

87% of PR executives believe the term “public relations” does not describe their future

 By [Daniel Munslow](#) 19 Apr 2017

The USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (CPR) has released key findings from its second annual Global Communications Report (GCR17), a comprehensive survey of public relations executives from around the world.



For the first time ever, the report also features insights from almost 700 public relations and communication students, along with in-house marketing executives.

The term ‘public relations’

87% of public relations executives believe the term “public relations” won’t accurately describe the work they will be doing in five years’ time. Almost half believe PR needs to be more broadly defined, while the rest think the name should be changed. Interestingly, students are far more comfortable with the current terminology than seasoned pros. Fewer than 20% think the name needs to be changed and 85% are relatively comfortable explaining it. This poses interesting questions about the readiness of students coming into the industry in the coming years, as the landscape changes and traditional PR is evolving into a more integrated business communication discipline.

Trends

When it comes to trends that will be most important over the next five years, digital storytelling ranked above all others (88%), followed by social listening (82%), social purpose (71%) and big data. The combination of these items illustrates the rapid change that the industry has seen in recent times and the increasing need for agility and change among professionals.

This survey was conducted in February 2017, and already fake news and Donald Trump were ranked in the top 20 trends, coming in at 36% and 25% respectively. This means, 1 out of 3 communication professionals believe fake news is a trend that needs attention in terms of how to combat situations that may arise. Also, Donald Trump was selected as a trend, given various communication fundamentals that have emerged since his campaign and journey to the White House.

PESO

The differentiation between paid and earned content is another topic tackled in this year’s report. Aligned with the findings of the 2016 report, earned media will continue to decline as a source of PR agency revenue, while paid, shared and owned media will increase. Similarly, in-house executives predict that over the next five years they will devote more resources to owned channels than to earned channels. Supporting that

direction, 60% of all PR executives believe that branded content and influencer marketing, which are both primarily paid, will be important trends in the next five years.

Measurement

Respondents this year were asked how they felt public relations could increase its value inside the organisation. Interestingly, measurement of results was not their top choice (34%). Overwhelmingly, they selected demonstrating how PR achieves business objectives (77%). Of course, this requires measurement, but a much more sophisticated variety that focuses on less-tangible variables like brand reputation and purchase intent; i.e. are we driving output or outcome.

Agency relationships

In 2017, the 5-year average growth rates for PR agencies (30%) and communications departments (12%) were very slightly down from last year. Agency leaders are much more optimistic than in-house executives. Almost all (92%) of agency executives predict some growth in the next five years, while only 70% of in-house communicators predict an increase. In other words, agencies are predicting more growth than the corporates will likely provide.

At the same time, the number of clients who rely on a single agency of record continues to decline to below 20%. 38% of in-house PR executives say they will use more agencies in the next 5 years, while 34% of in-house marketers say they will use less agencies of record.

Overall, the survey raises many questions as to what the underlying factors are that are setting some of these trends, and importantly, how communication professionals – and agencies - will manage not only the change but also what is fast becoming the new norm.

About the Global Communications Report

The annual Global Communications Report is conducted by USC Center for Public Relations, in conjunction with The Holmes Report, the Arthur W. Page Society, the Institute for Public Relations, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, ICCO, the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, the PR Council, PRCA, the Worldcom PR Group, PRSSA and PRSA. It is designed to provide insight into the evolution of the global communications industry by analyzing emerging trends.

** Daniel Munslow is a member of the international advisory board for the Global Communications Report (GCR17)*

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