR Pundit Public Relations Pvt Ltd	Campaign Title McSpicy Fried Chicken Campaign Britannia Tiger Krunch Krunch Khao Punch Dikhaao FreshToHome Meeting India's Meaty Needs Momo Mia Influencer Launch Campaign It's Kind of Delicious and Wonderful	Client/Consultancy Name Hardcastle Restaurants Pvt Ltd Britannia Industries Limited FreshToHome Pizza Hut India Glenmorangie
Best Entertainment and Media Sector Campaign (B9)	Organisation Name AvianWE Kommune Brand Communications Ruder Finn India Value 360 Communications Weber Shandwick	Campaign Title PVR CARES Launch of Beyondlife club NFT Platform #PoochnaZarooriHai - Criminal Justice Behind Closed Doors Creating India's Largest, Fastest Growing Vernacular Audio Influencer Community Housefull! Marvel Studios Assembles Fans to the Theatres by Tapping into the Indian Culture	Client/Consultancy Name PVR Ltd. Beyondlife.club Disney+Hotstar Khatri Marvel Studios
Best Banking and Financial Services Sector Campaign (B10)	Organisation Name AvianWE Edelman India Pvt Ltd First Partners Godrej Capital Limited ICICI Prudential Life Insurance	Campaign Title #AbHarDinHuaAasan India Protection Quotient 4.0 India Fights Back From Deferring to Demanding Post Generation Rent Protect & Save	Client/Consultancy Name Amazon Pay Max Life Insurance Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd
Best Services Sector Campaign (B11)	Organisation Name Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd First Partners First Partners MSL India Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title LEADing towards School EdTech India Fights Back From Deferring to Demanding Solving Cross Border Financial Inclusion Delivering India to the World Becoming the most preferred partner for D2C sellers in India	Client/Consultancy Name LEAD Home Credit Zolve DHL Express Shiprocket
Best Sports Campaign (B12)	Organisation Name Media Mantra MPL MPL MSL India Value 360 Communications	Campaign Title Got Guts to take the plunge Fan Bann Jaagoe Billion Cheers Team India Jersey Launch Hum Honge Kamyab - Tokyo Olympic Games 2020 Streaming Global Speaking Local	Client/Consultancy Name Jumpin Heights Sony Sports Network Rooter
Best Infrastructure and Real Estate Sector Campaign (B13)	Organisation Name Columbia Pacific Communities Godrej Properties Ltd Holcim India Group-ACC & Ambuja Cement Value 360 Communications Weber Shandwick	Campaign Title #ReplyDontReject #GreenPincode Change The Story Setting real example of Aapda me Avsar Hard Hat Challenge Uplifting women in STEM fields	Client/Consultancy Name Famous Innovations Curated Living Solutions Vedanta Aluminium
Best Campaign by a PSU (B14)	Organisation Name AvianWE Concept Public Relations India Limited	Campaign Title International Day of Girl Child Scaling New Heights	Client/Consultancy Name Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation Limited

Special Awards

Best Brand Reputation Campaign of the year (D1)

Organisation Name

Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd
Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd
Ketchum Sampark
Schneider Electric
Weber Shandwick

Campaign Title

Tata Tea Premium - Dosh Ka Kulhad Campaign
Presenting Mahindra's world-class SUV XUV700
Ariel Share the load - Do you see me as equal
Green Yodha
Rallying men and boys to create a bold and united force against gender based violence

Client/Consultancy Name

Tata Tea Premium
Mahindra
Ariel
Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd
Son Rise - Vibha Bakshi

Best Corporate Reputation Campaign of the year (D2)

Organisation Name

First Partners
First Partners
First Partners
MSL India
MSL India

Campaign Title

Hyundai Celebrates its Silver Jubilee with India's Super 25
Waging a War Against Single-Use Plastics
India Fights Back From Deferring to Demanding
Pepperfry2.0
#MaricoOfTomorrowToday

Client/Consultancy Name

Hyundai Motors
ITC Limited
Home Credit
Pepperfry
Marico

PR Consultancy of the Year - Small (Below 10 Cr) (D3)

Organisation Name

Ideosphere Consulting
ON PURPOSE
Scroll Mantra Pvt. Ltd.

PR Consultancy of the Year - Mid-size (Above INR 10-20 cr) (D4)

Organisation Name

Fuzion PR Pvt. Ltd.
Kaizzen
Ruder Finn India

PR Consultancy of the Year - Large (Above INR 20 cr-50 cr) (D5)

Organisation Name

Hill+Knowlton Strategies India
Media Mantra
SPAG

PR Consultancy of the Year - Giant (INR 50 cr above) (D6)

Organisation Name

Adfactors PR Pvt Ltd
AvianWE
BCW India Group
Edelman India Pvt Ltd
MSL India
Value 360 Communications

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Public Relations must thrive, not just survive



Arpit Garg

Vice President
Adfactors PR

Futureproofing Public Relations - the theme chosen for #PRAXIS9 could not have been more thought provoking. Yet, it is brain-freezing to opine on futureproofing a profession whose origin can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century and, by some estimates going as far back as the 17th century. The onset of the pandemic had industries abuzz with foretelling on transformative, irreversible new normal(s) that will have sweeping effects. The floodgates of eulogies were flung open for theatres, books, workplace, physical sports, and so on. The two of the most successful theatrical releases of the Indian cinema happened in succession during the pandemic. The watershed event of our lifetimes is continuing, and the world around us has changed, but the fundamentals of human behaviour and existence have more or less remained.

Closer home, I cannot not address the elephant in the room. Digital is a force to be reckoned with - only fools will miss this train already pacing like a bullet. That said, digital can mean many things to many people. For those in the business of influence, digital is a medium, as is print or TV, to reach audiences with intended messages, either directly or indirectly. I agree digital has removed barriers and, to an extent, disintermediated press, but its practical use is embedded in the science of persuasion.

The question at large is what it takes to remain relevant and evolve with the times for Public Relations and its practitioners. For me, the answer is staring in the face, People! No amount of emphasis is enough that the future of our industry can be insulated only by attracting, nurturing and retaining good talent. We need not look too far for a solution. The least we can do to make a beginning is to be the example we want to see. Invest in knowledge, apply our skills and lead with empathy to inspire the newest members of our teams to be proud of their choice to make Public Relations their career. As onerous as it may seem, we are all dutybound to be genuine ambassadors of our industry.

The second foil to this puzzle is Experimentation. The greatest companies of our times have failed several times and failed fast to succeed sooner. We are often found on the beaten path, and our vocabulary is unimpressively similar. We talk of disruption but do not want to disrupt value erosion. A culture that promotes experimentation, entrepreneurship and freedom to fail has outpaced the industry averages on all counts.

Last but not least is promoting Continuous Learning and development. We see the fruits of democratising knowledge at Adfactors PR. Over 1000 people so far have graduated with a Diploma in Digital Marketing, and several others have trained in management and leadership at the top institutes. Does it serve the company well? It jolly well does. But, the underlying intention is also to help the industry build a robust talent pool for future. Is it enough? Surely, not. A lot more minds and hands will need to commit to the noble cause of making Public Relations thrive, not just survive.

How has the field of public relations evolved and what does the future hold?



Shweta Munjal

*Vice President - Corporate Communications & Sustainability
Lupin*

Change is inevitable. Due to frequent and wide-ranging changes in the world, Public Relations today is a more challenging space than ever before. The fact that digital media trends are always changing makes it more difficult for individuals without a thorough long-term plan to build a strong PR strategy. To remain ahead of the curve, you must continually consider your public relations plan for tomorrow, not just today. It's more important than ever to keep your eye on the future, given how quickly everything is developing, particularly digital innovation.

Before discussing how public relations and social media will develop in the future, it's critical to recognise how drastically digital media has already altered the field. People can communicate with brands at a never-before-seen scale, and brands can exhibit more of their personalities. With this, PR has quickly changed to a focus area with bigger audience interaction and a much faster response time than PR approaches of the past.

Let's delve deeper into the current public relations trends to enable in development of a future-proof PR strategy:

Intriguing and shareable content is a must

PR professionals need to break out of their traditional shells and adapt to the new chapter given how quickly news circulates these days. Today, high quality video content creation has become incredibly simple thanks to smartphones, and the medium appears to be here to stay. To maximise the longevity of your PR effort, be sure to tell compelling stories that stand out from the crowd. This can be done in multiple ways, whether it is highlighting insights or processes in a quick social media video or by using videos to pitch press releases to the media. Videos and photos can help your PR strategy since they let you tell your brand's narrative in a manner that is more relatable and invites more audience participation.

Influencer PR is an effective means

Social media is an effective marketing tool, and it appears that will continue to be the case for some time. Evidently, influencer PR is becoming more and more popular. But this is not limited to the bigger social media influencers with millions of followers. Micro-influencers that have a niche audience specific to your brand can have a big impact, especially for companies with sharply defined audiences. Because influencers are seen as relatable, reliable, and approachable, they aid in raising brand recognition.

A must-have is tailored social media promotion

Simply sharing your content on social media is insufficient. Instead, PR specialists should develop unique messaging based on the values of their target audience for every platform. You require

knowledge of their wants and expectations for that. Therefore, while developing an effective social strategy, you should combine PR with social media, brand consultation, and digital marketing.

Personalisation is essential

Humans are, in fact, all unique, but they all share one fundamental characteristic: a need to be seen. As a result, the secret to creating a successful PR plan is customisation. Everything should have a personal, relatable touch, whether you're making pitches, distributing press releases, or hosting events.

Cross-promotion steals the show

This is one of the best strategies to amp up your brand's awareness and branch out to a brand-new audience. In essence, cross-promotion involves sharing material with another author to reach a larger audience through a variety of platforms. The most often used forms of cross-promotion are podcasts, guest blogging, and partnered Instagram posts.

Inclusivity is the key

Did you know that consumers now demand social responsibility from brands? Diversity should be a part of our PR strategy. Focusing on a variety of ethnicities, sexual orientations, genders, disabilities, belief systems, cultures, and ages in PR efforts is crucial because inclusion is vital.

Data is the essential engine for innovation

As we have seen time and again in various industries today, data is priceless. While PR may seem like a qualitative focus area, since it tells your brand's story, that narrative should be supported with statistics and analysed to strengthen your media communication efforts. Once the data is visible, you can know what works and what doesn't, to come up with fresh concepts that actually work with your target audiences. Tools like SEO (Search Engine Optimization), Listening and Monitoring, and social media metrics can help with that.

Even though PR is known for its creativity, the pandemic has made operating in a virtual environment particularly challenging. In order to create, foster, and maintain relationships with media contacts, PR professionals must now find creative ways to engage with them. Meeting in person is no longer a straightforward option. Innovation is required to keep these relationships strong and to dominate journalists' thoughts in the virtual world. The success of media pitches and story pickups depends on these connections.



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Nitin Mantri

Group CEO, Avian WE

President, International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO)

The past two years have been nerve-racking, to say the least. While Covid-19 threatened to—and nearly did—throw us off-track, we managed to stay the course with ingenuity and innovation, as the entire business came together to adapt to new ways of working.

Global consultancy heads surveyed for ICCO and PProvoke Media's World PR Report were overwhelmingly optimistic about the sector's growth in 2022, with expectations for a more profitable year rising by almost 50% compared to the previous year's report. This buoyancy was further evidenced by an astonishing 95% of respondents expecting an increase in client income.

So we defied the worst, but will our resilience and creativity be enough to thrive in this fast-moving and fractured world? We know from our latest Brands in Motion report, "The Bravery Mandate," that the expectation that brands provide stability is rising, but perceived impact remains flat. Audiences want brands to help but aren't convinced that they're delivering. And for communicators, the work starts now. The road ahead calls for more inclusive work policies, a deeper commitment to sustainability and greater adoption of technology.

Build strength from within

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is the importance of human vulnerability and the need to invest more in the human aspects of work. According to "The Bravery Mandate," employee well-being is the most important issue that needs to be addressed by employers. Employees are tired. They demand more autonomy and flexibility at work. Others want a renewed sense of purpose, and many crave interpersonal connections with their colleagues. In short, they want to feel valued by their organisations.

Unless we champion the welfare of our workforce and appreciate the value of their contribution, we stand to lose what lies at the very heart of our work—our people.

Double down on ESG goals

At the same time, businesses must act to ensure that environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals are more than just a buzzword. "The Bravery Mandate" found that 71% of respondents felt that brands have an obligation to engage with global issues such as climate change.

Brands that "walk the talk" have an opportunity to showcase their authenticity and impact. As their strategic partners, it will be a key communication priority to help brands create an authentic purpose legacy by building on their core promise and making deep and sustained investments in the issues their stakeholders care about most.

Own the technology space

Technology is going to become bigger and take on a greater role in communication strategies. AI, Robotic Process Automation and advanced analytics are already creating ripples across the entire value chain. Roles such as 'Consumer Insights Analyst', 'Social Engagement Manager', 'Data Evangelists' will become mainstream. In the future, communications functions must build their core around technology, and not remain limited to being a support function.

That said, we must never forget that PR is fundamentally about human relationships and our ability to tell a human story. The art of storytelling with emotions will remain core to PR, and technological advancements can't replace that.

Difficult issues will keep arising. Today it is COVID-19, tomorrow it could be something else. The way forward is to operate not with fear but curiosity and openness to change. The PR profession not only has a powerful voice, but it also has the means to amplify it. Now is the time to operate with boldness, show up with honesty, and act on our values and convictions over the long term.

Futureproofing healthcare communications



Juhie Gorwara

*Head - Brand, Communications, Digital, CSR,
Philips (Indian Subcontinent)*

In the last few years, as COVID-19 made its much unwelcome steps across the globe, we have seen a renewed public interest in health and healthcare. Prior to the pandemic, interest in health – especially in India – was often seen through the lens of government initiatives to improve delivery of healthcare amongst the less privileged sections of society. COVID-19 changed all that. People now want information on how best they could keep themselves healthy. It is here that communications plays a great role in strengthening the bond between the public and health and pharma brands. A bond between equals and one which is not established only when there is a crisis.

Recent studies have suggested that, amongst the challenges presented before the healthcare sector, the three top issues are unequal access to healthcare and health services, employee well-being and the ongoing mental health crisis. Given that audiences expect the health sector to have the greatest impact on positive change in the world in the next six months, we are at a critical juncture now.

This is also a time for both public and private sector executives to communicate and show genuine care towards their customers, their employees and their business. This is the triple duty of care that must be performed to build future credibility and wellbeing, with open communication being the key.

What then must be done to ensure that communication between the public and the healthcare sector remains robust and resilient in the coming days?

Ramping up Tomorrow's Communications

To start with, healthcare brands should focus on effective communication with their target audiences. As vulnerable populations are more receptive to messages that are in keeping with their realities, it pays to focus on local realities when engaging in communications.

Secondly, nothing helps more than the demystification of science. If the pandemic provided a silver lining, it was the fact that when conveyed in simple language, public health information can reach the masses effectively. The fact that most Indians are double vaccinated proves this point!

Then again, healthcare firms should tread carefully and maintain clear communications. It pays to take nothing for granted while enjoying the brand's "moment under the sun".

Building a Purpose Legacy

Lastly, nothing helps more than building an authentic purpose legacy that people can identify with. To future proof, healthcare communications should focus on larger social issues. Today there is a newfound recognition of the health sector's association with social issues; there is also an understanding that healthcare delivery and the health of the environment and people are closely tied. Audiences expect the health sector to have the greatest positive change in the world; however, this is tinged with a degree of cynicism. This is where continuous and consistent engagement is called for to future proof communications between the healthcare sector and society in the coming days.



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Public Communication is a Balancing Act in the Age of Digital Media



Mahesh Jayaram

*Director and Head, Corporate Communications, India and Asia Emerging Markets,
Dell Technologies*

The evolution of digital media and hyper-fast communications has completely redefined the role and function of Public Relations. Today we can exchange exceptionally large amounts of data instantaneously. In this networked society every end user is also a producer of knowledge, compelling a fundamental reconfiguration of the creator-consumer relationship. The beneficial impact of the internet, 5G and other emerging technologies on our social life and commerce has been profound. The new information regime, in turn, makes stringent demands on enterprises in acquiring consumer consent and mobilising public opinion.

Audiences are far more informed today. We are in the post-industrial knowledge era. From hypertext to rich media, from Wikipedia to blogs, from 'how-to' videos to infographics, audiences draw upon a surfeit of sources to enlighten themselves. Information is available at our fingertips, at any time, all the time. The information asymmetry has swung from the creator in favour of the consumer. Peer reviews and communal evaluation define merit and inform buyer choices.

How and when we consume knowledge, too, has changed. For the first time, we can carry our entertainment everywhere on our handheld devices. Data travels ceaselessly between a multitude of connected nodes, creating a perpetual source of information. The internet is always on, always listening— and it is hard to predict what will go viral. One small misstep can end careers, destroy organisations, and precipitate international crises. Not only is cyberspace unforgiving, but data is persistent, and it is hard to take back statements once uttered. It is a challenge for organisations to better manage Public Relations across numerous channels of communication.

The boundary between information and entertainment has blurred, spawning an interactive world of infotainment. The widespread and rapid adoption of digital media has triggered a massive shift from traditional media, such as print, towards

newer disruptive technologies. A battery of novel user experiences is emerging, such as the metaverse— an immersive 3D virtual world, where we interact and collaborate with other actors in a lifelike representation of reality.

Empowered by accessible technologies, audiences today actively participate in the production and transmission of information. This paradigm shift has enabled the democratisation of power and a collapse of the top-down, controlled, one-way communication aimed at audiences for consumption only. The new creative culture of open participation has given rise to more egalitarian, non-hierarchical, collaborative structures. This endows the general populace with immense power to utilise digital media to sway popular perception, expose ills and weaknesses of organisations, and campaign for societal transformation. This fundamentally changes the ambit of Public Relations— a discipline tasked with managing the reputation in the eyes of the population.

One of the basic tenets of Public Relations is to know your audience. While on the one hand the digital domain paints a challenging landscape for influence building, it equally provides an opportunity to listen to signals from the audience, and respond with appropriate solutions in a more transparent, participatory, and collaborative environment. Companies can analyse consumption habits, explore new routes to market, and drive innovation to deliver extraordinary outcomes. Businesses must therefore recognise the potential of the internet and complementary digital technologies and embrace current capabilities to future-proof their Public Relations. They must venture beyond antiquated exchanges and leverage the agility of "always-on communications" to build trust and long-term relationships that evolve into business opportunities.

Integrating Technology to futureproof PR: A pot boiler in the era of Metaverse



Pooja Garg Khan

Head - Corporate Communications
Panasonic India

I believe the PR business has been evolving and we have been futureproofing ourselves over the years. From 'Publicity' to Public Relations to Chief Communications Officer, we have come a long way and continue to reinvent ourselves. And as I read somewhere – **"Content, and the way it is consumed, is the catalyst for futureproofing PR."**

I couldn't agree more with this. Last few years have accelerated digital adoption and content has become the centerpiece for the success of any platform. So, if PR can innovate and continue to drive an efficient **content strategy** for their organisations, we have won half the battle. However, this is not easy as content does not only mean content for media releases or editorials or employee communication messages but has changed to include social media posts for organisations and leaders, scripts for OTT/ videos etc. The trick is to use a mix that works for your message delivery. The appetite for long articles, that my generation loved, is now limited. How can you package your news/ key messages in easy to consume, snackable content with visuals is the present and the future. In the digital world, getting maximum leverage through choosing the right "keywords" are essential to improve SEOs, and website traffic and improve the overall brand identity of any corporate or individual.

With the digital wave, the PR business today requires up-skilling and devising innovative strategies to meet the changing market environment. Some of the skills I believe we need to continue to invest, besides **content creation** include.

- **Metrics:** As we all know, what cannot be measured cannot be rewarded. With consumer behavior constantly changing and the budget getting tighter, the pressure on PR will keep mounting for metrics. We have come a long way in measuring performance through the delivery of messages, perception audits and tracking sales through influencer engagement. However, for the C-suite to invest in the PR department, the business must show more stringent measurement metrics (RoI) that support bottom-line achievements. As we move from the digital revolution to finally entering Metaverse, a minimum benchmark would help the PR business to keep a check on wins and accomplishments.

- **Data analytics:** AI, ML have become buzzwords and SaaS platforms have made life simpler for most verticals. So why not PR? There have been some conversations here and as an industry, we need to invest in technology/ tech platforms that

will give us more relevant analytics to execute better or measure RoI more efficiently. I have reviewed quite a few platforms but yet to come across a cohesive and comprehensive one.

- **Relationships:** This is one of the most important aspects of Public Relations. Analytics, measurements, and content aside, we need to continue enhancing and investing in our engagement skills. A partnership based on trust and mutual respect must be formed for long standing relationships. To collaborate with journalists, one must build those relationships – this comes through years of experience and consistent efforts. Also, in the age of influencer marketing, it is essential to engage with connoisseurs of certain sectors to leverage maximum gain on social media and other video and audio format channels (podcasts, webinars, YouTube).

- **Role enhancement:** A public relations person shapes and builds the organisation's public perception by building a brand, delivering key messages, and minimising the impact of any negative publicity. The role of any PR professional is multi-fold; from managing clients to creating content and media outreach, I find that communication leads are typically jack of all trades. Swinging my way from marketing to CSR and public affairs, I believe I have successfully handled these portfolios at different stages per organisation requirements.

Public Relations is evolving and will continue to do so. With the digital revolution outpacing traditional communications, digital PR coupled with online brand strategies has opened multiple avenues for owned, earned, and paid content. It is no longer vis-a-viz, but all three need to be a part of our reputation management strategy and be deployed as per campaign requirements. Furthermore, the "Metaverse" inculcation is expected to change how the PR business has functioned, dramatically. Many brands have already set up their virtual brand stores and products in the Metaverse market. Keeping the audience engaged in the mirror world (Metaverse) will be a significant challenge. The industry must adopt an integrated-communications approach, including earned, owned, and paid media channels in their metaverse marketing mix. From storytelling to audience engagement and maintaining a virtual reputation, it will be interesting to see how PR re-invents and tailors its strategies to match up with the never-ending technological advancements, making them future-proof.

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Tech-tonic shift: Technological disruption changing the face of the communications business



Manisha Chaudhary

Founder Director

Value 360 Communications

Anyone who has spent a considerable number of years in Public Relations remembers the time when press releases were printed out and hand-delivered to reporters and media houses. While the internet existed even then, it wasn't a mainstream tool, and e-mail was a practically inconceivable concept.

Fast-forward to today, and we can no longer imagine PR without a robust tech-backed support system streamlining intentions, simplifying tasks, and enhancing execution. The shifting sands of communication, combined with the staggering increase in sources of information, have led to a new-age, tech-empowered communications sector that is just starting to come of age.

As the business transforms at a dizzying pace, here's a look at some of the technologies leading this evolution:

Data Analytics

Data-driven decision-making has added the element of precision to communication. PR professionals can cut through the clutter with crucial insights about brands, target audiences, publications, and opinions. Analytics arms us with the knowledge and research required to understand a brand's tonality and objectives, resulting in more efficient and effective campaigns. Eliminating guesswork from PR, analytics has helped us maximise impact with each strategy.

Digital Platforms

Digital PR has presented the sector with endless opportunities, including online press releases, video-based storytelling, and immersive podcasts. Moreover, Web 3.0 is changing how brands look at their digital footprint, allowing them to reap the many benefits of creating a virtual presence, from virtual brand integration to virtual storytelling.

Digital PR has also unlocked the infinite potential of multimedia content creation, which can help a brand expand its reach. From interactive audio-based content such as podcasts to engaging and informative videos or even a detailed newspaper article, content strengthens every PR campaign.

At this point, the primary goal should be to create unique, authentic, and purposeful narratives distributed through the appropriate channels to reach suitable stakeholders for maximum impact.

Metaverse

The rise of Web 3.0, with blockchains and NFTs at its core, have got people excited about the possibilities of the Metaverse in PR. A digital extension of physical life, the Metaverse offers a huge opportunity for brands to offer an immersive experience to brand stakeholders. It will bode well for PR professionals to gain an understanding of the Metaverse and gauge the way it can help their clients expand their narrative and reach a larger section of digital-first stakeholders.

Some ways in which the Metaverse can be leveraged is through virtual storytelling, virtual product placement, and virtual reputation management. Proactive, innovative PR campaigns will be able to set clients ahead of the curve as Metaverse continues to come into play as a strong conversation medium.

AI & ML

While the use of AI and ML in PR is still in the nascent stage, the possibilities are enthralling. PR professionals can use predictive analysis to foresee the advent or impact of client crises. They can also leverage the power of ML to map market trends, predict audience response to particular campaigns, and gauge the impact of each piece of communication. In fact, AI can tell you exactly what to include in a press release to make it more impactful and recommend the channels through which it should be pushed.

AI-led systems can also understand audience preferences and create compelling content for brands. In fact, publications – including some as prominent as The Washington Post – already use AI tools to create news and feature stories. While the human connection is understandably missing from these stories, we're slowly but surely getting there.

The PR and communications landscape is hurtling towards a stage where technology and communication will be unified to ensure that a brand and its stakeholders are well connected through the right platforms. But, there's still a lot left to do in terms of tech integration. When it comes to technology in PR, the conversation has just begun.

How is Public Relations helping businesses build a brand, organically!



Vishesh Sharma

Chief Marketing Officer
Ashika Group

Building a digital brand in today's age and time demands that companies remain visible and connected with prospective as well as existing customers 24*7. And to maintain this consistent presence, either a brand must regularly spend on campaigns or maintain a robust media presence, which is where the dynamics for public relations have changed substantially. When today's consumers demand social proofing, it becomes imperative for brands to put a strategic approach to the PR activities and not just think of it as another good-to-have activity. PR professionals, in fact, are the communication strategists of the day, ensuring that the brand remains in the spotlight for the right reasons, at the right time, and to the right audience.

Emergence of the new-age PR ecosystem

Let's take the example of the digital marketing function, which is segregated into two verticals, i.e., paid and organic. Companies usually prefer to build an organic business model (unless supported by hoards of VC cash), amplified by the paid performance marketing efforts. Similarly, PR activities have emerged as a credible source of brand building, supported by paid awareness campaigns. In short, it is no longer a peripheral brand-building activity but an essential part of a company's strategy and growth. The PR function now covers almost all aspects of brand communication, including advertising, marketing, corporate communications, event management, and crisis communications.

Armed with new-age platforms, including social media, the PR ecosystem creates winning strategies through contemporary marketing tools, from branding and social media management to influencer and media relations.

Carefully-crafted PR strategy contributes to business performance

Indeed, the PR function is slowly becoming a reven center. Today, PR is about creating and narrating a story that resonates with the audience for lasting impact rather than being limited to getting print, digital, and broadcast media

coverage. PR professionals leverage social media tools like Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Quora to reach their audience. They are adept at creating a unique and authentic story that conveys the appropriate brand message using the right social media channels. It is vital for new businesses to acquire new customers who are not just socially aware but come well researched.

While crafting engaging narratives before launch is crucial, creating a reliable and engaging brand image for existing businesses is equally important. It entails connecting with the potential audience through a series of stories told via events, social campaigns, partnerships, and press. This improves brand recognition and establishes a robust digital presence. It helps in organic business building efforts (backlinks, SEO, Online reputation Building, Social Reputation Index) and paid marketing efforts (any growth marketing genius will agree that how a robust digital history helps optimize paid campaigns).

Reach the target audience organically

Building a community (based on a unique brand narrative) goes a long way in retaining customers in today's age, as millennials and GenZ may not be loyal to a brand but are incredibly loyal to communities. A sharp PR approach can successfully help you build such a tribe of loyal customers. Nowadays, a brand's target audience is present on multiple digital platforms while relying on third-party validation before making a purchase. Here's where PR activities and tools such as influencers and online reputation builders come into great effect.

In a nutshell

It will be prudent to say that brands must look at PR from a new lens and give it due importance. Going forward, a well-amplified PR will help deliver a fantastic business legacy for India and the global markets.

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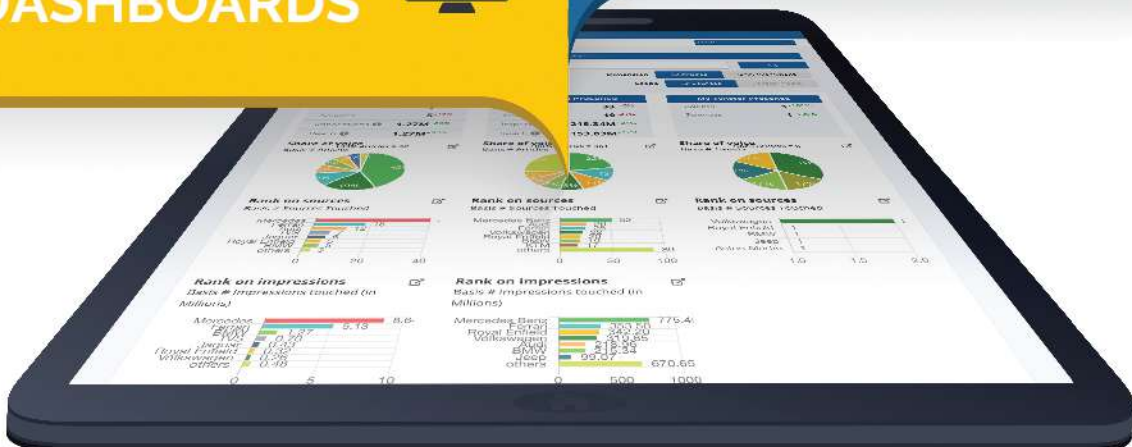
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Futureproofing Public Relations in the era of continuous consumption



Vineet Handa

Founder and CEO
Kaizen

From the first public relations activity traced some 3000 years ago in the ruins of ancient Babylonians and Sumerians (now in Iraq) to its modernized version today, the public relations industry has evolved with time for the better. With the rising technological revolution, the industry has flourished at an unprecedented speed. It has become an inevitable part of every organization, generating about USD 15 billion in revenue worldwide. Its growing need in the modern world can be speculated by the latest PRowoke Media report indicating a surge of 10.6% in the global PR business, all thanks to technological advancement.

From OTT, E-mailers, SMS, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, there are endless modes of communication, constantly consumed by always online consumers. These platforms have widened the reach from national to hinterlands, helping the business to target large groups of audiences at any given time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the PR business was also affected, with a 4% decline in 2020. However, we innovated quickly, experimenting with new modes of communication like podcasts, virtual events, and influencer marketing. The crisis gave way to opportunity, where brands understood the impact that PR can bring during tough times. Be it external communication or crisis mitigation across employees, civil society, or Government, PR helped brands come together and fight. The trust and credibility that our industry can bring are far more than any other amplification models. This is why the entire sector bounced back by 11% within 18 months.

Evaluating the current trends, here are a few recommendations to future proof communications:

Focused approach

With digitisation and the rise of social media, people will turn to online media for relatable stories and real-time responses. Consumers will continue to play a role in how consultancies pitch their clients to the media. The future of public relations would be more about what consumers want to read.

An integrated model of communication

While social media platforms will continue exploding, they will not diminish the importance of traditional communication. The right approach would be to utilise all available means to reach the ultimate objective of delivering the right message to the right audience through the right channel.

Empowering the workforce

The need to empower the workforce as per the changing dynamics will remain the topmost priority. No matter how much technological development we undergo, the human touch will remain.

Advanced technologies

The ICCO world PR report 2021 predicts 53% growth in the use of Artificial intelligence, 40% in data science, and 38% in SEO. This means that the campaigns in the Future will be data-driven.

Condensed information

With a large population of internet-savvy 18-49 year olds who read only 28% of the words, the demand for condensed content would rise. GIFs and short videos will become more effective. Compiling such content would require more brainstorming and a carefully crafted content strategy.

It's truly a VUCA world out there & Communications Professionals need to be the Change Agents!



Sophia Christina

*Head of Communications
IIM, Ahmedabad*

In the early 1990s when the US Army War College responded to the collapse of the USSR with VUCA and much later in 2014 when HBR published an article on the shiny, new acronym doing the rounds in boardrooms and corporate floors, little did they know how Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity would hit us all at the same time. While we are slowly recovering from the impact of the pandemic that started in 2020, we've also witnessed The Great Resignation in 2021, a war that started in 2022, the recent Sensex crash, and newer stories every day that make us go 'It's definitely crazy out there!'

As communicators, therefore, our role to help organisations/boards/institutions navigate this VUCA world and create change for a better future is ever so critical now. But what does it take for Public Relations professionals to become these strategic advisors for the organisation?

- **Ears to the ground:** Listen to every word your audience and stakeholders are saying - on social media, on TV, through e-commerce reviews, in the media, and just about everywhere. Knowing the pulse of your audience is the most important part of your communications strategy. These popular words from Police, 'Every breath you take, every move you make, every bond you break, every step you take, I'll be watching you' are a communicator's mantra!
- **Eyes on multiple screens:** In a world where WFX (work from anywhere) has become a common feature of our lives, communications professionals have to ensure that organisations are able to communicate clearly and consistently through various mediums- Zoom/Teams/Google Meet or Slack/Google Docs/Intranet/WhatsApp as well as traditional media outlets. Concise and razor-sharp messaging will be our true friend when we talk to people all around the world
- **Hands-on on data and technology:** PR professionals need to learn to fall in love with data! Data helps make sense of the ambiguous messages floating around. Whether it's slicing

and dicing social media analytics, the hits that each of your content pieces gets, the reviews that your product gets on Amazon, or even looking at sales numbers post a campaign run, every data point is necessary for us to create the right communications strategy. The fast-evolving digital world calls for communicators who know how to craft interactive stories for short attention spans and changing trends, based on data and insights

- **Feet ready to move:** If there's one thing that the last couple of years has taught us, it's Agility! Public Relations professionals have to be flexible, adaptable, and agile to move with the situation and alter plans as events unfold. It also means that we have to be ready to collaborate with people we wouldn't usually interact with within the organisation. Public Relations is no longer just media relations or event management. PR teams now have to step into the shoes of a digital manager, the researcher, and also the creative director to ensure the right message in the most effective manner is communicated to the world
- **Head full of ideas:** Volatility in such a world can only be countered with a vision and new ideas. PR professionals need to be ones who are always thinking, not just about media coverage or events or content but also about how to engage better with employees, what kind of simulations and scenarios are to be built for the future and even about collaborating with people in other functions and sharing knowledge. Public Relations as a core management function needs to bring in genuine diversity of thought in the organization. It's not enough to only think of diversity in terms of gender or race but also in terms of beliefs and ideas.

The last few years have shown us the power that strategic Public Relations can play in the organisations' growth. But as our friendly, neighborhood Spiderman says 'With Great Power comes Great Responsibility. Public Relations professionals, therefore, also have to hold responsibility for doing things the right way.

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Clients want results



Aseem Sood

CEO, Impact Research & Measurement
Chairman, AMEC

We need to talk differently to our clients.

How many times have you heard from your teams or colleagues that the client is not giving us budgets for measurement or research? We hear this all the time from the PR consultancies that we work with in India. At the recently concluded Global AMEC Summit in Vienna, Chris Foster, CEO, Omnicom Global Publications Group shared his thoughts on the question If clients are not buying measurement, then what are they buying? I found it interesting and apt for the Indian market as well. Here is what I learnt:

Clients aren't buying measurement, stop selling measurement solutions to them.

They are looking for solutions to their problems. So we need to tell them how the research and analytics, that we are proposing, is going to provide them a better solution to their real business problems. There is a higher probability that they will like our proposed approach.

Change language in pitches and proposals.

This is more about how we sell our services. As PR advisors, we need to talk differently to our clients. We ask for research as a separate line item in our proposals. If we cannot afford to do our jobs without the data we need to stop asking for a separate budget for research and make data and analytics a central part of our PR programme. Chris shared an interesting question. Do your doctors give you an option to choose if you would like to conduct a medical test (research) before, and after, an important surgery (campaign) or skip it? They don't. The test (research) is important for them to give you the best solution. Similarly, we also need to stop suggesting in proposals that data and analytics is an optional line item.

Data Integration can do wonders for clients. Focus on integration.

Clients have lots of data and research coming from various internal and external sources. But all these different data sets are sitting in independent silos, they are not talking to

each other. Each data set has insights but independently no single data set is able to provide solution to the client problem. We need to encourage the clients to start integrating these insights. We need to forge ahead with convergence and integration as the guiding principles in our campaigns.

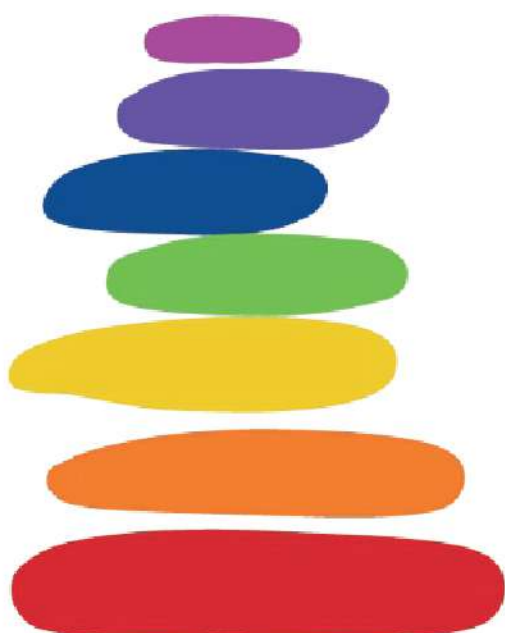
I have been in the Communication Measurement business for over 17 years now. I can tell you that this is the first time I heard a PR professional talk so passionately about data and analytics and the things that we need to change in the profession and practice of Public Relations to provide better solutions to our clients. These insights are as relevant for India as they are for any other part of the world. Chris's keynote and other presentations from the Global AMEC summit are available online, as on-demand sessions on AMEC website (www.amecorg.com).

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With the rising importance of reputation and trust in business and a multi stakeholder environment, businesses need smart PR for their license to operate and thrive. Public Relations has over the years moved from a support function to a partner function – no longer an adjunct to marketing, legal or part of the CEO's office. The role of digital and social media has transformed the way we work in PR. While stakeholder management and strategic media relations will be the cornerstones of any PR professional, adding digital capabilities and multi stakeholder management expertise is now vital.

Here are some thoughts on how Public Relations will evolve in the coming years and what role it will play.

Integrated communications

Across media, social, marketing and other critical functions – it is no longer the PR team that solely needs to create and drive a narrative. Narrative creation needs to be multi-functional and multi-dimensional for greatest impact across every channel. It should also be owned by every colleague and every leader. For this to happen authentically, the narrative must reflect organisational reality.

Living the narrative

This will become increasingly important as we build organisational reputation and trust. As we create a narrative or value for our organisation, it is important to demonstrate what it does and how it behaves to provide proof that it should be trusted. This requires every function, business unit and colleague to live the values and embed this in the business.

Multi stakeholder management

This will be the cornerstone of Public Relation in the future – we are already seeing how it is moving away from media relations to stakeholder engagement. This will get more defined in the future and therefore PR professionals must equip themselves with the knowledge to work with NGOs,

governments, influencers, key opinion leaders and others more.

Measurement

This will become key as organisations are now driving towards value creation – demonstrating how the PR team has protected the business from potentially losing millions of dollars that impact reputation and stakeholder value during a crisis or proactively driven reputation to drive sales, greater partnerships or the talent brand. Moving away from AVE to message impact on business and outcomes will be critical as the function evolves.

Being the co-pilot to your business leader

We need to act and advise businesses to bring the outside in as well as take the inside out. This starts with understanding the business – deeply –beyond the product launches and marketing. It involves understanding the financials, the implications of governance, long term business plans – as this is the only way you can see a reputation headwinds or tailwinds come your way. This is what business leaders need and appreciate.

Content will continue to be King

PR should continue to be the pivot that drives and navigates content for the organisation. PR professionals need to continuously re-skill themselves to make content more audio-visual across platforms. Creatively driving the message – aligned with how consumers and stakeholders feel best to receive the messages – will be crucial. Greater personalisation of messages and stakeholder segmentation will be required as we hope to land our message better.

Public Relations will continue to grow in importance as reputation and trust will continue to drive business salience – however the requirements from the PR team will change and go beyond the traditional confines of media relations. We as professionals need to see the change coming and equip and train ourselves to the new demands of businesses.

Making Public Relations future ready



Sujit Patil

VP & Head Corporate Brand & Communications
Godrej Industries Limited and Associate Companies

There is enough empirical and anecdotal proof available around the fact that the media has evolved. The question is – are we as PR professionals tuned to these changes? To really fortify the future of Public Relations, the business first needs to acknowledge the gap that exists between their offerings and the clients' expectations. The way many corporates are looking at their PR processes has changed. A holistic approach of POEMS – Paid – Owned – Earned – Media – Strategies is being adopted by more and more organisations and brands. Marketing and advertising and now influencer and boutique firms are hence eating into businesses of established PR consultancies. The larger players need to build a mindset of creative pragmatism to find solutions rather than fight the wave.

Few of the thoughts that come to my mind to make the PR business future-ready are:

Holistic media relations:

Today, every media house has a print, TV, and digital/online team. Within each of these, there are different teams according to beats; a different team for social media, and even for video, research and infographic based content. However, a significant part of media relations is more or less limited to the traditional editorial team. Are we still stuck in the rut of traditional media?

CommTech and Automation:

We all could agree that in an average day of a PR professional there are several mundane and repetitive tasks which can be automated. However has the profession adopted automation to the level it should? This itself can free-up time for creative thought process and strategising. More so, measuring success in a non-anecdotal way is taking center stage. What is the level of CommTech that we have invested in?

Affinity for data:

More and more brands today ask for data-driven and research-based plans and activations. PR professionals will have to start falling in love with data and ensure data analytics can be made an integral part of the decision-making process. The use of data to understand

consumer behaviour and generate insights will facilitate more engaging and bidirectional conversations. We need not be data scientists, but can we decipher data and frame narratives based on insights?

Two way street:

Vanilla PR tools are no more seen to be delivering results. Consumers have evolved from transactional relationships and prefer meaningful engagements and experience driven relationships with brands. They want to be heard. Hence the sector needs to learn how each communication can be made into an experience for the customers. The days of one way communication – or the concept of 'spray and pray' of press releases is gone.

Digital Savvy:

Research demonstrates that people today touch, swipe or tap their phone over 2000 times a day! The digital world itself has undergone changes – from blogs to notifications, the real-estate and the time span for grabbing attention of consumers has become smaller and shorter. The real war today is between devices and platforms; and between moods and moments. Are we digitally agile to cater to these consumer characteristics?

Owned media platforms and metaverse:

As brands grapple with the rationale of investing in an owned media platform or metaverse, PR firms still have the opportunity to own this space. Immersive experiences are here to stay, what is needed is a clever idea to use it for achieving communication and PR objectives.

There could be many more but these aspects require talent. Are we doing enough to build and nurture talent that can future proof the business in its renewed circumstances? Or are we blaming it on the 'Great Resignation' without even introspecting how we can retain talent?

Well, it's the collective responsibility of all of us and calls for prudent actions on various fronts. Not that efforts are not being put in. However, from a client perspective all I can say is that much more needs to be done to maintain and enhance the sheen of this wonderful world of public relations.

To thrive in a world of constant change, organizations and businesses need more than talk. They need the ability to move people—all kinds of people—to think differently, feel deeply, and act urgently.

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DON'T GO 'REGION



Consider the scope and scenario of Regional Communication in India. This segment has lately become an area that brands just can't afford to ignore. Right? But, I pause and wonder – are brands doing enough?

I had pitched in from 2009, and have closely observed the transition over a decade but today in 2022, I think twice – are the dynamics of Regional India getting into place? Do communicators always look for innovative ways to make their presence felt? What could be the possible communication strategy to reach the huge market at the bottom of the Pyramid (BOM)? I don't think there is any urgency.

Why should there be a tearing hurry to reach BOM? A market that has its own culture and dynamics! Why include it in the national budgets? Hence, **I suggest eleven great reasons for you to keep ignoring this part of India while drafting your communication strategy. Don't go regional!** This is excellent time for brands to turn a blind eye.

- Internet users in **non-metros consist of 53% of internet population** in India. Do you need to make the heartland of India part of your brand strategy? Hey hang on, things will move, so why the fuss? Relax!

- **Visual content in regional languages** has the upper hand – it **gets shared 40 times more** than content in English. But, your brand messaging is already collating an accurate image, right? So why make the shift?

- 70% of the population that contributes to more than 50% of India's GDP actually resides in non-metros. Have you taken the trouble to slot regional India in your brand's master plan? Plans have been working, so why re-strategise?

- India has 12 prominent regional languages and only 10% of the Indian population speak English. Don't you think it will be a great move to tap 90% of your potential customers and go regional? Not at all. Let the emphasis be on English language and the 90:10 principle should keep working.

- Predication is that **household income from 26 cities from non-metros will cross INR 400 billion** in 2022. Why push the peddle now? Why widen your horizon? What has to happen will happen.

- **Top 11 cities in terms of 2015-2020 annual GDP growth are from new wave markets.** Do you need to tap the expertise of these cities to outreach this potential consumer segment? Brands are busy shaping communication strategy for Metros. Take it easy. There seems nothing to lose, at all!

- English publications tend to display an upper hand. If you look at circulation, **only one english publication registers in Top 10 leading publications.** It doesn't matter. It's english newspapers and magazines that brands tend to focus on...let that continue.

AL'!

- Vernacular language newspapers witnessed more CAGR growth than English from 2006 to 2016. It's 2022 now. Are we still not speaking the language that majority of the consumers speak and understand? Do we need to shift focus? English gives us a superior air, so let's take this route again!

- What about the consumption pattern? Household consumption expenditure will increase by 27% in Tier 1 to 4 cities by 2025. That's a long time to go – to grab your share of the market. I think we can take it super easy till then!

So, there is no hurry for the regional role to actually drive the marketing or communication vision for businesses. At the end it all, the strong signal is – **DON'T GO REGIONAL!**



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”

SUNDAR PICHAI,
Google CEO

Disrupting the world of Public Relations: Skills, Knowledge and Talent



Atul Sharma

Managing Director, Ruder Finn India
President, PRCAI

Evolution is the key to long term success for any industry, and if you take a step back, the same evolutionary process can take you back to how it all started. This is the case with present-day Public Relations as well. For over a century, PR focused solely on earned media for storytelling, with ROI being measured in terms of exposures solely. This has changed with PR expanding its ambit to the world of paid, earned, owned and shared spaces. PR firms are working to build brand and corporate image across various stakeholders. With this change, the strict compartmentalisation between marketing, social media and public relations has blurred, calling for a renewed look at the abilities and talent we bring at PR firms. I believe there are four key pillars that will enable this change in the future, disrupting the world of PR.

New services, new skills on deck

When I began my journey in Public Relations, the most prized skill-sets were content & the ability to tell a story. While we still require these invaluable skills, the ever-evolving demands of clients as they foray into niche sectors and re-innovate themselves in conventional ones have led to the emergence of new designations and demand for skill sets that would have otherwise not been conventionally seen in the sector. The emergence of content platforms has created demand pockets for verticals like research, analysis, monitoring, visual content, graphics designing and many others. The ambit of the profession itself is widening across all platforms.

Beyond communications, in the world of Web3

In addition to newer skills, PR firms are also looking at sectoral experts to take forward conversations by new brands. As we brainstorm over placing brands in Metaverse, creating NFT assets and analysing the blockchain, it calls for the presence of not just communications experts but also industry experts. These experts will come with complete understanding of client business and operations, regulatory

and policy landscape, along with industry practices and emerging trends, helping deliver targeted communications effectively.

Consulting led approach

Realistically though, it may not be possible for a PR firm to onboard experts and talent from every sector and vertical. The solution? Industry-specific consultants. As the blitz of entrepreneurship encourages specialists to chart their paths, consultants can be a silver lining for firms looking to have experts on a project basis. Their access and flexibility can unlock uncharted opportunities.

Rise of the multi-location, multi-generational workforce

Another critical aspect for PR to grow sure-footedly is by lifting restrictions and making opportunities free from geographic and age restraints. This critical unlearning, as taught by the pandemic, will allow PR firms to dip into a wider talent pool while being respectful of one's constraints, leading to the rise of multi-location, multi-generational workforce. Being in sync with this neo-work structure can drastically scale the output, quality and culture of the workplace.

Conclusion

The key to the future of Public Relations lies in going back to the basics of building relationships. It stands true now more than ever in the age of thunderous information sharing. Only when a comfortable, stable relationship has been built with the public for brands, can other metrics like media, social or influencer fall into place. Integration of diverse skills and talent diversification will enable PR to succinctly emerge as a true support partner for brands.

Public Relations in the Future



Tuhina Pandey

Communications Leader - India & South Asia

IBM

Covid pandemic dealt a final blow to the squeaky structures of public relations, which have been in flux for years. The choice today is down to self-disrupt or getting disrupted. This is also our biggest opportunity to embrace change and future-proof public relations.

Embrace Outcome-based Models: The revenue models have shifted from effort-based to outcome-based. We must break free from the 'hourly' traps and be equal partners in value creation. Businesses and the economy are adapting to new ways, and so must public relations. The newer players are challenging the incumbents like never before; when the dust settles, we will have a new landscape and new leaders.

Glocal (Global & Local) PR in the 5G world: We live in a hyper-connected yet hyper-localised world. The space and time dimensions that informed and governed the PR activities are irrelevant today; the sun never sets in the internet world. Real-time PR is simply the need of the hour and only gets further nuanced with the charged socio-political global environment. Content must constantly speak to the context otherwise, you have an instant crisis at hand.

Championing owned & user-generated content: Every corporate is a publishing house, and every communicator is a journalist. Public relations services are all about being the content guru. With the rise of digital and social media and the ability to access audiences directly, the onus is on public relations to produce content and own the entire life cycle of engagement, including measurement. The user-generated content is becoming a force in the digital world. The consumer is the brand - she is the user, content creator, ambassador, and the customer all rolled in one. Data privacy and protection frameworks are forming across the globe; with technologies like blockchain, the content creators are looking to monetise, and brands will have to brace for it.

Tech-up PR for the metaverse: Every PR outfit must be a tech outfit. Automation and botification (chatbots & conversational Artificial Intelligence) of PR activities are already surging. Applying data and analytics for audience insights and crafting campaign strategies is critical. The augmented and virtual reality is deeply embedded in the experiential economy and how we engage with it.

The metaverse readiness in stitching the hybrid messaging and experience will determine our relevance with the future audience and that future is now.

The New Gig: The onset of the gig economy has pushed our thinking, where brand loyalties are fluid, the focus is on an individual and value exchange, in the moment. Engaging with the gig worker and building brand relevance is the next frontier to conquer.

Power of Partnerships: The new world order has proven that no individual firm, nation or community can solve the challenges we are currently facing. Whether it is the pandemic, climate change, or food and water shortage. Corporates worldwide are joining forces to address the pressing issues of our time; public relations has to be a far more concerted and cooperative body as well.

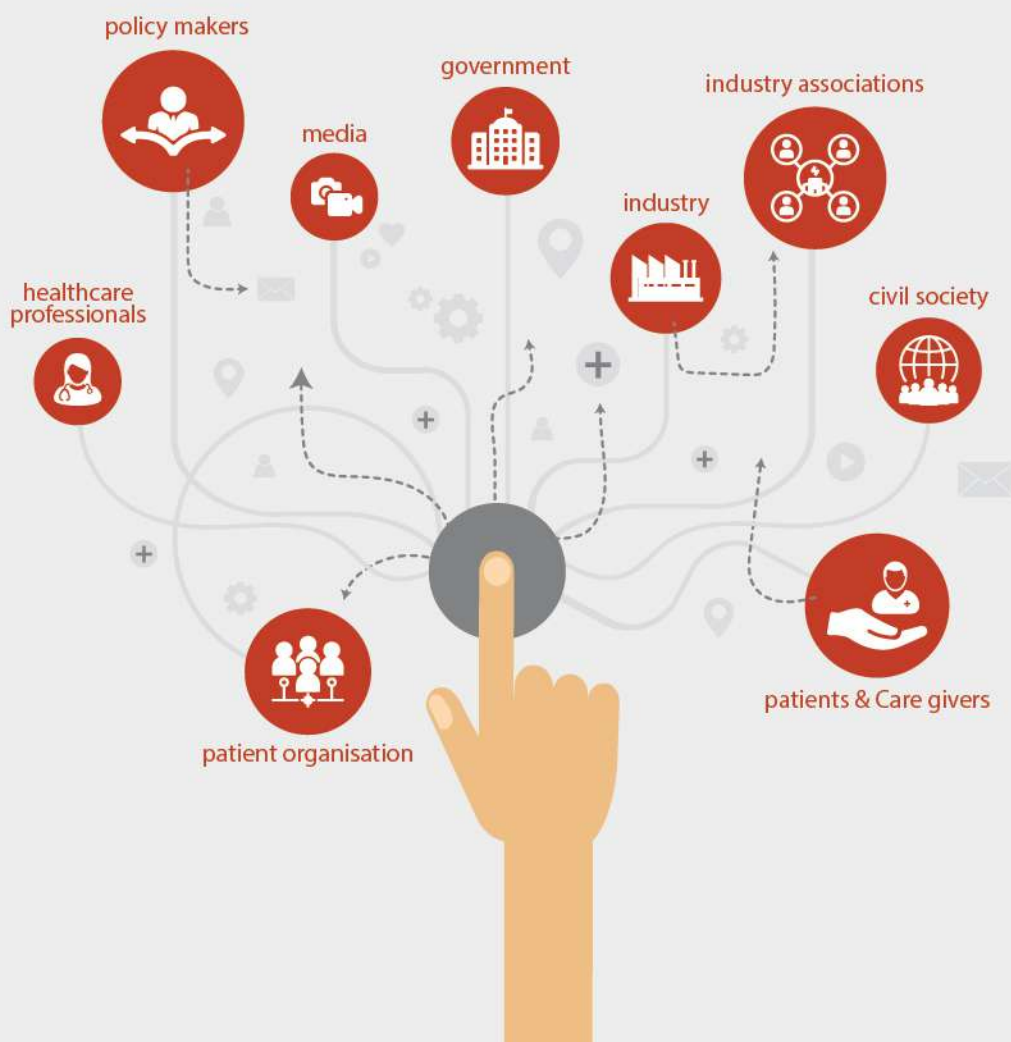
Skill: Skills of the public relations space need to reflect the demand of it. We need interdisciplinary skill sets like techies, architects, designers, film-makers, business analysts, researchers and data modelers, among other industry experts, to design for the needs of the dynamic audiences. Our task is cut out, and I will choose self-disruption for survival each time I am given a choice.

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Futureproofing PR in the Metaverse



Ritika Jauhari

President - New Business Development & Strategy
SPAG

Two years and numerous waves into the pandemic, most of us can identify ourselves as digital creatures reflecting on the interaction and reliance on technology in our routine. It can be encapsulated aptly in the words of Vladimir Lenin stating, "There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks where decades happen." It is impressive how fast we transitioned our entire world online, overnight in some cases. The change was not as easy in some sectors as it was in many others but has certainly proved that we are quite agile and adaptive to our ever-changing environment.

Leveraging the technological push and highly evolved consumption behaviour, envisioning the opportunities from internet's next big thing – Metaverse has created waves of excitement everywhere. Despite some reservations and doubts about its meaning and impact on different individuals and businesses, one can't help but imagine their place in this exciting new virtual frontier.

Metaverse is rightfully being positioned as the biggest tech disruption since the invention of smartphones. While, it is still in its infancy, there is a lot to explore as we transition into the metaverse world. While envisioning communications in this highly engaging and community focused world where one can build real connections in a virtual setting seems exhilarating, one must weigh the benefits and risks, especially for corporate communications. This reinstates the need for rethinking and tailoring our communication channels.

Communications is all about creating experience, experiences that are real, experiences that create impact. This is exactly where Metaverse plays a role. When experiences are unexpected, yet positive, they increase the consumer's affinity for the brand.

Metaverse can host millions of people together for 3D experience to work, play, socialise and create, making communications and marketing central to any business strategy. Imagining product or service launches across the world at once, or a press event without the hassle of travel or even a 3D board meeting that can compress our timelines and expand our clientele, paves way for a 360-degree approach to communication for brand placement in

the blended real and virtual world. Just like every other version of the internet, Metaverse will scale ideas and expand possibilities.

Recently, a leading pharma company partnered with Infosys XR Platform to create digital twin of their vaccine lab allowing engineers to access vaccine culture data to accelerate the decision making and shrink the margin of error. Being a healthcare communications specialist, I am truly fascinated and could not ignore imagining how metaverse can transform healthcare and healthcare communications in par. The pandemic paved the way for digitization in healthcare and metaverse can only aid it further by enhancing patient experience and improve access by making it geography agnostic.

While Metaverse is exciting, we as communicators need to be leverage it in a planned manner; giving below a few points:

- Train the employees at onboarding about the mechanisms of Metaverse and empower them to identify the differences and similarities of the decentralized and community owned platform.
- Understand the perception of their audience and build a strong network base to be able to sustain and control narratives.
- Transition and implementation plan for the existing clients and positioning them in the Meta world.
- Formulating advanced PR strategies for unexplored audiences beyond the real-world limitations.
- Understanding the risks involved in creating digital assets by tracking the time and cost mechanisms involved.
- Making monetisation and payment systems comprehensive with block chains and digital currency provisions.

I am personally looking forward to creating thoughtful and integrated opportunities with socially responsible developers and causes which can make our business models more inclusive and truly economise on the democratic nature of the platform. Communications in metaverse is the next big thing in the digital world. Even though metaverse is in its nascent stages, it is safe to say it has marked the beginning of a new era with the many comparing it to a second life. The multi-tiered digital infrastructure will enable all to create rapid business innovation through process, technology and people.

A new digital-first communication curriculum



Atipriya Sarawat

Vice President - Brand, Communication and Corporate Citizenship of
Global Services
Fiserv

The pandemic has accelerated the role and strategic positioning of corporate communication. Dialing up the importance of communications, it has pushed organisations to reassess and reimagine how they engage and reach stakeholders – including employees. In this backdrop, digitalised communication can offer ample opportunities to meaningfully and purposefully engage stakeholders in an organisation's aspirations, goals and journey.

Digitalisation of communication has made modern corporate communications agile, insights-driven, and multidisciplinary. Teams need to balance traditional PR skills (storytelling, writing, media engagement) with expertise in newer areas such as social purpose, risk management, cultural communication, and content marketing supplemented by a CommsTech stack comprising data science, measurable outcomes, and actionable insights.

External Communications – Changing the Game

Though traditional methods of communication exist, modern technology has revolutionised external communications. As a result, digitalisation is emerging as crucial to reach existing and potential customers. Organisations create websites, social-media pages, and communities to let their audiences know of their upcoming products/services or drive thought leadership. Blogs and newsletters are a cost-effective means of tapping into target demographics. Additionally, social recruitment outreach, leveraging new-age chat platforms and engaging on employee review platforms are a great way to articulate an organisation's value proposition and culture for prospective hires. That said, interactive technology may also attract backlash – negative comments and trolling. But in the long run, the advantages outweigh the risks involved.

Digitalisation of communication has the potential to enhance a businesses' online presence and visibility, convert static information into meaningful conversations, enabling companies to directly communicate with their audience anytime, anywhere.

Internal Communications – Shared Storytelling

Employees are at the centre of everything that happens in an organisation. Their awareness of the big picture and how they contribute to it can have a significant impact on culture. This

is where effective internal communication strategy comes into play.

The changing consumption patterns of employees is reshaping internal communication narratives. They rely on online chat, social media, vlogs & podcasts for quick awareness and understanding.

It is important that internal communication strategies, tactics and tools are stepped up in view of digitalisation to keep employees apprised, involved and aware of things that matter to the organisation. This enables consistent dialogue with teams and can yield positive sentiment and impact amongst employees fostering a sense of belonging, growth and stickiness.

In today's context, employee insights can be valuable for both leadership and customers. Erstwhile, internal communications programmes were focused more on top-down passing of information from leadership to employees. Collaboration tools will play a significant role in determining new ways of connecting, communicating, being agile and engaged as we begin to witness Phygital workplaces. There will be renewed focus on elevating employee experience as expectations from organisations dramatically change.

The Bottom Line

As companies grow, transform, and reorganise, it's essential to re-evaluate & re-assess both internal and external PR strategies. Digitalisation of communications has become an inevitable part of the overall strategy.

An impactful digital communications campaign can help businesses improve their brand awareness, drive engagement, and build an effective online presence with their customers. An effective internal communications strategy can boost employee retention, enhance brand identity, articulate employee value proposition, and make way for a more connected culture that fuels business transformation.

As consistency and prioritisation go together, both internal and external communication strategies open doorways for collective innovation, community building and ownership. Companies must use layered strategies which can drive business goals.

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Going Beyond Traditional: A multistakeholder approach is the only way to futureproof public relations



Deepshikha Dharmaraj

Chief Executive Officer
BCW India Group

While there are many definitions of public relations, the one which really holds true today is 'public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics'. Here 'publics' refers to the range of stakeholders who we need to communicate with—from the consumer to employees, partners to community, government to key opinion leaders and influencers. What often happens though, is that while the campaigns and services address different stakeholders, the overall public relations strategy of an organisation or brand does not have a multi-stakeholder approach, where the impact on each audience is inter-linked. Each 'service line' focuses on a particular stakeholder. The interconnectedness of it all is often missed. For instance, an employee is also part of the community, is also a consumer, can also be a brand advocate and is part of the industry. How do you make sure that your employee communications programme addresses all these aspects of each individual employee? Each of the stakeholders for a business plays multiple roles. So a siloed approach can't work beyond a point. What is needed is a multi-stakeholder approach. To do that, we need to develop an integrated programme based on the business objective, build an insight-based narrative which reflects the inter-linking and then plan which stakeholder to engage using the most appropriate platform.

Starting with data and insights

Our narrative has to come from an insight, which in turn comes from research and data. This insight, which comes from a smart combination of data analytics and human intelligence, tells us what and who will enable the business objective or what are the roadblocks that stand in its way. It tells us what human needs are to be met in order to achieve the business objective. And this is true whether it is a B2C or B2B company.

Strategy led by purpose

Purpose is the true north star for a business—the very reason it exists. And importantly, it helps run a unified thread through all the stakeholders. When you combine the insight you've derived with the purpose of the organisation, you get a razor-sharp strategy for your integrated communications programme. This strategy then drives the narrative, the messaging that will move people towards the desired action. Success will depend on how sharp the insight is, how well-defined the purpose is, and yes,

how well the strategy is implemented across channels preferred by the different stakeholders.

Implementing it right

Getting the strategy right is an important beginning, but the follow-through is just as critical. And this is where things have moved far beyond traditional, especially in the last two years, with the help of technology. Using AI to identify the right influencers, or to get predictive analytics on which way conversations are flowing are some of the ways we can deliver better output and outcomes. Digital and social media, creative audio-visual content and now technologies like AR and VR have made it easier to meet the stakeholders where they are, and not just tell them what you want them to know but also make them experience the narrative. Taking this even further is the metaverse, making it immersive. What these technologies also do is give a much more personalised experience. While consumer brands is where you hear the most noise around this, there are also B2B narratives coming alive with these technologies. Trade shows, thought leadership conferences are some examples.

Ready to tackle multi-pronged crisis

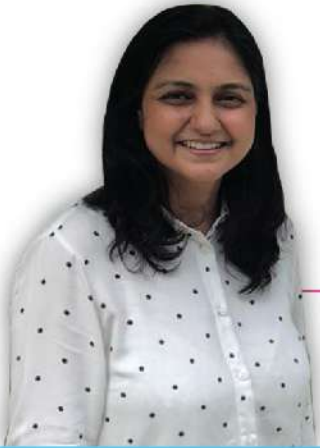
A multistakeholder approach in peace time means that you are also prepared with the same approach in times of crisis. Today, a crisis can come at you from any direction and affect not just the direct stakeholder impacted but also the other stakeholders who may be on the periphery. A coordinated and integrated effort is critical for that.

Measurement at every step

We started with the business objective. To make sure that we stay true to that, there must be a way to measure the public relations campaign—and not just at the end, but through the entire process. Calibrating the stakeholder response and then re-calibrating in case the response is not what is expected can only happen if measurement is done at every step and not done as an afterthought at the end of the campaign.

As a constantly and rapidly evolving marketing discipline, public relations needs to have creativity, purpose and technology innovation as strong pillars and a multistakeholder approach as the overarch. That is the only way we can lay claim to award-winning creative campaigns and sustain growth.

Is digital the future of Public Relations?



Kavita Doshi

Director – Corporate Communications
NASSCOM

Communication today is inherently evolving as brands give prominence to rapid digitisation, sustainability, inclusion and purpose. Today, organisations want to do more than just communicate about their initiatives; They have a driving purpose, are empathetic and want to relate to public interest and their key stakeholders. Further the thrust on digital first is reshaping how we consume and share content and the potential of public relations is being shaped by it. With an optimal mix of innovation and technology, PR across all industries will adapt and evolve to get their clients in the spotlight and ensure brand relevance and longevity. Here are some trends that will shape the future of PR:

Building Online Reputation

It has become imperative for public relations companies to ensure a stellar online reputation and this is why companies are allocating more and more of their resources to online marketing. There will positively be more focus on digital content. PR specialists will focus on various online platforms to build relationships with the media. Also, there will be a change in the form of writing content, to a real-time relationship, because of new tech.

Going visual with a focus on storytelling

Streaming has also become one of the main sources of crisis control in PR. Experts say that there will be more advancements in this area in the future, such as AR (Augmented Reality), and VR (Virtual Reality). Content has already become short and condensed. Now it's all about images, videos, and GIFs. Also, its storytelling aspect is very important, since the story will need to be shorter and more interesting.

Inclining towards emerging tech

Emerging tech like AI, big data, and IoT has made it necessary for consultancies to prepare a 360-degree value proposition for their clients, where the brand owns the narrative through, owned, earned as well as paid media.

Rising micro-influencers PR

Influencers are key to boosting a company's reputation. By working with influencers, public relations companies gain access to a new level of customer engagement and brand reputation. PR professionals will use the available resources to incorporate technology to pacify their work along with increased efficiency and reduced time.

Dependence on analytics

The future of PR will involve more dependency on analytics. Organisations that will use reliable analytics tools and media monitoring will have better reach and be more authentic. In the future, what will matter the most is diversity and inclusion. Remote work opportunities will be the future of work in PR. While social consciousness will grow for buyers, quantifying business impact from PR will become easier. Face-to-face interviews will make a comeback. Twitter will continue to be one of the speediest ways for subject matter experts (SMEs) to reach the media. Podcasts will be easier for discussions on major topics with the use of new tools and digital media skills.

The future will require public relationships to be more meaningful. It will be truly inspiring to witness what lies ahead, full of new learning, challenges, and opportunities with creativity at the heart of what is being done. Having said that content continues to be the king! Though the models might have changed with influencer led PR, podcast, video formats, social media and blogs, effective and impact led storytelling will be the differentiators for brands on how we are shaping the societies of tomorrow.



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Archana Jain

Founder and Managing Director
PR Pundit

Having the pulse of the now and the new is critical in our profession as in every other business. If our practice does not keep pace with rapidly evolving consumer expectations, disruptions in the media landscape and opportunities offered by technology to sharpen our communication programme, we run the risk of becoming obsolete in the blink of an eye.

Integrated Communications

The concept of integrated communications which has been taking shape over years, is here for real, providing a level-playing field for PR Consultants to score across PR, digital, media, influencer, social and creative. This requires us to pivot in our thinking beyond mere PR to advise brands on positioning, marketing, engagements, etc. We must therefore redefine our value proposition and cascade that system wide to change the traditional mindset of practitioners. It is critical to communicate, reinforce, and model the behaviour expected from practitioners to expect the same from organisations.

Authentic storytelling

This remains at the heart of what the PR profession has thrived on and this, will continue to champion our future too, but are we being culturally creative, and insight driven to connect with new cohorts? Are we curating credible stories to impact change and communities? While creativity may be the currency of an integrated model, effective mining of data and deployment of technology to connect brands to customers has increasingly become more essential.

Digital PR

Similarly digital PR, which has become the chief discipline in our practice of communications, only makes sense when we use it to build relationships with audiences and communities who will in turn contribute to a conversation that unfolds across our content ecosystem. People find authentic content

or recommendations by actual consumers to be more trustworthy than other in-your-face promotions and advertising by brands. This is reason enough for brands to actively nurture a community of advocates. We must not leave community advocacy to chance, but step in to help craft and manage a meaningful brand advocacy strategy. This set of loyal and vocal customers help humanise brands, boost brand appeal & trust, promote its products & services, provide invaluable user-generated content (UGC), word-of-mouth recommendations, and social media chatter.

Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG)

We also have to be mindful of what could enhance the perceived value of businesses and companies. While the reputation of an organisation is not limited to its environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) score; prospective clients, customers and investors may certainly be influenced by how a company engages with its employees or demonstrates dedication to sustainability, its carbon-neutral initiatives and broader social issues. PR practitioners need to therefore understand ESG well enough to table relevant solutions to organisations as investments.

Talent

I believe another area that needs attention to future proof our profession is having an enthused pipeline of talent! On the one hand, our profession needs to attract passionate and committed talent and on the other, we must keep our vast body of practitioners abreast of the new trends. With a generation flocking to join woke organisations, we need to consciously build culturally sensitive and diverse workplaces, devoid of hierarchy, prejudices and bureaucracy.

Unless we are adept at welcoming all that comes our way to mould our communication, we could find ourselves in a minority.

Futureproofing PR: An Inside Out Perspective



Saheli Chatterjee

Senior Manager - Brand PR & Digital, Personal Care Business
ITC Limited

PR is witnessing a paradigm shift. The role of PR has intensified especially in today's era of inquisitive consumers who are not only evolving rapidly with the plethora of purchase options but also looking for meaningful gratification. Concurrently, the avenues for creative storytelling through dialogue platforms to share, shape and review opinions on everything possible have grown manifold. This altered landscape has paved the way for PR to play a critical role in contributing to the cultivation of relationships between brands and consumers. Media consumption is witnessing a significant shift with a digital-first approach trumping the traditional means. Consumers are increasingly exploring and experimenting with media, a plethora of online platforms and content. The growing consumer cynicism is also leading to brand reputation being more fragile. While brands tackle competitiveness on one hand and innovate to create a differentiated offering, Public Relations and Communications professionals are required to accelerate their creative thinking towards culturally-nuanced & relevant initiatives & agile planning to navigate unfamiliar challenges. Digital-first media approach has also led to a more defining set of cohorts based on interests and preferences. Social media has been critical in shaping the modern PR perspective. Today, Brands are showered with love and trust or dismissed, measured and documented in real-time. With the blurring boundaries between Public Relations, advertising and marketing communications with messaging, imagery and reputation at its core, a PR professional is expected to play a more proactive and strategic role as:

- a) The creator of a narrative or conversation**
- b) The purveyor of the medium to facilitate the conversation**

In the rising world of Metaverse, AI and deep fakes, will PR see a reset and evolve again?

Be it iconic brands leading the category or challenger brands, the core PR tools will be similar but what will distinguish is the simple power of what I define as ABC; A - (Adaptability, Agility & Analytical mindset); B - (Breakthrough and innovative thought process and approach; Building a relatable brand image); C - (Cultural awareness, adept at Changing the narrative, and Communicating purpose).

Few critical elements will enhance the role of Public Relations for brands and organisations:

1. Exploring the new

a. Big Data: An analytical mining of data enables an informative new gen PR manager to rationalise the storytelling and to navigate the trends, opportunities and issues in real time. Specially to understand the actionable insights which will help leverage the growing creator economy.

b. Artificial Intelligence (AI): The transformative impact of AI will have far-reaching implications across various facets of life, including professions in the society.

c. PR in the Metaverse: With NFTs and digital footprint increasing with the exploration of various forms of engagement be it music, fashion, gaming, content, and more, PR will need to reassess and step up to explore this new medium which enables a prolific experiential conversation.

2. Recalibrate the old mix

a. Storytelling: Creativity continues to be at the core with storytelling playing an important role.

b. Platform: Sources of information have now increased multifold. Hence, the choice of platform and tool for PR outreach can no more be passive and linear. It is imperative for PR professionals to explore, experiment and innovatively create outreach.

c. Tool: Tangible and intangible both play an important role in gaining mindshare and attention.

d. Influencer Marketing: The influencer space is exploding with an influx of young men and women beginning to adopt influencing as a profession. The mix and the efficiency need to be reviewed.

The only way to futureproof is to continuously upskill and embrace change, enhance creative and analytical thinking, make informed choices, provide an immersive integrated solution to cater to the multiple organisational and brand needs. All the above, to either solve a consumer problem or to nudge the brand to get closer to the consumer in a more authentic way.

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How PR must evolve if it intends to remain relevant



Valerie Pinto

CEO
Weber Shandwick India

The world has undergone a paradigm shift over the past two years, be it in terms of work or culture, the kind of content consumed, or the mediums used for content consumption. Hence, it is undoubtedly time for the PR space to embrace this shift

The PR space is now dealing with an audience that has access to a vast expanse of information and are using it wisely to pick and choose the narratives they believe in. With the advent of a digitally-enabled world, PR is no longer limited to conducting media specific activities. It is about finding the convergence of tech, media, society, and policy, and using this convergence to derive stories that shape brands from such.

Data lies at the heart of communicating the right message to the right audience.

It's crucial for communicators to have the ability to understand and absorb data and translate them into strategic actions. But that's not all. The need for communicating data correctly is also essential to bridge the gap between those who work with data and the hardcore communicators of the world. One is expected to distill and dissect huge amounts of data and translate it into contextual information that is crisp and concise. It's important to bring in data early in the planning process and also learn to get rid of confirmation bias.

Finally, it is about using the available tools and making them serve the purpose. With the help of tools, one must look at what is causing a very positive sentiment and what is causing a very negative sentiment - understand the extremes and then understand what will bring out these sentiments from the audiences, and curate your narrative accordingly.

Being in-culture.

Creativity is the currency of any effective communication, and one needs to move from just being media-facing. It is time to be in-culture. This demands positioning oneself at the intersection of society, technology, media, and policy, to become storytellers who thoroughly understand local nuances and insights and use this to connect brands with

their customers effectively.

As a communications professional, one needs to realise that brands can no longer simply be bystanders in cultural conversations, but instead be those who drive and shape these conversations. So instead of simply observing culture, brands should be built to impact it.

Omnichannel communications and multimedia content are the way to your audience's heart.

Modern customers prefer to interact and communicate through multiple channels and the advent of the pandemic has only heightened that need. People are now clamoring for convenience and don't want to have to change devices to access content. A successful communications plan is all about meeting your customers where they are in the customer journey, on the platform they are present on, and understanding the optimal ways to seize their attention.

With the idea to build campaigns that are immersive, AR is also taking center stage in communications strategy. The experiential element that AR adds to a communication, imprints the minds of the consumer, and leaves them with a long-lasting impression of a brand.

Brand advocacy translates to brand loyalty

PR is evolving in tandem with the shifting social climate. There is an intense focus on brand values and meaningful actions. Amid pronounced social shifts, brands are responding with campaigns that emphasize civic responsibility and wield their influence to form a tolerant society. A brand that makes a difference, is a brand that garners consumer loyalty and brand affinity.

Personalisation, customisation, and contextualisation of brand message

The need of the hour is to implement contextualisation because it's no more about what one says, but how one packages that message. One's messaging and pitch are likely to get higher visibility and conversions if the press kit is built to suit the narrative of one's target audience. This tactic can be used to learn more about your audience and drive better content discovery.

Purpose, People & Perception



Asawari Sathaye

Director - Communications and Patient Advocacy
OPPI

Communication as a term and technique has evolved over the years. The traditional-first approach to communicating a key message or conveying the brand identity to the public is undergoing an overhaul within the communications business. From social media channels to podcasts, the space of communications and public relations is constantly evolving. Digital-first is dominating and real-time news and data at fingertips are connecting the dots better.

Today, communication is an integral business function that can lift and build a brand further. At its base, communication in business helps us convey clear, (at times as required) strong messages about our ideas, strategy, and product. We all understand that building a brand requires us to understand the audience first; a consistent and customised message that enthuses credibility and is supported by facts and data, is always worth its salt with the target audience. Yet, many times, brands have strayed away from this, chasing trends instead of utilising the tools to fulfill their objective. As communicators, our focus now needs to be pointed toward the changing trends and predicting the way this space will look in the next decade or so.

Staying consistent with the vision

Consistency in communication reaps two major benefits, firstly, it ensures your objective is apprehended correctly by the intended audience, and second, there is continued high retention of messaging. This ensures that the consumer can resonate with the brand better. The biggest challenge here is to stay consistent not only on your messaging but also across platforms, tools, and seasons while also tapping into the industry-relevant trends and economic changes.

To tackle this challenge, brands must move beyond reacting to just any (fake) news to curating content that is in line with their business objectives. Laying down certain rules, key messages to be incorporated across all communication and a strategic plan that helps brands achieve business goals - will ensure that brands create content with intention and thought. In case of a crisis, this groundwork also ensures the message is captured in the most effective way possible backed up by the required data and fact-checks.

Integration of Technology In Communications

With the rapid implementation of digital platforms, it is now imperative for strategic communications experts to embrace digital-first thinking and create an effective integrated communication plan. While businesses across, have launched new verticals via various digital channels, it is important to ensure that communications evolve continuously with technological innovations. To futureproof our approach in this space, it is prudent that we take small steps in understanding the nuances of the wave of digitisation embedded in each sector and move forward utilising the best technological practices specific to our industry.

Communicators must deal with three technological advancements that are already reshaping their industry: AI, Networking, and User Empowerment. AI technologies have affected us all, and the pandemic's impact on digital transformation is predicted to continue. AI technologies can allow communicators to devote more time to creative endeavors such as developing captivating messaging or strategising media outreach. Advances in trend analysis, prescriptive modeling, algorithms, and language processing are already a strong influence on how a narrative unfolds. AI, machine learning, and digital disruptors can help communications efforts by giving tools that unfold well with our target audience. It can boost digital presence through SEO optimisation, consumer segmentation, and audience response calculation.

Having said that, going forward networking will be one of the most critical components of the technology-integrated communications approach. Face-to-face encounters were the most popular networking approach a decade ago. However, social networking has grown faster than ever since the emergence of social media. Aside from in-person events, the usage of social media platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn is on a steep growth curve, both within and beyond one's industry. We as communicators need to harness our untapped potential and take up a digital-by-design approach in organisations moving forward. Finding a way to talk about topics that are of our personal and professional interests on social platforms will ensure we are able to network and communicate better.

Segueing Data-Driven Communications

To make judgments in an environment where data is like oxygen in this digital age, communications professionals must be armed with the appropriate currency. Too often, we make engagement and communication decisions based solely on gut and personal experience. However, by leveraging the benefits of data-driven communication, companies can foray into creating more sustainable and impactful decisions that are more likely to resonate with our consumers and garner the desired media coverage for our brands. This approach takes the guesswork out of the equation, ensuring that the most apt message is reaching the intended audience.

Summary:

As organisations across the country position themselves to thrive in this transformative, complex, and challenging world, the role of communications is increasingly more important. We have every cause to be enthusiastic about the evolution in the communication space, as it has opened endless possibilities for creative campaigns, raising awareness of low-interest concerns, and driving conversations on topics that are generally overlooked in the debate. Moving into the future, we can hope that the communications business is more impactful and actively pursues the 3Ps - 'purpose' and 'people' to improve 'perception' throughout.



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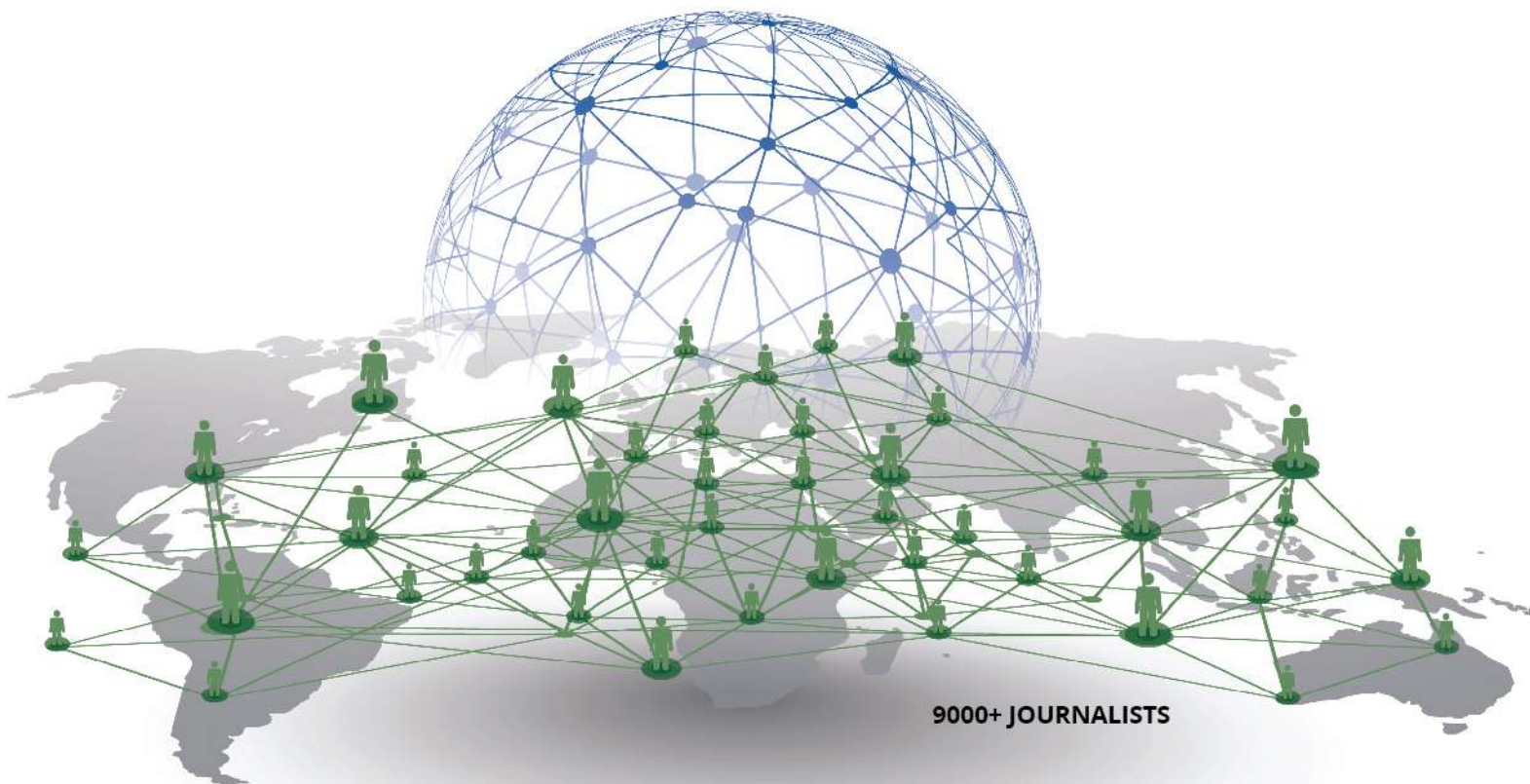
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Public Relations 2.0: Top trends that'll shape the future of PR



Pooja Pathak

Co-founder & Managing Director
Media Mantra

Public relations (PR) as a business has transformed into a well-oiled machinery that touches almost every aspect of an enterprise business, reinventing communication like never before. Despite the changing landscape of PR, its importance has never been more relevant. Whether it's marketing, advertising, event management or corporate communications, a modern-day PR firm covers all facets of communications.

With the downsizing of newsrooms and expansion of the digital world, public relations and its archaic methods of operating have also evolved. Thus, the Public Relations, in future, is expected to foray into the new age of communication dominated by disruptions and innovations.

Influencer Marketing: With a growing usage of social media, influencer marketing has become an integral part of a brand's marketing strategies. But, with the rise in influencers and content on multiple platforms, the need for authenticity has become imperative. Today, social media users aren't just looking for authentic content but are also concerned about the causes influencers support. Thus, brands are careful while finalising the influencers to represent their products. And, with the expected rise of influencer marketing in future, the onus will be on PR firms to vet influencers meticulously before choosing them to represent their brands.

Multi-Media Content: The recent pandemic brought a major change in PR. With a focus on technology, the business has diversified in accordance to the changing market situations. Apart from social media, new platforms have also been crucial in shaping public opinion. The use of short videos and other digital content remain at the forefront of PR strategies aimed at communicating with the masses and delivering a brand's message. In the future, where the attention span of people continues to shrink, PR will witness a greater need to leverage multi-media content, especially podcasts, to facilitate communication more effectively and efficiently with customers.

Technology will be a Driving Force: There has been a massive

change in how PR professionals are using technology to establish communication with consumers. The modern-day PR firms are using the latest technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), big data and Internet of Things (IoT) to get the job done with more efficiency, reduced time and minimal error. As witnessed during the pandemic, the use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) by PR companies to host events has proved to be a gamechanger. With our technological dependence, PR will further adapt and mould itself to incorporate the new and upcoming tech-related advancements to facilitate effective communication.

Growth of ESG: In a world concerned about sustainability, the ESG (environmental, social and governance) movement is gaining steam as it defines how sustainable and ethical a company is. Failure of a firm to meet the expectations of its public in any of the three dimensions of the ESG can result in reputational and investor risk. Going forward, these ESG concerns and how they will be met present big opportunities to the PR profession to make a larger contribution to organisational decision-making and performance. As companies strive to meet ESG parameters, the role of PR firms to increase awareness about their efforts will naturally increase. Also, since ESG contributes to a company's public perception, reputation management, as one of the key PR offerings, will emerge as another crucial opportunity. By helping businesses in achieving and effectively communicating their ESG goals, the PR business is bound to increase its strategic value in the future.

While the aforementioned predictions are expected to influence the PR business, the need to efficiently channel the human touch in approach will always be essential for its overall growth. The onus will be on the industry leaders to share wisdom and nurture talent at the source to add value. Public relations is credited for shaping our world and changing our perceptions. And, as our world undergoes future changes, so will the dynamic PR business, in a bid to facilitate effective communication.

Futureproofing Public Relations through transparency employee empowerment



Ranabir Majumdar

Head - Internal Communications (APAC)
Uber

There's a sequence in the 2018 film *Bohemian Rhapsody*, where Freddie Mercury arrives late to a jamming session, and is perplexed to see his bandmates clap and stomp their feet together. Brian May puts him out of his misery with the line, **"I want to give the audience a song that they can perform."** Organisations are like concerts. How you choose to play can mean the difference between a performance and an immersive experience.

Technology has already upended the communication experience — where neither knowledge nor access is a privilege. The proliferation of social media, and the democratisation of technology allows both long and short form content to be at our fingertips. With their "first with the news" northstar, competition among reporters is high, and reaching employees is easier than ever before. More importantly, employees have a voice and there is a premium on what they say and how they say it.

This is why building an immersive experience where employees can sing from the same song book can have an outsized impact in terms of share of voice and the quality of conversation. Professional communicators are the songwriters and conductors of that concert. They are at the very heart of building that immersive experience.

"Futureproofing" public relations, is rooted in two core principles — transparency and employee empowerment.

Transparency is driven from the top. It is part of an organisation's DNA, demonstrated in its culture and values and pervasive across functions; cascaded in a way that ensures information isn't a tool for the privileged few. It helps attract and retain talent, drives morale, and provides a safe space so employees can be authentic at work. We all know what these organisations look like and how they are perceived both internally and externally - High on mission and values, and driven by a purpose to do good for their communities and society at large.

The value of such transparency for public relations is immeasurable. A 'loved' brand is mostly treated with

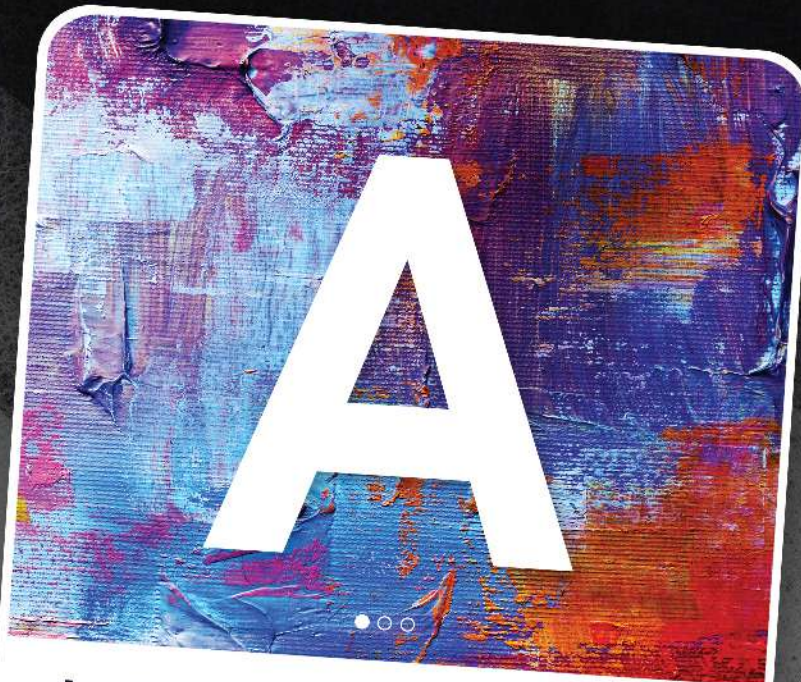
respect, mitigating risks, and allowing for communicators to concentrate on the job of amplifying the 'good'. These organisations naturally empower their employees. There's enough goodwill of the organisation that rubs off on them. Employees strongly believe that the organisation they work for is good for the world at large, and generally they aren't at the receiving end of a communication conundrum.

This changes a bit in new-age companies or even in legacy organisations that are beginning to operate in newer ways. That's where employee empowerment comes in. This could begin as early as the talent identification stage — when teams are reviewing resumes or reaching out to potential candidates. How an organisation communicates, how much information it shares, and how transparent the hiring process is are the markers of success. If the process can turn a reluctant candidate to someone who is keen to join the organisation, the investment in communication is a success, irrespective of the outcome of the process.

Companies also invest in their employees. Often enough they are designed from a perspective of enhancing or learning a new skill. But skills are not enough. And it is here that professional communicators can help shift the mindset and the method. Workshops that allow you the time to look within, discover each other's strengths and weaknesses, and help build a culture of bonding is the foundational work that communicators should lead. It is not an easy task. These are long-term commitments, where professional communicators will be expected to hold the conscience of an organisation.


It is often said that a person will not remember the words you use, but they will never forget the way you make them feel. In an organisation, irrespective of your function or your role, being treated right will always hold a premium. When organisations get this right, employees will have a song that they can perform. Together. As one.


Ranabir Majumdar is winner of the Anant Rangaswami Memorial Essay Competition announced by Reputation Today in July 2022. The best essay won an all-expense paid pass to #PRAXIS9.



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Communications strategies need to be future-focussed



Abhishek Gulyani

CEO

Hill+Knowlton Strategies India

Given that the foundation of public relations – enhancing and protecting reputations and shaping opinions and perceptions – never really changes, the business itself faces surprisingly frequent waves of transformation, and firms which fail to adapt and evolve have a very short shelf-life.

Futureproofing our profession, therefore, requires predicting and responding to changes across a number of fields, the key ones I see being channels, audiences, clients, and technology.

Prepare for the Metaverse

The next big change to channel strategy our business will see is the emergence of the Metaverse – a starting point for a new era where all the strands of our increasingly online lives converge. We're still at the stage of guessing exactly what this virtual space will look like – parallels to Web 1.0 are fairly accurate now – but Metaverse ideas and campaigns are beginning to appear in digital pitches, and firms are increasingly realising that some form of Metaverse roadmap is needed if they are to stay ahead of the curve.

Ensure authenticity

Back to a more recognisable reality, audiences, and specifically how we interact with them, have grown more sophisticated over the years, in correlation with channels. If the print and broadcast era was defined by one-way messaging, the emergence of social media in particular has encouraged debate and dialogue. Companies, governments and individuals which were once aloof and distant are now approachable and relatable – this is a trend that will continue, but I believe it's important to add authentic to the mix. Generation Z knows all the old tricks, and today's companies need to prove they can do much, much more than talk the talk.

Focus on future needs

Client needs are changing too – and in this lies our greatest

opportunity. Public relations, for too long stuck with the label of spin merchants and, ironically, earning its own shady reputation as a 'dark art', is today back in its rightful place as an essential component of C-suite counsel. In a world where management consultancy briefs overlap with strategic comms shops, digital firms, boutique firms and multinational giants, a truly futureproofed PR consultancy is one that seamlessly combines CEO advisory with future-focused communications strategy and, crucially, the ability to implement campaigns on a tactical level.

Get comfortable with technology

Looking to technology, this is where we face a transformation at least on the scale of the Metaverse: the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). As a business, we all need to understand better the potential impact of AI and develop a deeper understanding of AI tools and technology.

AI can facilitate insight-driven decision-making. It can be used to identify channels and audiences; target the right media outlets; conduct sentiment analysis and feedback to alter strategy and tactics in real time. Moreover, AI can create custom story angles and, as news aggregators are increasingly showing us, even draft stories with minimal oversight.

At Hill+Knowlton Strategies, we already use proprietary and industry tools as part of our stack and we continue to add on to our database of AI and digital tools to gather data and insights, identify trends, make faster and more targeted decisions, predict potential outcomes and plan ahead. Today, we're on the crest of the next big wave of change, and look to this brave new world with excitement and confidence. See you in the Metaverse.

This is not the end game



Roma Nair

*Director - Global Media Relations, APAC & China Corporate Affairs,
Pfizer*

Never has there been an opportune time than now when Albert Einstein's words resonate in all that we do - "I never think of the future, it comes soon enough." True enough, I'd say for those of us in this profession - we can collectively agree that there are events of a yesterday that may feel like they happened an eon ago and tomorrow comes even before today has ended. There is no denying that we are operating in a fast-paced environment where the turnaround times are sometimes within the blink of an eye. So, while we are so busy doing what we do best... are we missing out on what more we should do?,

This is not the end game

Over the past two and half years, the world has endured three inter-connected crises - the global pandemic, economic downturn and now the Ukraine-Russian conflict. Businesses must sustain the momentum but also prepare for the next growth opportunity when such geo-political, environmental, and societal factors are at play. That makes it equally demanding on communications professionals to safeguard the company's reputation today as well as strategise for a bullet-proof tomorrow that may come with its own set of challenges.

This pandemic has taught us lifelong lessons. PR and Comms teams across all industries have had to adapt, evolve and pivot to manage their stakeholder expectations. The traditional role of PR has transformed, its reach is extending, and we are taking on more responsibilities than ever. The emphasis is on value creation, being relevant to meet the demands of the new-age workplace ethos and most importantly, being resilient to crisis. The trick is to plan and prepare.

A seat at the table

At such times of shifting priorities and global uncertainty, organisations are also facing issues by populist campaigns that go beyond the business cause at hand. Besides, in this era of highly digitised social behaviors, stakeholders have also become activists in their own right. Gone are the days when working in silos helped us tide through any crisis-like situation, that scenario planning and adhering to response timelines was all that was needed to save the day.

The time is ripe and right to expand our horizons to the larger

organisation construct, to be able to connect all parts of the puzzle to see the big picture and tell the story. Let's have that seat at the table to develop an integrated approach to the overall comms strategy to balance the narrative - that is the need of the hour to communicate effectively and convincingly with internal and external stakeholders.

Tell a story the smart way

We must also harness newer capabilities as we take steps into the future. Beyond the once-upon-a-time, traditional skillsets of comms professionals (primarily writing, inter-personal skills, media relations, etc.) PR folks are now expected to be storytellers - conversational and interesting in the way they engage with their target audiences across a variety of platforms. Being digitally savvy and into the mass consciousness of the virtual space is as important as understanding the pros and cons of social media perils. Do not hesitate to try out different approaches that are required to build the community, to establish trust for the brand. A campaign today can include a variety of earned, owned, paid and shared media so it is important to have an understanding of content design and management, visualisation skills, video production, etc. to tell the story.

Stay true, find your voice

Another paradigm shift that we have witnessed is the growth of fake news and misinformation on social media platforms. Fear has overtaken facts, leading to misinformed public that can be damaging to both the society and the environment we operate in. We are experiencing an 'infodemic' that may impact organisational reputation, so let's have a credible voice relying on authentic sources of data and information.

Needless to say, public relations is rooted in the company's cultural and work ethos. It is here to stay...in fact, it is more important now than ever. Trust being the buzz word; fueled by data that will drive content and engagement. Simply put, let's make sure we are future proofing it through a simple amalgamation of our core skills, leveraging the power of digital technology and everyday common sense. Perhaps we have already done so, Mr. Einstein - the future of PR is already here.

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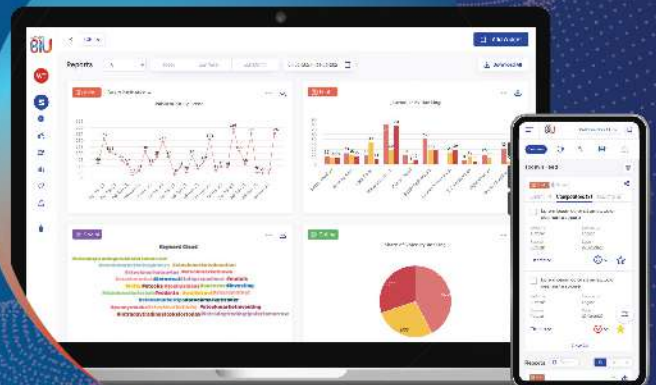
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Apra Mishra

Budding PR Enthusiast

As a fresh out-of-college graduate, propelled into the world of PR, with little to no experience in the field, I wager my thoughts on the subject “futureproofing public relations” wouldn’t be ground-breaking to say the least. In fact, most would crack a laugh while taking in my ‘pearls of wisdom’. Nevertheless, my strong and incessant desire to take up tasks, irrespective of what others might think, has brought me here to deliver. So, buckle your seatbelts for you are in for an exciting ride.

To begin with, the contemporary world that we live in has a lot to offer: people here are digitally driven, fast paced and highly automated. The same goes for businesses, with their artificial tech and high-end services, they are presenting a myriad of choices and options to the consumers. Yet, it isn’t simply about providing products or services to people anymore. Rather it’s about formulating successful customer understandings. So, I’d reckon that it would be correct to say that today’s shoppers want more from an establishment than the simple opportunity to buy something off the shelf, or off their website. They want experiences, they want their problems to be heard and their issues to be resolved. They want conviction and confidence.

That’s exactly what I think the future of public relations should be about. Confidence, conviction, authenticity, trust and truth are all adjectives which I associate with the same. C.S Lewis worded it better than anyone: *“When I was young, I hid my love for fairy tales for fear of ridicule, but now that I’m fifty I read them openly.”* In this regard, I (metaphorically, of course) picture PR as a fifty-year-old- an honest, faithful and trust-worthy individual who’s comfortable in every inch of their being and is one-hundred percent dependable and authentic, without any worries, happily watching their cartoons and reading their fairy tales.

Now that we’ve covered the adjectives, I’d like to mention some principles following which the future of public relations would be so sound and secure, it would be as if you’re covering it in bubble-wrap. The principle of ethics or morality is something which to me seems of utmost

significance. I personally believe in the saying: ‘if it’s not ethical, it’s not PR’. If you haven’t heard of it then hear it now and if you weren’t aware that the saying existed, then read it here and inscribe it in your minds. Ethics to PR is the same as water to the sea. None would exist without the other and neither would make sense in the absence of one.

Next, diversifying public relations is what I think would help the field to achieve greater heights in the future. For innovation and diversity go hand-in-hand and it is something which encourages creativity, enhances it and brings out novel insights and ideas due to the existence of different perspectives. People who differ from one another in gender, race, religion or sexuality bring out information which is unique and distinctive. It’s time to realise that a male and a female public relations professional might have perspectives as different from one another as an engineer and a journalist might have- and that is a good thing. We should be able to celebrate this diversity of opinion, not just on government-mandated holidays but rather every day.

In the end, with the newer generations coming-in, the fear of getting old is vanishing as we realise that society is slowly collapsing and moving in a downward-spiral, and we are no longer obligated, nor duty-bound to settle into serious adults in tight business suits with steady nine-to-five jobs and 2.8 kids. There’s nothing to stop us from just gradually becoming more and more eccentric with each passing decade. Finding our genuine interests and leaning into the things which make us happy to be alive. The future of Public Relations should be like that too, hopeful and optimistic and bold, unburdened by fame or money, delighting in its own strangeness, thoroughly alive to the glory around it.

Apra Mishra is runner up of the Anant Rangaswami Memorial Essay Competition announced by Reputation Today in July 2022. The best essay won an all-expense paid pass to #PRAXIS9.

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