

Vol 2: Issue 1 | Price ₹150/-

# Reputation TODAY

A magazine for Public Relations and Corporate Communications Professionals

## FOCUS

*Boutique Communication*



### *The Niche Advantage*

How do the niche PR firms fare in the communications ecosystem?

## INTERVIEWS



**PREMA SAGAR**

There is a lot to learn from millennials.



**RAJDEEP SARDESAI**

A journalist is only as free as s/he wants to be.



**VARSHA CHAINANI**

A strong reputation is critical to long term success.



# Reputation TODAY CONCLAVE

Engaging the intelligent communicator

## MUMBAI

📅 Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 | 📍 Godrej One, Vikhroli

An event exclusively for senior communicators  
**Listen to corporate CEOs share insights on Reputation Management**



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# Reputation TODAY CONCLAVE

Engaging the intelligent communicator

## BANGALORE

📅 Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017 | 📍 The Park Hotel, MG Road

An event exclusively for senior communicators  
**Listen to corporate CEOs share insights on Reputation Management**



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## FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM



We often hear about boutique PR firms. And there are various definitions to this reference - A tiny outfit with a handful of team members; a one-or two-city operation; a focus area of operation; or a comparatively small turnover. In our endeavour to size up the PR consulting business we realised there were broadly four types of PR firms by revenue size: Giant Firms (₹50 crore and above), Large Firms (₹10 crore - ₹49 crore), Medium Firms (₹6 crore - ₹9 crore) and Small Firms (₹3 crore - ₹5 crore). In between all these categories there were hidden gems which keep mushrooming from time to time. They are in the small and medium category. Once they cross the ₹10 crore barrier and join the big league they no more remain hidden gems. The reference here is to what is commonly referred to as boutique firms or niche firms. They carve a niche for themselves and super specialise in a specific area or two, or in a specific geography. They choose to remain small and focus on a handful of clients.

We decided to write about them as they deserved the spotlight. There are several consultancies that focus on celebrity public relations, start-ups, sports, luxury, healthcare or entertainment. They thrive on being specialists. We have mentioned those that are known and would like to hear from those who do not feature in the inside pages. Our endeavour is to feature a ranking of the fifty biggest firms by revenue size and our gut-feel is that half of these will be niche firms who make a monthly turnover ranging from 40 to 80 lakh.

This issue also marks the second year of our existence. We have our regular sections that include three columns and three interviews - Prema Sagar, Varsha Chainani and Rajdeep Sardesai. The opinion page, debate and a new section called Special 17 are interesting reads. In April we have the two-city Reputation Today Conclave where we have lined up half a dozen corporate CEOs each in Mumbai and Bangalore who will address senior communicators on aspects of reputation. We are also hoping to launch the first list of the Top 30 corporate communication teams based on a survey, which will feature in the next issue. We look forward to hearing from you and hope to be your voice and your mirror.



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## SUPER NIGHT REPLAY

Reputation Today organised its first edition of Super Night on 19th January 2017 to celebrate the year gone by. The Super Night had over 100 communications professionals come together for an evening of cocktails and conversations. Additionally, Reputation Today unveiled its 40 under Forty special issue in the presence of the who's who of the PR fraternity.



*A special thanks to all of you for a great show and for creating such a brilliant platform for like-minded people.*

**Pooja Pathak,**  
Director, Media Mantra

*What you all are doing is an absolute need of the hour for our business and please let us know how I/Gutenberg can help you in anyway.*

**Ranjani Roy,**  
Senior Director, Gutenberg



*It had been an absolute pleasure attending the Super Night and meeting the wonderful line up of Comms professionals. The performance by the musicians was fresh, engaging and truly joyous for the audience.*

**Kapil Sabharwal,**  
Manager, Communications, Delhi International Airport



*Thank you so much for hosting such a great networking evening. Your efforts were there for all to see. Kudos to you and the team.*

**Nicky Singh,**  
Associate Vice President, Golinopinion



*You guys are an awesome team and doing great work to bring the PR business together.*

**Sonali Madbhavi,**  
Vice President, Corporate Communications, Quikr



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## PROFILES OF COURAGE



The first phase of the programme at SCoRe, which comprised of over nine months of rigorous classroom training plus practical simulations as Public Relations consultants, culminates in April. With the help of experienced PR professionals from several firms and in-house departments, the candidates were exposed to the practice of PR over variety of sectors and business goals.

A strong focus was on honing their fundamental communications skills, and familiarisation with the consultancy businesses and practices therein, to ensure that they are ready to plunge right in and hit the ground running. This second phase, wherein they intern for four months with PR firms and in some cases with in-house departments begins in May. They have interesting internship offers. Internships will run from May 1st to August 31st. If you would like to make an offer write to [hemant.gaule@scoreindia.org](mailto:hemant.gaule@scoreindia.org)



### Amisha Tirthani

Amisha is a graduate in Psychology from R.D. National College with a perfect 7.0 GPA. Her background in psychology helped her gain keen insights into human behaviour, which she aims to apply in the field of Public Relations. She is also a pro photographer and a passionate traveler.



@amishatirthani



[thediaryofawanderingsoul.wordpress.com](http://thediaryofawanderingsoul.wordpress.com)

### Amy Crasto

Amy holds a Bachelor's degree in Arts and Sociology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. She chose the line of PR as a profession as she likes challenges and is always ready to take on a new one. She is flexible and can easily adapt to new situations which makes her a fit for PR.



@crasto\_amy



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### Judelyne Banerji

Judelyne is a Bachelor in Arts with honours in English Literature. She has a very creative bent of mind which she has so far applied in arts and crafts at various levels, and hopes to continue to apply it professionally too.



@juzzzybe



[juzzzybe.wordpress.com](http://juzzzybe.wordpress.com)

### Mehernaz Fitter

Mehernaz is a Bachelor in Mass Media from Mumbai University. She relies on her ability to understand people well and build and maintain positive relationships to carve a niche for herself in the area of public relations and communications.



@mehernazfitter



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### Nicole Fichardo

Nicole holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Her interest in working in areas that give her a chance to interact with people drove her towards a career in PR. She's interested in photography, exploring new places, is a movie addict and a music lover.



@nickyfichardo



nicole199521.wordpress.com

### Prerna Porwal

A firm believer in perfection, Prerna has completed her MBA in Entrepreneurship from Institute of Management, Nirma University. She has gained abundant knowledge and expertise in playing managerial roles. Understanding as well as communicating effectively with the audience is one of her core strengths.



@porwal\_prerna



seaofinspirationblog.wordpress.com



### Priyadarshini Mazumdar

Priyadarshini is a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting. Despite completing her graduation in finance, her love and natural bent towards communications drove her to an education in public relations. She aims to continue to strengthen this knack and offer it professionally going forward.



@priyadrshne



rewindingthoughts.wordpress.com

### Sumitha Naik

Sumitha is an Information Science Engineer. After working as a software engineer for five years she decided to convert her interest in Public Relations into a profession. Besides being an avid traveller, Sumitha is also a go getter and can don multiple roles to get the work done.



@SumithaNaik



sumithanaik.wordpress.com



### Twinkle Jayson

Twinkle holds a Graduate degree in Zoology from Mumbai University. After taking a long hiatus from the professional world, Twinkle aims to jump back in via the entrepreneurial route in the area of public relations and communications. She relies on her strength of getting along well with people, and enjoys reading and playing the violin.



@twink077



mejournal7.wordpress.com



## The Niche Advantage

*How do niche PR firms fare in the communications ecosystem?*



***So you're looking for a PR consultancy for your organisation*** - would you go for a big firm with a diverse range of clients or would you choose to trust a specialised firm, which is probably smaller and has handled fewer clients? Would you look for a firm that is rich in experience across sectors or one that has in-depth knowledge about your sector alone?

Let's assume you understand all the fundamental advantages of having a good PR firm on your side. And, if you want a firm that understands the business you are in, then hiring a niche PR firm is your answer. Getting news about your company into credible media, increasing visibility, and getting your brand out in public view - a niche firm can indeed, do full justice.

We got down to speaking with some niche PR firms to understand what exactly, is the ***niche advantage***. Being more targeted, it appears that niche PR provides better value.

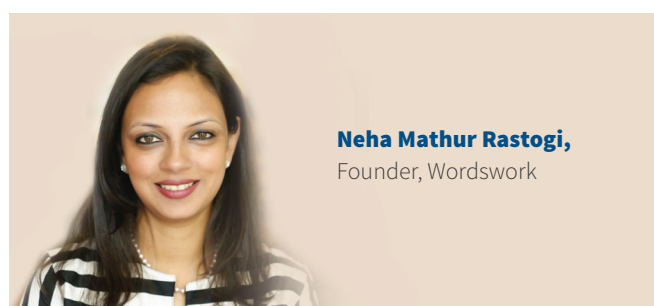
### The 'niche' rising!

Trying to understand 'niche' communication, perhaps would lead us to the fact that it is sharp, focused and insightful. It implies a deep perception of the space that the brands operate in.



It brings in the importance of customising messages for specific target groups. Communication is all about storytelling, but when the focus is on a specific target group, the story gets pruned and customised, with the right key messaging. The story is polished with an in-depth knowledge of the sector in question.

At the outset, we looked at pinpointing a perfect definition of niche PR.



**Neha Mathur Rastogi,**  
Founder, Wordwork

*"Niche communications is when there is a need for a specialised approach to communicating for a certain sector. When a company chooses to deep-dive and gains this specialised skill, it gets a unique advantage that sets it apart."*

Believing that the communication business has grown immensely **Anuja Choudhary, CEO, WizSpk Communication** says, "It's about understanding the space, gaining deep insight about the brand or



the industry, the audience and drawing a strategic plan focused and geared to deal with the niche space.”

### Tracing the journey

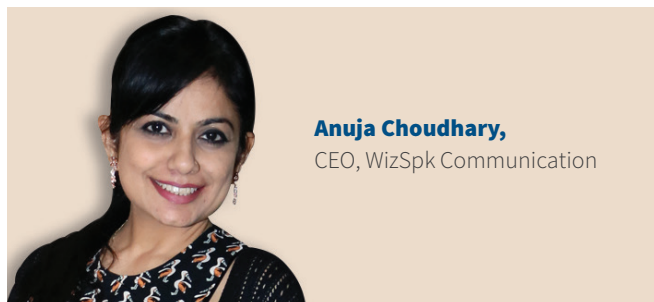
In the last decade the PR business has witnessed major changes. You could call it a revolution, which paved the way for speciality PR or niche PR. Plus, globalisation has enabled different communities to connect. Consequently, the target audience evolved as well, and new ways of conversations were born. The age of specialisation had enveloped the PR business, which meant that niche businesses were searching for niche firms. And, niche PR firms entered the mainstream.



The journey has been slow, arduous and intensely exciting. For firms like Wordswork, the journey has been *one big stupendous adventure* so far - from working with leading consumer brands to launching numerous fashion and lifestyle products, representing destinations, managing reputation for corporate entities to strategising campaigns for start-ups.

While venturing out, Mindworkz discovered that their particular segment was non-existent! But, their focus and growth in theatre, art and culture has been tremendous in the last decade.

It has been *like an uphill jog* for Media Medic Communications. Initially, there were hardly any focused healthcare PR firms, but that proved to be an opportunity. Over the years, the healthcare industry has matured and evolved; with changing times scientific healthcare, medical understanding of content and the importance of story-telling has gained importance.



**Anuja Choudhary,**  
CEO, WizSpk Communication

*“The first year was always under the fear of being a one-hit wonder, but choosing to stay focused and aiming for quality clients has helped along the way to grow deep and grow quick!”*

### What is the slot that niche PR enjoys in the business scene today?

Content marketing now forms a vital part of attracting customers to your portal. There are blogs and social media – you can tailor your content to your niche market audience. So, the ability to use niche marketing communications helps build a connected community around your brand because you provide relevant content that relates to their needs. You gain a high level of traction with your niche marketing communications, which means more social shares and more targeted conversations.

Businesses are evolving and getting focused and new-age business is all about breaking the rules. Niche PR has found a firm place in business today. In healthcare, the science is getting more complicated; hence specialised PR is even more significant.



**Priti Mohile,**  
Co-Founder &  
Managing Director,  
Media Medic Communications

*“Moving ahead in the digitally-savvy world, niche PR will gain importance and good content will reign.”*

“Niche PR works well for certain sectors (such as sports, technology, healthcare, luxury etc), where knowledge plays an important role”, according to **Neha Mathur Rastogi, Founder, Wordswork**. Focused experience over years across clients in the same sector, makes you develop a unique expertise which can be leveraged to either write technical content or have serious media relations. You tend to reflect how the media works - where beats are defined and knowledge is built over years. Consequently, mutual respect is created with key media stakeholders and it makes the client comfortable, dealing with an expert, who has a grip on the industry.

“In niche PR you get to learn a lot about your genre”, says **Kajal Gadhia, Media Consultant & Proprietor, Mindworkz**, as over time, you get to know the details and challenges a client may face; this prepares one for various situations, and because of the focus, it helps to connect with targeted media across publications.

### Advantages/disadvantages of niche PR

What are the advantages of hiring specialised PR firms? Although traditional PR firms offer experience in a wider breadth of fields, their knowledge of specific niche businesses may be limited.

Employing a niche PR firm opens up unparalleled benefits for clients in select sectors.



“The obvious advantage in niche PR is that the firm will develop unique skills and also target select media, without much ado. One can enjoy media attention, from the right journalist at the right time”, observes Kajal. The advantages from a client’s perspective include insightful and focused quality communication output.

There are firms which specialise in their niche spaces alone; others have built different practices with specialised and focused teams. It works well for both, says Anuja. Brands look for firms with specialised and experienced resources and relevant credentials; they can be niche or varied, as long as they understand the space well.

A PR firm can get deeper into the sector’s knowledge zone to draw deeper insights. Of course, unlike a traditional PR firm, the overheads are higher and so is the cost of resources, notes **Dinesh Chindarkar, Co-Founder and Director, Media Medic.**

### The challenges faced

Does working in a niche market make it easier or harder to find new business? The firms maintain it is 100% easier. Word of mouth or business connections may help.

How does working within a niche industry affect account efficiencies? With a focused effort on one area, is it possible to complete work faster than if you were catering to multiple business areas?

It takes time and a lot of patience to build the reputation for a niche player. Indian business was not ready to understand the benefits of PR in this niche segment. But your belief in the concept, your passion for deliverables and the precise work you put in, will show results. Changing the mindset takes time, but eventually will bear fruit! The co-founders at Media Medic Communications feel that one needs to be ready to put one’s neck out and overcome these challenges in the incubation period.

Building relationships and connecting with editors and bloggers ultimately benefits clients. Here, you can actually become a one-stop shop for media, who reaches out to you for content, creative ideas, top-notch media interviews, and the best trend spotting in the industry. The niche PR firm’s reputation can be a great asset. And they can pass these efficiencies on to clients in round-up stories and pitching.

Carving an identity that is unique, maintaining a positive reputation, consistently delivering good work and our business credibility has kept us in good stead, believes Anuja. Wordswork was initially known for specialising in sports, and over time they built two niche areas to include lifestyle & luxury. “We have had to really work hard to sustain our sports team during the off-season months. Luckily now the industry is growing and developing fast. We have leagues and new innovative formats being played across the calendar year and that brings in a steady income across the year,” says Neha.



**Kajal Gadhia,**  
Media Consultant  
and Proprietor,  
Mindworkz

*“The biggest challenge was to make the journalist believe that there was something intelligent and interesting to write about in our niche category.”*

The fact that our industry itself was looked upon as “No PR Needed” category, it was a tough cookie to crack from both the ends. Also, there was a dearth of journalists, who would really have an inclination and understanding of this segment, adds Kajal.



# What's the SECRET of SUCCESS?

*Today, one can notice the enthusiasm and interest of millennials entering the business. Here are some tips that the firms share that can give any new entrant the 'niche' advantage. Passion seems to rule here. That could be your gamechanger. So, go for it!*



In today's day and age, being driven, passionate and focused is a big USP. If you can develop this early in your career it will certainly benefit you in the long run!

**Neha Mathur Rastogi**



Be focused and driven by passion. It looks difficult and could take time to show results. But the wait is worth it, and it gives you a sense of achievement

**Kajal Gadhia**



Do not fear the giants and believe in yourself. Be passionate about your work and proud of the niche knowledge you have, lay down clear objectives and roll out with loads of patience!

**Dinesh Chindarkar**



Keep innovating and don't lose focus. Understand integrated communication well. Keep up the pace.

**Anuja Choudhary**

## THE ROAD AHEAD



For PR firms the future would involve - a good growth path, churning out impactful campaigns and helping clients to enhance market shares and brand equity with all stakeholders. The future is clear as far as Kajal Gadhia of Mindworkz is concerned. It's all about "Going Digital" - that is the space to watch out for. This would mean "conceptualising crisp, classy and creative content for the niche category".

Wordswork still sees a lot of opportunities within their chosen sectors of specialisation. "In order to further grow in these sectors I am keen to explore new formats of work, relying on unique collaborations. We work with larger firms as specialist partners, we also work with other vendors within the domain and develop long-term partnerships for eg sports management firms," Neha reveals and goes on to add, "I'd also like to strengthen our position across the key metros and hire the right kind of specialised talent, which can help us grow our capabilities and client list". For each sector, maturity levels are different, says Wizspk who has serviced a variety of brands, but they believe that PR can truly help a brand/service to engage with consumers. "You come to us with your brand query and we will have a great PR solution for it," Anuja promises.



## COVER STORY

It seems in the healthcare & pharmaceutical sectors they have now begun to realise the advantage of a niche firm. 'Healthcare PR' as a concept sells now. Sound scientific knowledge, healthcare content understanding and deep industry know-how, built over the years does help. "With the world getting smaller, we also decided to

partner with other global niche firms and hence we are now a part of the GLOBALHealthPR network - that aids in knowledge exchange globally and to undertake cross continent campaigns successfully, in healthcare," explains Priti Mohile.

### IN THE LEAGUE



**SPAG** - A specialised Public Relations, Public Affairs and Digital Marketing consultancy, S.P.A.G has presence in India, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Their main focus areas include Government Affairs & Advocacy, Digital Marketing & Social Media campaigns, Pharmaceuticals, Medical Devices, Healthcare, Start up ecosystem, Sports and Entertainment.

**Yorke Communications** - An Adfactors group company, Yorke Communications was founded by Matilda and Peter Yorke in 2008. They are a specialised marketing communications company and offer content that can be leveraged across platforms for government, corporate and retail.



**Dream & Hustle Media** - Founded by Ms. Jashoda Madhavji, Dream N Hustle Media is celebrity PR and reputation consulting outfit. They have handled high decibel campaigns like Afrojack, LMFAO, Fatboy Slim, David Guetta, Steve Angello, Nikhil Chinapa, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Anubhav Sinha, Naomi Campbell among several others.

**Spice PR** - Founded in 2004 by Prabhat Choudhary, Spice PR is a leading marketing communication firm in the field of Indian Entertainment. Spice has handled some of the top Bollywood grossers like GHAJINI - the first 100-crore film, 3 idiots - the first 200-crore film and PK - the first 300-crore film of India.

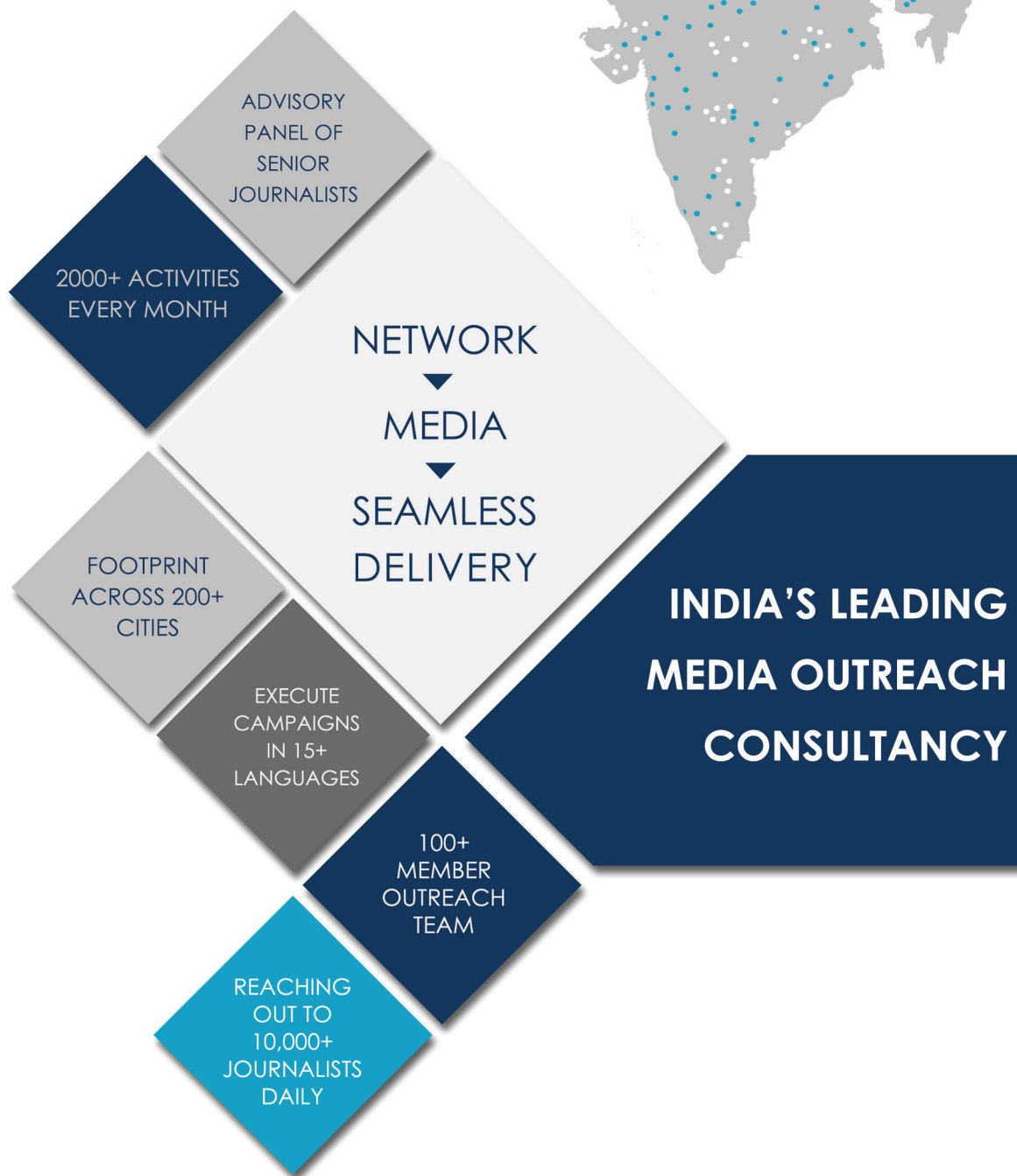


**80 Db Communications** - Co-founded by seasoned PR professionals Abhilasha Padhy and Kiran Ray Chaudhury in 2015, 80Db Communications specialise in working with start-ups and technology brands. Some of their clients include Mobikwik, Clovia, Vidooly, One Touch Response, Reglobe, M Taxi.

**Gutenberg** - Recently rebranded from Gutenberg Communications to Gutenberg, the firm is headed by Harjiv Singh. They are a digital integrated marketing communications firm with offices in US, UK and India.







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**“It is interesting to note that several firms originating in the niche areas are doing so with the intention of eventually finding a buyer.”**

- Hemant Gaule



Between May 2013 and November 2013 Nijay Nair, Director - Commercial and M&A, at Adfactors PR made over 10 trips between Mumbai and Bangalore to enable his firm's acquisition of Yorke Communications (Yorke). He led the acquisition that would go on to form an essential part of the Adfactors' goal for the near future - of strengthening their content strategy and delivery capabilities.

A 2016 study of the PR business (commissioned by PRCAI) concluded that content-driven campaigns would be the top drivers of growth of PR firms going forward - 86% PR firms agreeing with the idea. Yorke had made a niche in the domain since their foundation by Matilda and Peter Yorke in 2008.

*Yorke CEO, Peter, who has been in the communications space for nearly three decades, wrote in the context, “right from the beginning we were very clear about where we were heading. Content would be at the centre of our business”. This made it a highly valuable capability to acquire.*

At the time of their acquisition, Yorke had worked with over 95 clients in its six years into the business, offering content, web design and development and internal communications services. They were producing approximately 250 original collaterals each month through a team of 28 dedicated writers (and an ecosystem of over 300 freelance writers). While this was not nearly as large a team as Adfactors, who have over 450 professionals in four countries, it would size up to be a significant exchange of value for both partners to be.

Through the acquisition Adfactors got access to this strong content delivery engine. Such capability addition would lead to an

attitudinal rub off to the parent organisation - capability to offer fundamentally content-driven solutions. On the other hand, Yorke would be able to acquire strengths that Adfactors had built over a long period.

Nijay explains how their expertise of creating a robust IT infrastructure around services or capabilities greatly improves the efficacy of their delivery, and eventual profitability. Moreover, Yorke would also be able to get access to a larger talent pool with a premium on hiring prospects, by association with Adfactors.

Although strong domain expertise was a necessary consideration, it was only one of the many other factors that mattered significantly.

*As Nijay elaborated, “It wasn't just an access to a healthy balance sheet that caught our attention, it was access to solid human capital as well. We didn't just want market reach of capability, we wanted people who would lead Adfactors with us. And therefore it was as important to do a due diligence of the vision as also of the financial, legal, human resources and other aspects.”*

Alignment of this vision - captured in part through the shareholders agreement, was the part of the process that took the longest for the acquisition team to build.

The real exchange of value that will transcend the earn-out period of this M&A is where the visions of both the firms align. As Nijay puts it, “We want Yorke to succeed, and its success is our responsibility!” And the fact that Yorke is expected to grow by nearly 50% this year will be testament to its seamless integration.

**Hemant Gaule** is the co-founder and Deputy Dean at the School of COmmunication and REputation (SCoRe).



There are two ways to explain any success. First, by taking all the credit and making it look like a well-planned affair. Second, by crediting it to serendipity; how the universe conspired for your success. The first approach would be a dishonest one, because it would appear like we foresaw the future. I'd rather stay with the second, be honest in telling the story of how we were opportunistic in building a niche PR firm that is perhaps the most respected in the space of PR for start-ups, new-age and technology-enabled businesses in India.

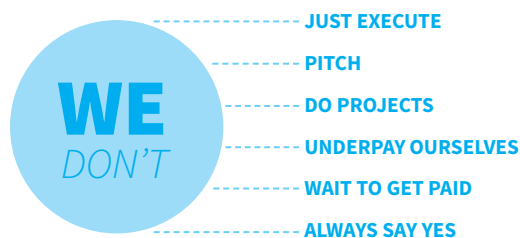
Our story began in the year 2007. While the entrepreneurship brouhaha has reached a crescendo in recent times, 2007-08 was really the beginning of the second coming of venture capital investing and the genesis of the new wave of tech entrepreneurship in the country. Early in the piece, we started working with Helion Venture Partners, among the earliest India Focused VC funds. It has always helped that Helion (and other investors that we work with) have been generous in referring us to their portfolio companies and other start-up ventures. One such reference got us working with Flipkart, then just beginning to be known as an online book store. Another investor reference (via Flipkart) got us saying 'Ola' to Ola. These early wins (investors, promising start-ups, some good work) got us well entrenched in the start-up ecosystem and lead to even more references. We were good, our startup clients and their many cohorts made us look better. We have had an opportunity to work with the biggest and the best amongst start-ups in India. Caratlane, Commonfloor, PropTiger, Zivame, Azure Power, Byju's, Swiggy, Blackbuck – the full list will have a hundred odd names that many would recognise today. All this, by serendipitously stumbling from one client to another - reference baton-handed and relays well-run. However, we believe that we got luckier, as we worked harder.

To gain initial awe and respect was easy. But, to sustain it was the real challenge. Hiring challenges - something that we haven't

gotten over, even today - stifled us by the neck. We needed a different breed; those who could understand business, plan, think, write and pitch. And like they say in startup parlance, *those who were willing to get their hands dirty*. We struggled to find relevant talent. We tried 'growing' our own talent. We continue to. But, that only makes for the dessert, and not the main course.

There were other challenges, and the story of how we circumnavigated those will not have the humility that you might have detected so far. In fact it is likely to sound self-laudatory, even as the attempt would be to owe allegiance to truth.

When we had favourable winds, we were small, and operated like a start-up ourselves. Taking every challenge, like how Sherlock Holmes would! But then, that was never going to help us scale, nor take us from good to great. We did some things, unique to the PR business in India (some, maybe globally), to gear ourselves to new normals that we would discover for ourselves, day after day. In the process, we ended-up being defined by what we don't, rather than what we do!



Visit: [bit.ly/NichePRFirms](http://bit.ly/NichePRFirms) to read Ravi Shankar's views on what you should not do to rise as a niche PR firm.

Chock-full with don'ts, let me end it with one more. To build a niche PR company, or niche anything - Don't compromise pride at the altar of business. To be crowned in your niche, expertise will have to be backed by confidence and pride, and vice-versa!

**N Ravi Shankar** is the CEO of Aim High Consulting ([www.aimhighindia.com](http://www.aimhighindia.com)), a leading PR Consulting firm focused on start-ups and technology-enabled businesses.



## Are specialist firms here to stay?

Are specialist firms here to stay or is this a trend that has rolled in to keep them growing and ahead of the pack? We threw this topic across to two professionals and got interesting perspectives.



### To survive, I have to specialise, have a niche, and constantly grow. To me, it is the only way ahead.

Change is a constant. And no profession epitomises this line better than PR.

I've always embraced and adapted to information technology like fish to water. I spread myself on almost all of social media platforms and learnt SEO tricks. I turned myself into a multi-tasking web networker. I became extremely accessible, with everything from my mobile number, email ID, to my social media accounts and various blogs open to public. I recognised very early on that great web, manipulation is the way to the future of media.

Then, I began concentrating more on web PR and mobile space where all the traditional media integrate, and not the other way round. Plus, I turned a spokesperson for my PR clients and began addressing the media whenever they fell into controversy. Apart from being their friend, philosopher and guide, I also became their protective shield from the prying and scandal-searching media. Adding the specialty of crisis management to regular publicity and promotions, I became their most trustworthy media person.

Next, I began training gen next and made my presence felt in colleges teaching PR with guest lectures. That way, the PRs of tomorrow began recognising me as an idol in their profession. I got their respect. About a dozen PhD students finished their dissertations with me as their guide.

A few years ago during recession, I adopted another path-breaking move. I shut my office with staff and appointed media reps in their place. I took my entire working on cloud. Many in the profession called this a crazy move. Some even called me mad. A few years later, they realised its effectiveness.

This is also the reason why the media often talks about me as being five years ahead of time. I have to be. Because to survive, I have to specialise, have a niche, and constantly grow. To me, it is the only way ahead.



**Dale Bhagwagar** is a PR specialist, strategist, publicist and founder of an independent entertainment PR consultancy - The Dale Bhagwagar Media Group.

### Whether a firm specialises in a particular service or industry, specialist firms are not here to stay.

There are two kinds of specialist firms - those that specialise in a particular service, such as media relations, and those that specialise in an industry, such as financial communications. However, regardless of which camp a firm belongs in, specialist firms are not here to stay.

The rise of digital platforms has empowered brands to communicate directly with the audience. Many PR firms specialise in media relations because that used to be all that was really required to get by. Today, a PR consultancy is expected to do more than just media relations. A brief from a client today can integrate many elements from creation of media materials to in-house training videos.

Of course, a specialist firm can always work with third parties but as clients move their preference to a single consultancy structure, it makes more sense to integrate these services within the firm. Also, it is easier to attract and retain good talent if a firm exposes them to a broad range of disciplines. Some specialised firms such as those that focus only on crisis, financial sector or technology are slowly evolving to multi-disciplinary firms. This is not because specialised services are no longer required but because this is a necessary shift to keep the business running.

Specialised firms are more susceptible to economic downturns especially when the industry of their choice suffers. By diversifying the portfolio, consultancies can ensure that there is the ability to get businesses anywhere. A firm with focus on different industries does not mean that it doesn't have the in-depth knowledge of any particular industry. In fact, such firms can look at the bigger picture and link different industries together to deliver more compelling stories for a client. Clients stand to benefit from a consultancy that understands how the financial industry is now driven by technology or how cyber security affects the manufacturing sector.



**Sonya Madeira** is a communications professional accredited by the Institute of Public Relations, Singapore and founder of Rice Communications, Singapore.



### Cultural Trend-Spotters and Communications Connoisseurs

**Archana Jain**

*Managing Director, PR Pundit*

'Lifestyle PR' sounds rather grand, and those who practice it, believe it truly is! Promoting companies that provide discretionary goods and services, for which we all love to spend money, is not a mean task and requires DECCA - Dedication, Excellence, Consistency, Confidence and Ambition.

*To read the complete article, please visit:*

<http://reputationtoday.in/views/cultural-trend-spotters-and-communications-connoisseurs/>



### The Coming of Age of Healthcare PR

**Aman Gupta,**

*Managing Partner and Founder, S.P.A.G.*

Healthcare PR or better called Life-sciences PR is vastly different from other sectors. It is characterised by the lexicon of medical jargon, forensic and a regulatory environment that is unique to this sector. It's a very exciting time for PR emerging through the challenges our economy is facing.

*To read the complete article, please visit:*

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***“We understand that we are a part of a constantly transforming business and new ways of communication evolve every day.”***

***- Prema Sagar***



**Prema Sagar** is a recognised leader in India's Public Relations business, serving as Principal and Founder of Genesis Burson-Marsteller. She is also the Founder-President of the Public Relations Consultants Association of India (PRCAI), an organisation that encourages the sharing of best practices in the business, and the President and a Founding Member of the Public Affairs Forum of India.

*In a candid talk with Shree Lahiri, she opens up on entrepreneurship, millennials, the growing clout of digital media and more.*



**Tell us about your journey as an entrepreneur?**

**Ans:** I come from a services family, where no one had ever tried to run a business. Much against the wishes of my father, I plunged into the unknown world of entrepreneurship. I started a printing press with my brother and published a city magazine. During the course of this, I came in touch with Priya Paul of Park Hotels. Together we started Music in the Park, an event that brought more people to the hotel, not realising that what we were doing was classic public relations and reputation management.



**How are you dealing with the challenges of the new-age professionals, also known as Millennials?**

**Ans:** Every new generation of professionals brings with it its own set of new ideas and new ways of working. There is a lot to learn from them and their creativity and energy can drive any firm to greater heights. In our firm, reverse mentoring is a very accepted norm. All they need from us is an understanding of their unique needs. They consider work as only one part of their life-there are friends, family, and more importantly, passions to give their time to, besides work. And frankly, that is the source of their creativity and energy that we so benefit from. So from our side, we work towards giving them the experiences and the freedom they need of course, while keeping client demands in mind.



**What is your advice to young entrepreneurs, who are building PR firms today?**

**Ans:** I think this is a great time to be an entrepreneur, in any field. Today, there are so many resources of support for entrepreneurs that we never had. However, I think we had eagerness and an appetite to take more risks than you see in people today.

In terms of advice, all I would say is that we often lose sight of basic values and ethics in the drive for growth. It is important to lay that foundation right at the beginning so that it becomes part of the DNA.



**Given the growing clout of digital media, how does GenesisBM plan to integrate digital media into its campaigns?**

**Ans:** We understand that we are a part of a constantly transforming business and new ways of communication evolve every day. That is why we created our centres of expertise - to give us both, the width and depth in communication. Digital media is now all-pervasive and you can't create a campaign without it having a digital leg. Our Digital Studio centre of expertise has a range of specialists in the various digital platforms and they help us deliver integrated solutions to our clients. Additionally, we are nurturing those with digital skills within the mainstream PR function to

enhance those skills to give our clients a more seamless execution layer for their campaigns.



### Is measurement a good thing to talk about, but difficult to implement?

**Ans:** I have never been one for talking about measurement for the sake of measurement. What we often forget is that communication in itself has no meaning if it is not supporting an organisation in its business imperatives. How has a campaign moved the needle for a client's business objective? If you can't talk about that then merely counting coverage, share of voice or even AVE is pointless.



### Where do you think the Indian Public Relations business stands today vis-à-vis the international arena?

**Ans:** There are two ways to look at this. One is to compare ourselves to other parts of the world in the kind of work we do. I think in that we are quite comparable. Of course, each geography has its unique opportunities and challenges, and so the work varies to some extent. Some would lean heavier towards particular industries and the public relations mandate would be driven by that.

The other way to look at it is the position of the public relations business in the larger scheme of things in the country, and comparing that with other countries. In that, I believe, we have really come of age in the last few years. Just as our peers in the US or Europe, we are playing a bigger and more pivotal role for our clients today.



### What have been the three biggest achievements of your firm in the last 25 years of its existence?

**Ans:** It would be difficult to pin it down to three, because at every step of the way, we have had people putting in their best to bring us to this point, and I wouldn't want to place any of that lower than any other. What I would say is that over the last 25 years, we have built an institution that stands for pushing the boundaries of communications and setting benchmarks with our imagination, creativity and agility, whether it is for our clients, our people, the profession or the community. Even as we set our sights on pioneering new initiatives and ideas, we also promised ourselves to never lose sight of our values. There are times we have refused business when it has not sit right with our sense of integrity.



### What do you envisage as the future of Public Relations to evolve into?

**Ans:** At the core, public relations will always be about building and managing the reputation of an organisation. However, with time, what that *reputation management* will include could evolve. The tools and tactics keep changing anyway - as you mentioned before, digital plays a huge role and with it, we have added direct communication with the consumer to the mix of stakeholders we address. We are already connecting with the media, the government, the key opinion leaders, the partners and even the employees. The evolution that I see would largely be in the mediums - more vibrant content, more distribution mechanisms, more mediums, like virtual reality, and more depth in specialisations, besides breadth - what we call T-shaped talent, a broad understanding in a range of areas and specialisation in one.







## 17 THINGS NO ONE TELLS YOU IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

**So you are all set for a career in PR?** You are curious, agile, love to network, are passionate about different Brands and are a complete adrenaline junkie? Then you have chosen the right place to be. But to help have a 360 degree view of what you sign up for, here are some truth bombs to help you prepare better:

1

**What they teach you in PR courses is very different from what you actually end up doing** - What you learn on the job will never be available in text books. So always keep an open mind.

2

**The press release has changed** - Note that most of your emails titled 'Press Release- XXX' are getting relegated to a journalist's spam folder. Don't just send a release; give them a hook or something of interest so they notice it.

3

**'Integrated' is the name of the game** - Just generating coverage is not enough anymore. Drive integrated campaigns for your brands; influence the influencers and create engagement across online and offline media.

4

**Consultancy v/s Corporate** - Have clarity on where you want to start from and why. Consultancies continue to be the best learning grounds. As you grow, you discover what your true calling in PR really is.

5

**PR can also be 'creative'** - Choose a workplace that fosters a culture of creativity. Be creative; play around with concepts; talk to your audience!

6

**A happy client is an oxymoron** - Out of the 100 odd clients that you may service in your career, only a few will genuinely express their appreciation, the rest may feel the same but will not tell you as much. Don't lose heart!

7

**No one knows exactly how much your coverage is worth** - In the world of marketing, we can measure everything - traffic, sign-ups, downloads, PR? Think again. So often, we're asked how a story in The Economic Times will convert to sales leads. The answer? Your guess is as good as mine.

8

**ROIs** - Always insist on having some sort of analytics in place to track the success of your PR efforts.

9

**The 'client' isn't always right** - As consultants, you are the one who should be advising the client. Don't be afraid to put out your point, if you have the logic to back it up with.

10

**Taking breaks** - Burn outs are very common in our business. Avoid them by taking time offs after every one hour of work and a holiday every quarter.

11

**Coverage: Volume v/s Value** - Don't get bogged by the numbers of coverage given to generate on a particular account. If the coverage does not align with your client's business objective, it is not relevant. Focus on value, always.

12

**Glamour is an illusion** - The first image that comes to an outsider's mind when they think of PR is a glam evening of wine and cheese and elegantly dressed people having interesting conversations. Well, that's not the whole truth. There is a lot of sweat, dust and grime involved in creating successful campaigns.

13

**Coffee may soon become your BFF** - If you're looking for a 9-5 Job, PR is not your jam. We live in a time, where we are constantly connected and your mind is therefore unable to switch off. Here coffee becomes our BFF and we turn into delightful adrenaline junkies!

14

**Your client thinks, the press eats out of your hands** - It's common to hear things like, "Can you ensure they write about us? Can you tell us exactly which page the article will appear in? Size, date, column, etc". Avoid these uninformed questions, by educating your client about exactly how things work. Set realistic expectations. This goes a long way in having a trusting, sustainable and successful partnership.

15

**Life is a pitch** - A successful pitch is a combination of understanding your brand, having a knack for news, knowing what's trending, understanding the profile of the media you are pitching to and finally getting them interested in your story.

16

**Don't take work home** - You will have long work hours and you will love the rush but you need to switch off too.

17

**Social media is a life hack** - Don't know about a particular journalist who has started covering your category, look up their LinkedIn, google the kind of stories they are posting, follow them on Twitter. Don't be a creepy stalker though. Similarly, follow your client's social media feed diligently.



**Ria Mukherjee** is the Business Head for West Operations at Value 360. She has over 13 years of experience in PR, Advertising and Corporate Communications.

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*“We have to build our brand narrative using stories and experiential mediums.”*

*- Varsha Chainani*



**Varsha Chainani** is Senior Vice President, Group Communications at Mahindra & Mahindra. Prior to this she has held senior management positions at Abbott Laboratories and IBM India. A senior marketing and communications specialist, she has the ability to foster culture change and apply and translate business strategies to target audiences.

*In conversation with Reputation Today, she discusses the importance of reputation management and specialist communication.*



### What are the challenges that face the PR business today?

**Ans:** Challenges and opportunities are two sides of the same coin. I see three large areas in the Communications and PR business to focus on.

The first is the trust deficit that is rising in our society. Our stakeholders, especially customers are becoming increasingly distrustful of several institutions in our society and are demanding transparency and authenticity before they begin to trust. Everyone is looking for credible partners who they can trust.

The second is the rapidly changing media landscape in India. Print publications, particularly in urban areas are seeing depleting advertisement revenue stream and are moving towards establishing a balanced business model for their online portals and social media. It becomes critical that we anticipate and deftly move our attention and skill sets to accommodate these mediums in our mainstream strategy and plans.

Equally important is for us practitioners to move towards storytelling. We have to build our brand narrative using stories and experiential mediums to subtly weave in the Company's brand attributes.



### How important is reputation management to solve a company's business problem(s) today?

Reputation matters more than ever before in this VUCA (Volatility Uncertainty Chaos Ambiguity) world. There isn't an iota of doubt

that a strong reputation is critical to the long-term success and drives stock stability of any brand, locally or globally. Effectively communicating how your company is innovative and hence relevant to your customers, your company's philosophy and action in the areas of corporate ethics and governance, employee practices, sustainability and CSR, helps to build and sustain good corporate reputation. That is what we at Mahindra are maniacally focused on.



### Do you agree that this is the era of specialist communications? What are your views on this?

As a function, we are specialists. We are the custodians of our organisation's reputation in both enhancing it and protecting it. Our core competency is to be the ambassadors of our organisation, understand its needs, develop sharp and focused key messages and deliver them through the right channels, speaking directly and powerfully to your target audience.

However, to thrive we need to be generalists, especially as you gain functional expertise. We have to balance multiple skill sets and gain experience and expertise in matters of corporate communications, reputation management and corporate brand positioning.



### What are the activities that Mahindra has undertaken at the corporate level that other brands can learn from?

The Mahindra Group is a USD 17.8 billion federation of companies with 200,000 employees across 100 countries, enjoying a



strong presence in diverse industry sectors from automotive, agribusiness, financial services and vacation ownership to energy, and from logistics, real estate to aerospace and defence.

Being able to create a pull for the CEOs and leaders across the federation as a counsel is what I would say is critical. Federation, unlike a conglomerate, does not have a centralised structure and hence one has to create value for the businesses/companies to subscribe and support your offerings.

We also refined our group messaging to being more innovation and technology led, global and caring.



**There are a number of niche or boutique firms emerging in India. As a senior communicator, what is your advice to them?**

PR consultancies are our partners and their skill sets and competencies complements and/or supplements in-house talent. Given the changing media environment, the largest need is for niche boutique consultancies to strategically lead with social media within the media mix. Unique storytelling and hence content creation and curation are key here.



**You moved from Abbott India to Mahindra. How has the experience of the last one year been?**

I moved from a highly regulated 'pharmaceuticals' industry and leading India as a region to an industrial group with many diverse businesses and a global role. It has been an incredibly exciting year filled with incredible experiences as I learn about the size, scope and complexity of the Mahindra Group. I am also deeply impressed by the culture at Mahindra which is empowering, caring and inclusive, and of course, its inspiring leaders.



**Do awards in the world of communications really enhance a career graph? What is your opinion?**

I think that depends on the credibility of the award but more than awards it is the quality of your work, passion for your craft, zest and drive, your integrity, and your commitment that will help to enhance your career graph.



**You moved from being part of an airline crew member and the hotel industry into the world of communications? How was that transition?**

I thrive on ambiguity and have the openness to learn and unlearn. I am also my own worst critic and keep challenging myself to do more and better at every step. Cathay Pacific helped me hone problem solving skills, 'own' the company approach and presented me with the passion to deal with people across cultures, ages and background and relate to them as equals. From operations, I moved to establishing communications at the Taj Group and there was no looking back thereafter. IT was getting to be the sunrise industry in the year 2000 with Y2K and as luck had it, IBM India came my way then. After 11 years, I moved to Abbott in India setting their Public Affairs function and now the Mahindra Group.

Life has been kind to me. I am on an exciting journey of opportunities and experiences, with all its highs and lows, working with some of the best global brands and amazing people.

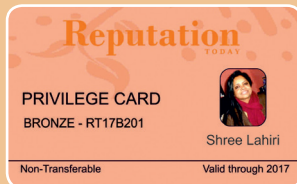






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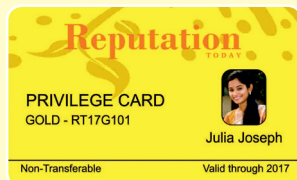
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***“Niche communications in PR will be shaped by boutique consultancies.”***

*- Ambuj Dixit*

Communication in Public Relations has always been about expertise. It is another factor that it might not have been taken seriously until a few years ago and that also lent the domain a bad name in India.

A PR professional is different from other communications professionals. S/he is not only supposed to know the domain, s/he represents, in detail, but also all the aspects that affect the business - HR, Finance, Operations, Marketing, etc... You never know when a question is tossed up at you by anyone on any aspect of the establishment - the reputation of whose you are to defend or build.

If you are into FMCG, you should know about the product strategy, brand strategy and value, should follow activists, should be aware of health norms, safety norms, should have a working relationship with various influencers, etc.

If you are into renewables you should know about climate change and environment protection apart from the domain and technology expertise. You should know about oil economy and how lobbying is impacting spread of renewable energies worldwide; know of innovations/inventions and technologies that have the potential to disrupt the industry; know about MNRE; also know about economics and human rights, etc.; and this is just a small list.

What we are talking about is depth and it comes after spending years in a domain. The very utility of PR evolves from Niche. So Niche PR consultancies is an idea the time of which came long back; we are just waking-up to it now. These consultancy firms will force every other PR firm to claim their expertise, in turn helping the domain to be respected and get a seat at the table.

Being a player in niche domain, we are happy to say that we are actively participating in the game and shaping it accordingly.

### BLAQ's Journey

BLAQ specialises in the domain of Organisational Communications and Employee Engagement. Into our 10th year, we are happy to say that we are contributing to the growth of the domain

through ideas not experimented before and campaigns that are rich in relevance measurement to companies and employees. We have the following learnings to put forward on building a niche Consultancy in the domain:

- Define your niche on your own and introduce it to the world.
- Leadership is very important - only on the strengths of the leader, the business can be built.
- We are making case studies with every project. We are doing the unprecedented.
- Work with the client to get the brief right and clear.
- Good delivery always rules - this aspect remains unchanged.
- Learn to say no - to the best of the opportunities if it doesn't fit into the strength or the vision.
- Partnerships are crucial - very crucial.
- Be nimble and agile - forget five years, even two-year plans are very far from reality.
- Always have a plan B ready.
- Work on the character of your company - build the third party admiration value.
- Have high ethical standards and low ego benchmarks.
- Let karma do its job - you do your job of building mutually respectful relationships.

### The biggest challenge

However, the biggest challenge Niche consultancies face is that of niche talent at all levels. Direction and thoughts are critical.. Insightful direction is the biggest differentiator between an efficient and respected team that takes good retainers and other teams that always crave for client respect. Somewhere directly related to positioning.

There are no shortcuts to develop such talent. The only way such talent can develop in the PR domain is when good talent from other domain decides to join PR. That could be the biggest opportunity and may be the biggest challenge for the business.

**Ambuj Dixit is a partner at Blaq. He is a business advisor, communications consultant and a leadership coach.**

***“I think there will always be a need for quality content.”***

***- Rajdeep Sardesai***



**Rajdeep Sardesai** is a senior journalist and author of the best-selling book, '2014: The Election that Changed India'. With 28 years of journalistic experience in print and TV, Rajdeep was Managing Editor of both NDTV 24X7 and NDTV India. He was the Founder Editor of the IBN Network 18 which included CNN IBN, IBN 7 and IBN Lokmat. Currently Rajdeep is the Consulting Editor of the India Today group.

*In conversation with Shree Lahiri, he elaborates on the role of the journalist, on taking sides, the social media and more.*



**The role of the journalist has evolved today, how important is reputation for journalists today?**

**Ans:** I think reputation is very important because journalism at the end of the day is dependent on credibility and credibility is something that is built not just in one week or one day, but over several years. So, I think reputation is critical for anyone in public life because credibility is a critical factor for your success.



**This refers to a comment you had made once, that journalists are not under threat from the gun alone. So, do you think that is the scene today or has the threat scene increased for journalists?**

**Ans:** I am among those who believe a journalist in the end is only as free as he or she wants to be. You know, we still live in a remarkably free country so I believe that journalists, don't need to be intimidated. It's just that today there are continuously increasing business and political pressures but, let's not exaggerate and suggest that they have destroyed their soul. So, I think journalism and the soul of journalism has been destroyed by journalists themselves and not by external factors.



**Today journalists have an opinion - is it possible for them *not* to take sides?**

**Ans:** It is possible to not take sides. I think journalists should have opinions but those opinions must be based on facts. So, we need to separate fact and opinion. It is important to believe and remember that facts are sacred; opinions are not. A journalist is perfectly entitled to have opinions and, if they are strong opinions then so be it, but these strong opinions should be based on facts.



**Taking to social media & twitter - trending in twitter does manage to influence even news rooms today. Do you think media tends to focus on such news?**

**Ans:** Yes, I fear they do. I think this is troubling. What troubles me is that farmers' suicides never trend on twitter but because farmers' suicides never trend on twitter but any stupid statement made a politician trends on twitter! So those statements tend to get extra importance while some real issues thereby, don't get the kind of importance they deserve.





**Regarding trolling - it's a totally new experience today to get trolled. Everyone, including celebrities get trolled today, but at the same time, it does give a voice to people to vent to their ideas and thoughts. What is your take on this?**

**Ans:** My own belief is that social media is sadly being misused, when people use anonymity to abuse others. I have no problem with people expressing their opinions. The strength of social media is that it democratises opinion; everyone can air their views. But, if you use the platform for abuse or for running character assassination campaigns, then I have a problem with that kind of a campaign, that kind of behaviour.



**How have PR professionals evolved in the last three decades, as you see it, from a journalist's point of view?**

**Ans:** I think PR professionals, when I started journalism in 1980, were seen as people who essentially tried to plant stories (journalists tended to dismissively look down upon PR professionals). They were seen as people who planted stories, people who were economical with the truth, people who were trying to gloss over the truth. But not anymore! Today, PR professionals are seen as people who can actually provide you with lots of facts, access to information and thereby, are a critical element of the news production process. I think compared to 30 years ago, there's a huge difference today.



**With a race for viewership and TRPs today, what do you think are the chances of survival of quality TV journalism today?**

**Ans:** I think that the space for quality TV journalism is shrinking because of TRP pressures, because of the business model of television. I think we've become *breaking news* channels which often thrive on sensationalism, rather than sense. The space sadly is shrinking, but that doesn't mean that we don't try to preserve it, even if it's a small space, it should be preserved.



**What is the future of journalism?**

**Ans:** I think the future of journalism is the need for quality content. But, it will not be specific to any one platform. We are in the era of multimedia, where you are platform agnostic – you could be on digital, TV, web and print. Content will always survive but what I fear is that everyone is now used to the idea of getting information without paying for it. So, I worry more about the business model of journalism which is under threat. Content will survive - there will always be a need for content. But, are people willing to pay for good content, is my question; because if that doesn't happen, then the business model for journalism is under severe threat.



**One last word from you... with media evolving so much, any advice for aspiring journalists?**

**Ans:** My only advice for aspiring journalists will be to just believe in journalism. This is a unique profession like no other. This is not a 9 to 5 job, so please treat it as a passion not as a profession.







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**Raza Khan**, Bharti Group  
**Seema Ahuja**, Biocon  
**Shravani Dang**, Avantha  
**Sonya Madeira**, Rice Communications  
**Subhayu Mishra**, Standard Chartered

### TECHNIQUE AWARDS

C1	Best Use of Content
C2	Best Use of Creativity and Innovation
C3	Best Use of Event
C4	Best Use of Digital
C5	Best Use of Integrated Communications
C6	Best Use of Public Affairs
C7	Best Management of Crisis
C8	Best Use of Internal Communications
C9	Best New Product Launch
C10	Best Use of Media Relations
C11	Best CSR Campaign

### SUBMISSION DEADLINE

**12TH MAY**  
**and**  
**31ST MAY**

### INDIVIDUAL AWARDS - CONSULTANCY & IN-HOUSE

D1	Hospitality & Travel
D2	Automobile
D3	Lifestyle, Luxury & Sports
D4	Technology & Telecom
D5	Healthcare & Pharma
D6	Consumer Products & Retail
D7	Not for Profit & Associations
D8	Manufacturing
D9	Entertainment & Media
D10	Banking & Financial Services
D11	Services

### SPECIAL AWARDS

E1	In-House Team of the Year - Mid-size (2-4 members)
E2	In-House Team of the Year - Large (5 members or more)
E3	PR Consultancy of the Year - Emerging (INR 5 cr and below)
E4	PR Consultancy of the Year - Mid-size (INR 5 cr to 10 cr)
E5	PR Consultancy of the Year - Large (INR 10 cr to 49 cr)
E6	PR Consultancy Firm of the Year - Giant (INR 50 cr or more)
E7	Life Achievement Award (Decided by the Jury, no entry to be submitted)

**Awards Night on 16th September 2017, Jaipur**

An initiative of



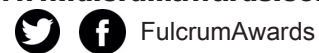
Knowledge Partner



Magazine Partner



[www.fulcrumawards.com](http://www.fulcrumawards.com)



***“The advantages of building a specialty PR firm far outweigh the disadvantages.”***

***- Shree Lahiri***



To my mind, the word niche immediately brings up the phrase ‘tunnel vision’. And tunnel vision conjures up the ever-entertaining fairytale - Alice in Wonderland. Once Alice falls through the rabbit-hole into Wonderland, the reality that surrounds her undergoes a radical change. Alice, a stranger to Wonderland, realises the fantastical nature of the world that surrounds her and gets down to work, to navigate and understand it.

Ever wondered what having an ‘Alice in Wonderland’ vision of the future is? It takes us to a world of fantasy, an imaginary world, with an all-is-going-to-great feeling.

Focusing on finding a niche can create countless business opportunities. Starting in the niche area, may just be your best bet for building a strong foundation for your business.

When it comes to choosing an industry, the decision can be based on a variety of things. Today, you can see specialised PR firms serving sectors like lifestyle, beauty, fashion, healthcare, entertainment, financial, IT and even start-ups.

Once you’ve chosen your industry, specialised within that field and know that you are an expert in the chosen area, you need to focus on becoming the leader in your chosen field.

It is important to understand the customer’s exact needs. Market research may be required to discover useful insights about your customer; then focus on organising it in a meaningful way to create a clear representation of your customer.

Once you exactly know who your customer is, you can begin crafting the marketing messages best suited to reach them. Focus and make sure your marketing message is tailored to your niche and communicate that same message consistently. The language you use to create the message is also important and must be understood by your audience. The best way to build rapport and

establish an emotional connection is to speak the same language as the receiver - so when addressing your niche think and talk like them.

If you plan on doing creative as part of marketing to a niche make sure that creative also resonates with the customers. Create branding and graphic elements based on what you have learnt about your customers.

If you’ve decided to go after more than one niche, you will have to create a strategy that applies directly to each one. The tactics used to reach out to one target audience may be completely different from the tactics used to connect with another.

Still, most experts agree that the advantages of specialisation far outweigh the disadvantages, especially since consistent, quality work and high growth drives most specialty firms.

Success strategies for specialty PR firms are important.

- Before deciding to specialise, consider your competitors and growth opportunities.
- Once you decide to move forward, have a fix on how to position yourself in a given niche, take steps to establish credibility as an expert.
- For new business purposes, cultivate relationships with consultants, as well as business leaders, who may pass along projects and clients better suited to a boutique agency.
- Establish a network of freelancers and other firms.
- Take on other types of businesses at times. It is energising for employees and also ensures that all your eggs aren’t in one basket!

The secret lies in how you build, engage and mobilise consumer audiences and deliver tangible outcomes with creative, insightful campaigns and a super team, keeping an eye on results.

**Shree Lahiri** is Senior Editor at Reputation Today. She has spent several years in the field of communication, being involved in reputation management and public relations.

***“Our motto of Engaging the Intelligent Communicator has found resonance among people like yourself.”***

*- Amith Prabhu*



We managed to do couple of things at the start of the year. First, we listed the leading PR firms by size in an online column and will take that forward to make it an annual feature that records the 50 biggest PR firms in India by size. Second, we institutionalised a celebration of the fraternity with no agenda by creating the *Super Night*. These are tiny attempts at celebrating the profession and creating a new normal in the way Public Relations is done in India.

A year ago we had not imagined a print magazine would take shape in the form of a quarterly and run an entire year. We have not only succeeded in that endeavour but also built a fairly robust online platform which does not focus on News but only on Features and Views. Our motto of Engaging the Intelligent Communicator has found resonance among people like yourself. And we seek your participation in the upcoming conclaves in Mumbai and Bangalore and later in the year at PRAXIS in Jaipur to engage further. The good news on PRAXIS is that like last year, we have six international leaders of large firms who have confirmed participation as keynote speakers.

However, the more exciting news is, that we have managed to go where no one else in the PR business has ventured anywhere in the world. To invest in signing up a Big Four audit firm to be the process validation partner at the Fulcrum Awards - a programme we co-created with PR Moment India. This is a first and we are confident this will ensure due diligence and a process audit in making the Awards the most credible and the most sought after.

Another matter of pride is that the first batch of the PR school is soon completing their theory and gearing up for the internship. Creating the school has been a beautiful struggle and one can look back with delight at an idea whose time had come.

Well, the fifth issue of the magazine focusses on a new breed of firms that are being setup by brave professionals to cater to specific constituencies. The niche firms miss out on getting noticed because they operate within set parameters. We wanted to give them their due by featuring some of them in a cover story. All this falls in line with a larger impetus on creating relevant lists that job seekers and consultancy hunters will find useful in their search for the right firm to connect with. There is a clear-cut focus on doing four things through the year and we invite your participation.

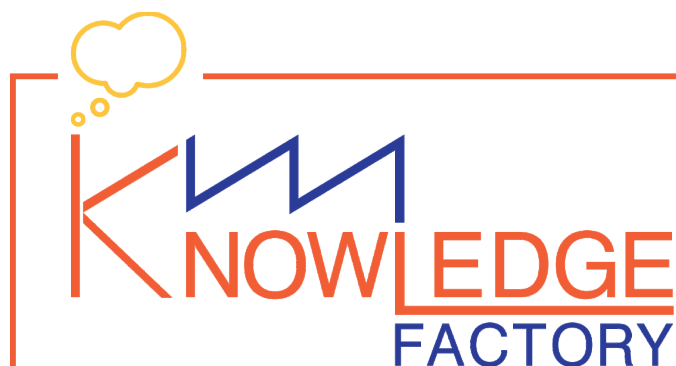
- *If you are a senior corporate communications or consulting professional, please look out for our List of 100 Most Important People and self-nominate yourself into the list.*
- *If you are born on or after 1978 then nominate yourself to be considered for the 40 under Forty - Class of 2017.*
- *If you are part of a corporate communications team that is raring to go then nominate your team to the list of Top 30 Corporate Communications Teams.*
- *If you are a firm with an annual revenue of ₹6 crore and above look out for the ready reckoner of Biggest PR Firms.*

All this is being created with two clear intentions - To enhance the reputation of the profession and to celebrate the people and teams who go the distance.

**Amith Prabhu** is the Founding Dean of the School of COMMunication and REputation (SCoRe) - He is also the Founder of the Promise Foundation - the only organisation from India which is a member of the Global Alliance.



# A TWO - DAY FESTIVAL OF INSIGHTS, IDEAS AND TRIVIA



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## Day 1

### Dealing with a Billion People

How do you address a teeming market with cultural diversities, multiple languages and controversies on many things?

### Why Bharat needs the Bard: Is Shakespeare still Relevant?

400 years after his death, an English classic writer thrives in Bollywood. We need to know why...

### Taking the Classical Arts to the Masses

Are there secrets to wooing philistines to classical music? Do musicians compromise on their art? Are there tricks to boost classical music?

### She and The City

Viewing the city from the eyes of urban women and how city lives impact women today.

### Knowledge Factory Quest on Politics

### Beyond the Dangal: Into a Sports person's mind

What happens on the field and in the body is often in focus. But minds win matches. How do sports people crack that?

### Bartending Workshop: The Art of Mixing Drinks

## Day 2

### Going Green- The Why and The How!

Thoughts and ideas at the intersection of democracy, capitalism, development and ecology

### Romancing the Constitution

We The People, need to know some interesting facts about our political Bible

### Addressing the Urban Crisis

Roads are congested, the air is polluted and more people are moving into cities from rural areas. How are we going to use technologies and techniques to make urbanisation work?

### Future of the Millennial

Talented, idealistic, driven yet casual, they are facing economic explosion and technological disruptions. What are their attitudes? What will happen now?

### Tickling your Mind

### Knowledge Factory Quest on Business

### Know your Beer

Heard of "Beer Snobs"? Those who can tell the source and brew from just a whiff. Here's an opportunity to get to know your beer.





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## Knowledge Catalysts



### GO GREEN - THE WHY AND THE HOW

**Jairam Ramesh**  
Economist, Member of Parliament and Former Union Minister



### ROMANCING THE CONSTITUTION

**Swara Bhaskar**  
Actor & Writer



### DEALING WITH A BILLION PEOPLE

**Suresh Narayanan**  
Chairman and Managing Director, Nestle India



### FUTURE OF THE MILLENNIAL

**Abhijit Bhaduri**  
Author and HR Specialist



### FUTURE OF THE MILLENNIAL

**Anuja Chauhan**  
Advertising Whiz & Writer



### INTO A SPORTSPERSON'S MIND

**Aparna Popat**  
Former National Badminton Champion



### ADDRESSING THE URBAN CRISIS

**Bharati Chaturvedi**  
Environmentalism



### TAKING THE CLASSICAL ARTS TO THE MASSES

**Kaushiki Chakraborty**  
Hindustani Classical Vocalist



### IS SHAKESPEARE STILL RELEVANT?

**Kaval Arora**  
Faculty, Dept. of English, Kirori Mal College, Theatre Commentator and Practitioner



### TICKLING THE MIND

**Papa CJ**  
Stand-up Comic



### TAKING THE CLASSICAL ARTS TO THE MASSES

**Rahul Ram**  
Singer-Composer, Member of Indian Ocean



### ADDRESSING THE URBAN CRISIS

**Santosh Desai**  
Columnist and CEO Future Brands



### DEALING WITH A BILLION PEOPLE

**Vijay Shekhar Sharma**  
CEO PayTm



### IS SHAKESPEARE STILL RELEVANT?

**V. S. Ravi**  
ex Principal Secretary, Home



### SHE AND THE CITY

**Vandana Vasudevan**  
Author and Writer on Urban life



## QUEST



### QUEST ON POLITICS

**Rajdeep Sardesai**



### QUEST ON BUSINESS

**Gaurav Sri Krishna**

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