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INFLUENCERS

Influencers Cement Their Importance and ROI, Though Payment and Other Details Remain Fluid

Influencers are so new to communications and marketing that the term still lacks a clear definition. The general public's image of an influencer is a celebrity endorser. But is a journalist at an established publication also an influencer?

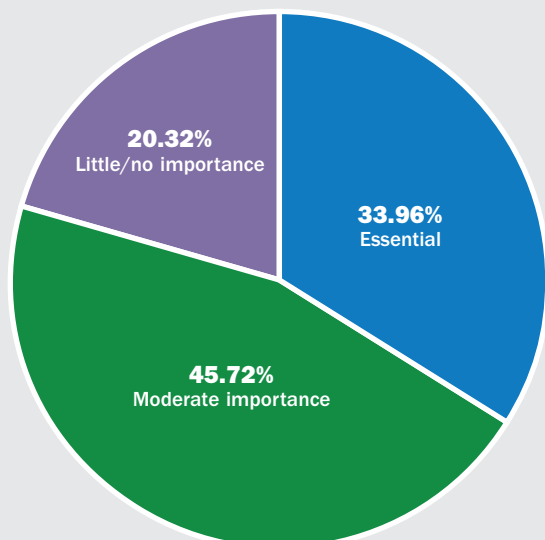
Is an independent blogger an influencer? Can an employee of your company be an influencer? What about your CEO?

And a consultant who receives payment from several companies in your industry—is that person an influencer?

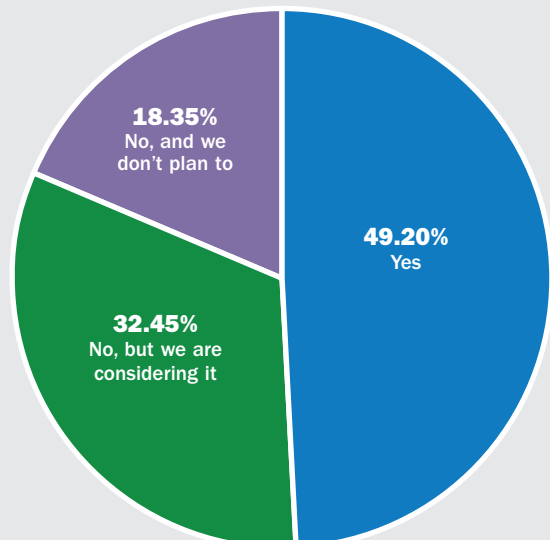
Is the definition of an influencer restricted to someone with a few million social followers on **YouTube** or **Instagram**? What about a person who has relatively few but intensely loyal followers? Is that person an influencer?

There are also questions concerning payment. Is it ethical for an influencer to receive money for content they produce? Or does that compromise the influencer's integrity? What about if she refuses to accept money but receives goods and

1 How critical are influencers to your PR/Communications success?



2 Are you currently using influencers to get your brand story/key messages out?



Source: PR News and Meltwater Survey, Q4, 2018

Continued on page 2



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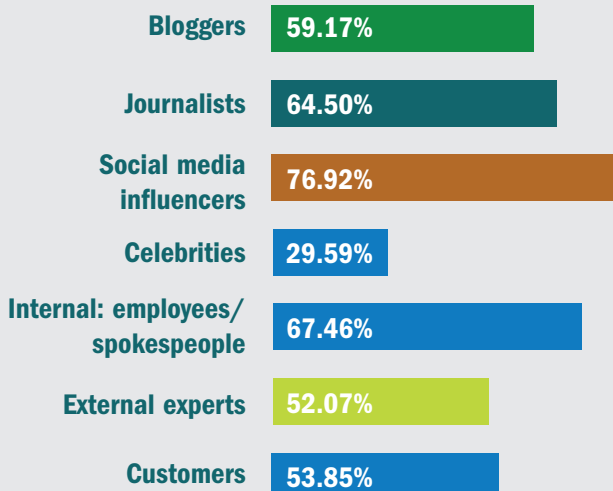
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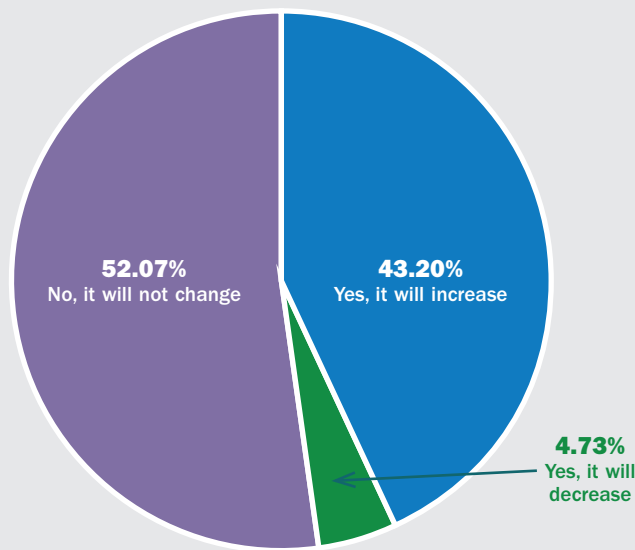
Continued from page 1

49% of Respondents Use Influencers

3 Which influencer types do you use to get your brand story/key messages out? (Check all that apply.)



4 In the coming year do you project your influencer budget will change?



services or free trips in exchange for content?

It's clear at this early period in the evolution of influencers, definitional questions remain. More more certain, though, is the ability to create and distribute content on social media has cemented influencers' importance.

This is evident in a new survey from PR News and Meltwater, a media intelligence company. Conducted during Q4 2018, the far-ranging sur-

vey received nearly 400 responses from U.S.-based PR professionals.

In addition to gauging the importance of influencers to marketing and communications, the survey asks how and why brands are using influencers, how much (if anything) brands pay them, and what issues arise from their use.

STRONG RATE OF USE

Not long ago the longevity of influencer marketing and communications was questionable. Not anymore.

As you can see from chart 2, an overwhelming majority (81 percent) of the survey respondents indicate they are either using influencers or are considering it. Nearly half those surveyed (49 percent) say they currently use influencers.

"It's heartening that [more than] 80 percent of PR professionals find influencers important to their success," says Danica Kombol, CEO at **Everywhere Agency**. "This was certainly not the case a few years ago."

[Note: Those whose response was that they don't use influencers were asked to answer a series of questions about how they *might* deploy influencers if their companies decided to do so (see chart 12). PR News and Meltwater will release the complete survey later this month. It will contain data about those who use influencers and those who do not currently use them.]

Just 18 percent say that they are not using influencers and have no plans to do so (chart 2).

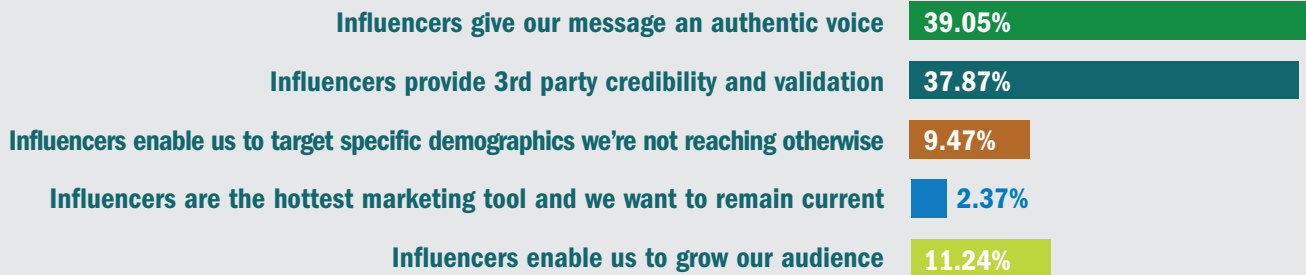
Similarly, just 20 percent say influencers are of "little or no importance" to their brand or organization's PR and communications success (chart 1).

Krista Todd, VP, global communications at **Logitech**, which manufactures peripherals for personal computers and mobile devices, said she was surprised that even 20 percent of those surveyed hadn't yet jumped on the influencer bandwagon. "I am surprised that number is so high," she says. "I suspect that will decline next year to 10 percent or less" soon.

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5

What is the main reason your brand uses influencers?



6

How do you use influencers? (Check all that apply.)



"Influencer relations is not going away," she says. "There is relevance in influencer relations for B2C and B2B companies and across vertical industries."

The definition of influencers is something **Nicole Dye-Anderson**, AVP, media relations at **Barclays**, the bank and financial services company, has thought much about.



Danica Kombol
Founder,
Everywhere
Agency

"With newsrooms shrinking, more and more journalists are looking to those I consider media influencers as experts." For her, media influencers are not traditional reporters, but are conduits to them.

"I reach out to media influencers... and educate them about my products because I know journalists will contact them" as sources of credible information when they're writing stories.

Media influencers, she says, also have their own following. She'll pitch material to them so they can create content for those followers. "They aren't under the same constraints

as traditional media," she adds, so she adjusts her pitches. For example, traditional journalists often won't spare three days to attend an event; she's found influencers will.

Though media influencers are "integral" to her work, she continues to pitch journalists, too. "It's like double dipping."

GOOD FINANCIALS

Another indication of influencers' increasing acceptance is budget. A whopping 95 percent of survey respondents said spending plans for influencers will either rise (43 percent) or remain steady (52 percent) in the year ahead (chart 4).

It's clear why brands continue to spend for influencers: they believe it's worth the money. The majority (70 percent) say their companies' use of influencers has delivered a positive ROI or a break-even result (chart 9).

But 30 percent of those surveyed say they don't know if influencers were a good or bad investment. This seems to indicate a lack of concern for measurement. It could also reflect an inability to know how best to measure influencers' ROI.

Continued on page 4



2019 Edition: Social Media Guidebook

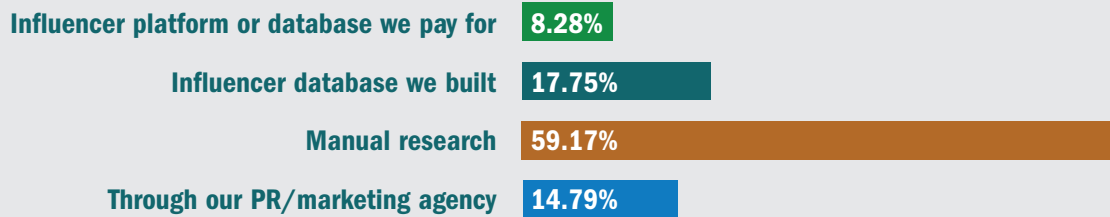
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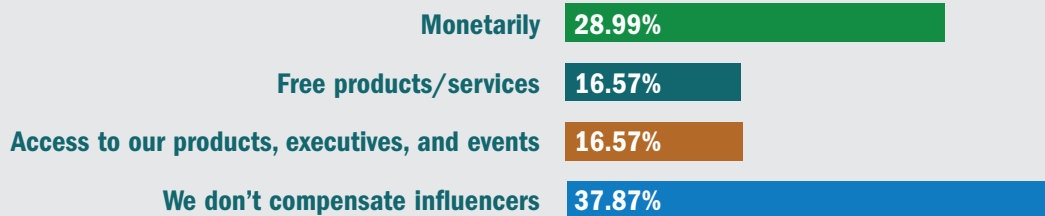


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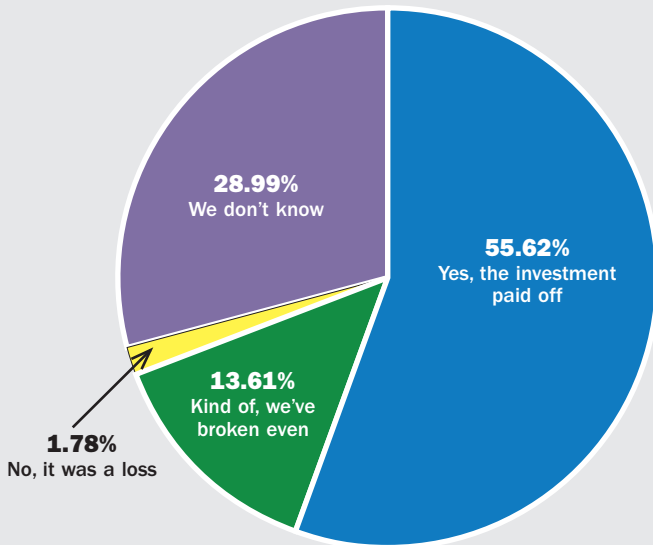
7 What is the primary way you uncover/identify relevant influencers?



8 How do you compensate influencers?



9 Have the influencers you've used delivered ROI?



This response is in contrast to the data in chart 10, where just 8 percent said they don't measure influencers' impact. The responses for measurement are strong in this chart.

More concern about ROI is seen in chart 11, however, where 34 percent said their biggest issue with influencers is "the ability to prove ROI."

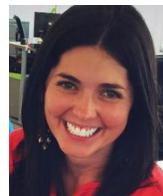
Says Todd, "The ability to prove ROI is still one of the biggest challenges the industry faces. We need to make it easy to measure what matters."

To make it easier to measure, establish goals at the start of an effort. "If the goal is awareness, then measure reach and impressions," she says. "If your goal is engagement then measure engagement totals and engagement

rates." And measure results on both influencer channels and on your owned channels. "You'll identify trends for each and they will vary as you both have different audiences," she says.

TO COMPENSATE OR NOT?

Also in the area of finance, compensation of influencers is an open question. As you can see in chart 8, 29 percent of respondents pay influencers with money, and 38 percent do not compensate them in any way. The remaining respondents offer influencers either free products/services or access to products and executives.



Krista Todd
VP Global Communications
Logitech

This seems to signal a disconnect. If influencers are as important to communications and marketing as this survey indicates, it seems incongruous not to compensate them.

"It's disappointing that a full 40 percent are not compensating influencers, though I realize the pay-to-play model is anathema" to communicators, Kombol says. She points out, however, that **Federal Trade Commission** rules for influencers disclosing sponsorship arrangements offer a "clear and ethical path toward compensation."

Dye-Anderson is upbeat about the responses in chart 8. "It should be a mix" since communicators have various needs. Communicators who oversee the social media portion of their brand need and use celebrity influencers should pay them, she says.

When Barclays recently launched a credit card with a brand in Hawaii, she created "experiences" for media influencers, where Barclays arranged for their airfare, hotel, board and various experiences it created for them. Dye-Anderson does not pay media influencers outright.

But she admits "times are changing and this is people's

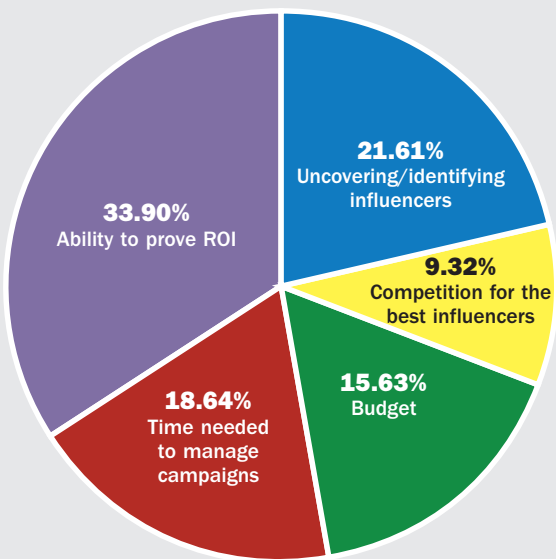
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How do you measure the impact of influencers?



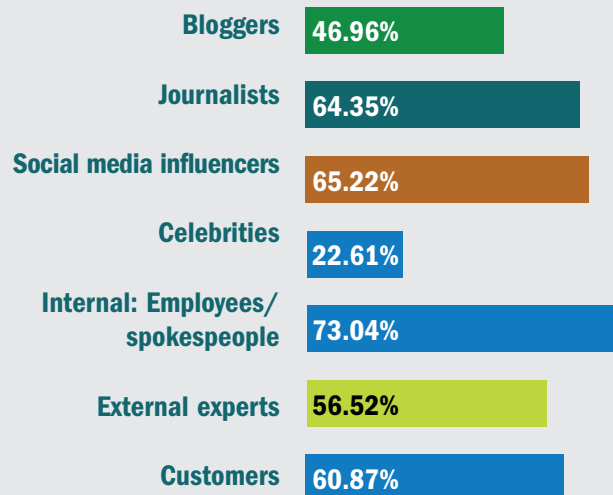
11

What is your biggest challenge with the rise of influencers in communications?



12

Which influencer types would you choose to get your brand story/key messages out? (Check all that apply.)



bread and butter, so we have to figure out the right mix where they can maintain credibility and integrity.”

For Todd, “The lack of compensation surprised me...this is business for influencers...it’s important to put an official agreement in place with details and commitments from both sides, including compensation.” She believes more companies eventually will soon begin paying influencers.

AUTHENTICITY AND VALIDATION

The survey also examines why brands use influencers. Common knowledge says brands desire to reach younger audiences. One way to do so is to engage the youth demographic where it lives.

Nearly half of teens (45 percent) tell the **Pew Research Center** they are online “almost constantly.”

And with video an increasing phenomenon (**YouTube** says

Continued on page 6

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it has nearly 2 billion monthly active users) and Gen Z (those born from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s) consuming 23 hours per week of video, it seems natural that brands would turn to influencers to appeal to the youth demographic. In fact, the number of influencers earning six figures annually via YouTube grew 40 percent in 2018.

THE YOUTHFUL DEMO?

Our survey (see chart 5), however, shows influencers' ability to provide brands with an "authentic voice" (40 percent) and "third-party" credibility and validation (38 percent) are the main reasons they deploy influencers.



Nicole Dye-Anderson
AVP, Media Relations
Barclays

Using influencers to attract hard-to-get demographics (9 percent) and "grow[ing] our audience" (11 percent) were far less important to our survey participants.

As Todd of Logitech says, "'Bringing third-party credibility' and 'an authentic voice to your brand' resonated with me." The "recipe for success," she adds, is to match authenticity and credibility "with guidelines [for influencers] to create content that will resonate with audiences."

THE DEFINITION OF INFLUENCERS

The survey also asks about the kinds of influencers brands and organizations use. As you can see in chart 3, at least half the respondents who say they use influencers indicate bloggers, journalists, social media influencers, external experts and even customers are examples of what they consider useful influencers.

Note the small response to celebrities. For Todd, industry experts "are the new celebrities...that's why celebrity influencers are down and social influencers are increasing."

The survey shows there are many definitions of influencers. Chart 12 addresses this question, where respondents whose companies don't yet use influencers weigh in on the issue. As you can see, the responses are similar to those in chart 3, whose companies use influencers.

ARE EMPLOYEES INFLUENCERS?

Kombol and Todd commented on the large number of participants (67 percent) who said their brands and organizations rely on employee influencers and spokespeople. "We definitely are seeing a trend where large companies are realizing their employees are among their best brand advocates," Kombol says. "I think this signals a trend where we'll see more corporations taking steps to build out an internal employee advocacy program."

Todd adds, "I am happy to see so many respondents say they would use employees as influencers. This is so important and sometimes overlooked...employees are the most authentic brand ambassador influencers."

At Logitech, for example, staff are encouraged to use an employee hashtag, #Logilife. The company, Todd said, "creates campaigns to drive excitement around" the hashtag.

"We also rolled out **LinkedIn Elevate**, an employee ambassador tool that makes it easy for employees to share content with their communities." A side benefit is the "excitement" this adds to the narrative about working at Logitech.

Dye-Anderson of Barclays, however, is among those who don't consider staff to be influencers. "Employees have a message to transmit," she says, and concedes brand ambassadors who also are employees "could be considered influencers, but not in a media relations sense...I look at media influencers as the new media."

And she has requirements. In addition to their industry expertise, they must be unbiased. "The minute they're not, they're of no use to me since traditional media won't reach out to them."

While the definition of influencer remains open, it's clear influencer marketing has pushed communicators to embrace social media, in part so they can understand their brand's presence and the influencers who help shape it. ■

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TRUST

Public Trusts 'My Employer' to Lead Social and Economic Change, Edelman Barometer Shows

Despite the difficulties CEOs and brands experienced in 2018, they emerged victorious in the 2019 **Edelman Trust Barometer**, released late last month. The public trusts businesses and CEOs most to right society's ship. Trust, the survey says, shifted "profoundly" in 2018; "my employer" now is the institution people trust most.

As was the case in the 2018 report, the 2019 survey of more than 33,000 people in 27 countries found trust declining in traditional figures of authority and institutions.

My employer (75 percent) is significantly more trusted than NGOs (57 percent), business (56 percent), government (48 percent) and media (47 percent).

Of interest to communicators, 76 percent of people surveyed say they want CEOs to lead the charge on social and economic change. 71 percent of employees believe it's "critically important" for "my CEO" to respond to challenging times. Brands can be profitable as well as change agents, 73 percent believe. ■

How Mastercard Reached a Priceless Decision to Change its Logo and Go Wordless

When you're a well-known brand it seems just a glance at your logo and nearly everyone knows who you are. Some companies are so well known, they can dispense with words.

You don't need the word "**Nike**" plastered on your workout togs. All that's required to know who created your gym gear is that upward swoosh. A white apple with a bite taken from its right side reveals who built your laptop. Ditto your coffee, where a green-and-white mermaid with a star-topped crown on her head makes it obvious where you buy your drink.

Early last month at **CES**, a financial services brand that describes itself as "a technology company in the global payments business," joined the league of wordless logos. The interlocking yellow and red circles took to a stage in Vegas as soloists and were immediately recognizable. At that moment the word "**Mastercard**," which, for the record, not long ago was "MasterCard," became obsolete.

FOOLS RUSH IN

Like everything a 53-year-old, "priceless" brand does, a logo change is best approached with care and consideration. It's the same for communicating about it, **Christine Elliott**, Mastercard's EVP of global communications, tells us in an interview. "We're being pretty strategic about it," she says.

With thousands of releases dropping at CES, the chances of breaking through were small. As a result, her team issued a release with a simple headline that it thought was unusual enough to entice journalists' CES-weary eyeballs: "Mastercard Evolves Its Brand Mark by Dropping its Name." It worked.

More important, she says, those words found their way into media headers. **AP's** headline: "No words: Mastercard to drop its name from logo."

After the release, Mastercard worked fast to get out the word about going wordless. First use of the new logo was at last month's **Australian Open** tennis tournament.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Internally, Elliott says employees had "an overwhelming response" [to the wordless logo]...they're excited to change their email signature" and business cards. "We're thinking about interesting ways to show the [logo] at our locations."

Mastercard also is handling internal communications strategically. Prior to the change, employees were polled about

their opinions and asked to submit comments. They were kept informed via Mastercard's intranet and electronic billboards. Employees are "sharing this story" more than past stories, Elliott says.

In terms of measuring the effort overall, when we spoke with Elliott, the new logo was barely two weeks old and measurement was mostly anecdotal, including positive reviews from media. There also was good feedback from the design community and retailers, who, during a January conference in NY about the future of retail, discussed "how much more a symbol will be integrated into the way that commerce operates...you get that visceral response from an image...versus the written word" in B2B, B2C and "obviously our sponsorship properties."

As the interlocking circles are integrated into Mastercard's signage, "excitement will be a benchmark for us."

RESEARCH FIRST

As we noted, Mastercard was deliberate about going wordless. "It was one of the biggest announcements in our history...so it was not taken lightly." Accordingly, global research preceded the move. "The intent was to ensure that...the public felt" the logo was iconic and recognizable sans words.

Raja Rajamannar, chief marketing and communication officer, says more than 80% of those surveyed "spontaneously recogniz[ed]" the interlocking circles. "We felt ready to take this next step in our brand evolution."

Michelle Lee, a graphic designer at **Venngage**, says Mastercard made the right move. "A mistake many brands make is changing their logo without researching it first," she says. Another mistake, she says, is going wordless without being sure your logo is recognizable. She also applauds Mastercard's move in 2016 to "set the stage" for the wordless logo, moving the word Mastercard under the circles (see graphic).

WHY CHANGE?

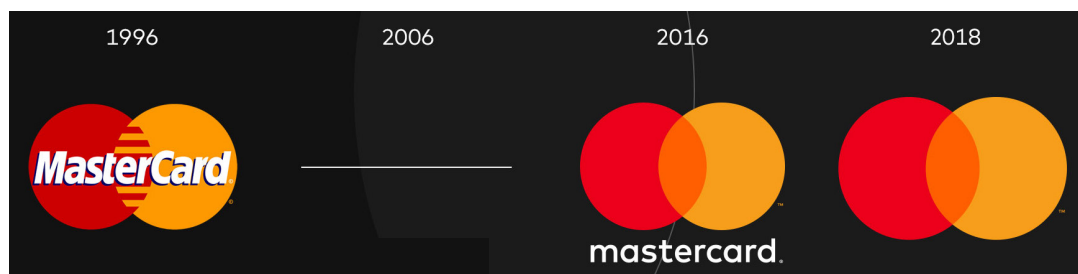
The big question, of course, is why undertake a logo change? The cost can be enormous. Elliott concedes, but says, "We are being very thoughtful" about "how we roll it out." It will be done in stages across Mastercard properties.

But why make the change at all? "Today, a picture is worth a thousand words," Elliott says. "We thought those interlocking circles are iconic...what better way is there to communicate

[being at the nexus of technology and commerce] than to let them speak for themselves?"

Adds Rajamannar, "Re-invention in the digital age calls for modern simplicity." ■

CONTACT: dan.kloeffler@ketchum.com



Wordless Revolution: Mastercard set the stage for its wordless logo with its 2016 design. Source: Mastercard

Planning, Practice and Listening Software Top Communicators' Priorities for Managing Crises

Editor's Note: Crisis. Not only is it often near the top of a communicator's mind, it's also the focus of PR News' Crisis Summit in Miami Beach later this month. We posed our monthly roundtable question to several of that event's speakers. Our question: What two areas should communicators invest in so they can manage future PR crises?

Their edited responses centered on investments in crisis preparation and practice, as well as top-notch monitoring technology. Speed in responding to crisis was another common thread.

Following this roundtable, on page 10, is a chart listing our picks of 2018's top PR crises. The common themes, as in 2017, were mismanagement and faulty corporate culture.

[Note: Your paid subscription to PR News entitles you to a 33 percent discount on all PR News events and webinars. Those interested in attending the PR News Crisis Summit, Feb 27-28 in Miami Beach, please contact: cbrault@accessintel.com]



Errol Cockfield
SVP, Communications
MSNBC

The disruptive and 24/7 nature of the traditional and online media landscapes is so supercharged and challenging that communications practitioners must invest first in a baseline and then an ongoing assessment of their crisis preparedness. This has to be paired with continued identification of vulnerability areas they and industry peers face.

Once that assessment is made, communicators need to convince their organizations to create a crisis response unit and conduct regular tabletop training sessions. This strengthens muscle memory and establishes a work rhythm that can be activated at a moment's notice with the aid of technology.



Nigel Glennie
VP, Corporate Communications
Hilton

Whether your organization is big or small, it's important to invest time understanding your risk profile. There are incidents that every company should be prepared to manage, such as a cyber-breach or a natural disaster, but also risks that are unique to an industry or company. Understanding these is critical to having the right listening tools, communication policies, templates, training and response plans.

I also recommend investing time thinking about your team's communication and collaboration tools. This is part process, part technology, and all about making sure the right

“ **Don't underestimate the value of trust. Beyond crisis simulation exercises a foundational level of trust must be built among team members.**

-Marisa Salcines Lead, Global Relations Equifax Inc. ”

people know when and how to connect. At Hilton, communicators support a 24/7 business with 5,600 hotels in 113 countries. We focus on tools that allow us to maintain connections and share expertise across time zones.



Marisa Salcines
Lead, Global University Relations
Technology and Cybersecurity
Equifax Inc.

When it comes to crisis communications, put all bets on the team—on your people. Success and failure are equally valuable. Hire team members with mixed crisis experience and backgrounds; those who've stumbled and made a misstep may even prove more strategic than those who've always succeeded. Having both provides balance and a better approach.

Don't underestimate the value of trust. Beyond the typical crisis simulation exercises a foundational level of trust must be built among team members. Create a monthly/quarterly cadence that fosters this culture; build this and the rest will fall into place, especially when PR mayhem comes calling.



Rebecca Rose
Director of Marketing & Communications
Everglades Foundation

Invest in great media monitoring and social listening software to stay on top of the pulse of what people are saying about your brand, good or bad. This can help you stay on top of and mediate potential issues before they get worse.

Recruit someone with crisis communications experience, grace under pressure and political savvy. Having the right person leading your crisis team is invaluable, given the situation often is high-pressure, high-visibility and stressful.



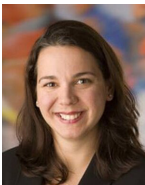
Kena Lewis
Director, Public Affairs & Media Relations
External Relations
Orlando Health

I cannot express enough the importance of having a crisis process. You don't need to have every detail worked out, but it's critical to identify some of the basics. For example: Where would your team meet during a crisis? Who will serve as the spokesperson? Who will be the liaisons with various publics, including clients, customers, emergency personnel, law enforcement, elected officials and of course, the press? Once you have a process, the next thing is practice. You don't have to run a full-fledged exercise, but you should at least run a few tabletop exercises.



Deborah Hileman
President/CEO
Institute for Crisis Management

Communicators must stay current with technology, especially the platforms designed for crisis management and communication. Investing in these tools makes the task of reaching the right stakeholders quickly much easier. It also is imperative that communicators have a deep understanding of their company and industry. Focus on being a businessperson first and a communicator second to earn the respect of executives and become a powerful advocate for crisis planning and preparedness.



Jennifer Butler
VP, Media Relations, Corporate Communications
Herbalife Nutrition

Practice. Practice. Practice. As we know, with crisis it isn't about if, it's about when. You can invest in all the tools and technologies in the world, but if you aren't prepared, you won't put them to good use. So, invest in training and in running scenarios. Again, we know the best time to prepare for a crisis is when there isn't one happening.

Part of this is investing in a comprehensive crisis manual that includes roles/responsibilities, contact lists, checklists, prepared statements, press releases and internal communications for a variety of potential issues as well as how to distribute them to your target audiences. Potential crises need to be role-played, and the manual needs to be constantly updated and improved based on learnings from the scenarios.



Kevin Elliott
Managing Director
Head, U.S. Risk and Crisis
Communication Practice
Hill + Knowlton Strategies

Communication is ever-evolving and companies should continually be asking, "What should we be doing differently?"

“ **Going fast is a start, but it won't matter if your team lacks the muscle memory to move quickly and responsibly.**

-Kevin Elliott, Partner,
Crisis Lead, Hill + Knowlton Strategies ”

With incident and crisis management and planning, we can boil it down simply: invest in the capacity for speed and real preparedness.

Communication moves faster and faster. When an incident arises, organizations need to be able to respond quickly and responsibly. They need to be in the conversation from the start. This means that you need to know the risks, and have the capability and actual capacity to communicate quickly. That is both process and tools. The best tools allow you to see all the risks, even those you didn't know existed.

Going fast is a start, but that doesn't matter if your team isn't well-prepared with the muscle memory to move quickly and responsibly. Companies are judged on how they respond to an issue—a quality response can turn an incident into a positive. That happens only if a company is doing regular and rigorous training, honing its ability to respond when an incident arises.



Christine DiBartolo
Senior Managing Director
Americas Head, Corporate Reputation Practice
FTI Consulting

A crisis by its very nature is unpredictable. There is so much you can't control. I focus on what I can control and prepare for in advance.

Think Ahead: Try to develop realistic scenarios for labor issues, natural disasters or product recalls and outline potential responses.

Who's Who? Outlining roles and responsibilities in advance will help smooth information flow and decision making. A decision tree that lays out who will engage in various scenarios is key. Along with this you need to make clear distinctions between what is an incident, an issue and a crisis. Establish a clear escalation process to define levels of risk and appropriate responses.

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THE TOP CRISES OF 2018

Wells Fargo

Operations, Exec Dismissal, Mismanagement: Crisis continued from problems first highlighted in 2016; Consumer Protection board fines Wells \$1 billion in April over auto lending and mortgage scandals; 2016 bogus card scandal continues as two op execs 'retire;' law suits pending;



CBS-Moonves

Exec Dismissal, Culture, Mismanagement: Longtime chief Moonves accused of multiple sexual harassment incidents; board drags feet and then allows Moonves to remain in job while investigation is underway; Moonves pushed out and loses golden parachute; law suits pending, including one from Moonves against CBS;



MSU-USA Gymnastics-US Olympic Committee

Exec Dismissal, Culture, Mismanagement: Total mess for 3 organizations over Nassar sexual harassment incidents that occurred for decades; key execs at USOC, USAG and Michigan State ousted; crisis continues into 2019; additional law suits pending;



U of Maryland McNair Death

Operations, Exec Dismissal, Mismanagement: School keeps death of football player during spring workout quiet until ESPN blows its cover; state board assumes control over investigation and downplays resulting report, urging football coach be retained; school president defies board and fires coach; parents of deceased player set to bring lawsuit;



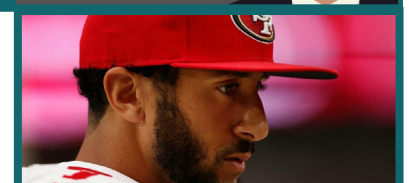
Tesla-Musk

CEO Misbehavior: CEO/board chair Musk goes off script on social media, tweets false financial claims, smokes pot during podcast and claims he's exhausted; SEC whacks Musk's actions; board moves slowly, though it eventually removes Musk as board chair and monitors his tweets;



Nike

Culture, Exec Dismissal, Mismanagement: Most will call 2018 a win for Nike, but Kaepernick deal papers over serious allegations from female employees against company re sexual harassment, unequal pay, general bro culture; Nike barely acknowledges female employee revolt, though 6 execs dismissed in its wake; lawsuits pending;



Facebook

Culture, Mismanagement, Operations: Take your pick, Facebook did it all in 2018 in terms of crisis, from data breaches, alleged cover-ups, sexual harassment, unethical lobbying and PR practices; late Nov. NY Times article exposes inner workings of data cover-up, lobbying and mismanagement, prompts calls for removal of Zuckerberg and Sandberg, though no evidence such threats are taken seriously; likely to result in heavy federal regulation of Facebook; consumer distrust rises, though Facebook revenue continues to surge and user levels aren't significantly impacted, though brand becomes poster child for public mistrust of big tech;



Google

Culture, Mismanagement, Operations: When a brand touts its open culture it raises the bar on itself; general unrest results in 20,000 Google workers worldwide walking out in November over sexual harassment practices and other issues, including company's work on behalf of China; CEO Pichai waffles on China, but says he supports walkout, though Jan. 2019 story alleges Google lawyers are blocking employees from organizing using office email; lawsuits pending; Google also poo-poo's large data breaches involving Google+, reporting the breach in Nov., nearly 7 months after it occurred as it says it will close Google+;



Catholic Church

Culture, Mismanagement, Dismissals: Summer report from PA attorney general details years of sexual harassment inside the church; U.S. bishops respond promptly, eventually institute hotline and other procedures; Vatican moves slower, some say too timidly, though Pope dismisses multiple church leaders around the globe and condemns sexual crimes; Vatican halts U.S. bishops from creating additional policies late in 2018, says Feb 2019 Vatican meeting will set global policy; lawsuits pending



Source: PR News research and media reports

Making It Work: When Reporting to Legal Becomes an Advantage for PR Professionals

[Editor's Note: PR professionals work in a variety of reporting arrangements. Some PR departments report to the CEO. Other communications teams report into marketing. PR is subsumed under external or government affairs in other organizations. In this first article in a series, we find communications reporting to the general counsel. Please contact our editor, sarenstein@accessintel.com, with reporting arrangements you'd like us to profile.]



Lorri Christou
VP, External
Communications
and PR
Choice Hotels

It's a common refrain among communicators, particularly if they're discussing crisis communications. When a crisis response lacks an apologetic tone, is filled with corporate jargon or isn't forthcoming, communicators often speculate that a lawyer, not a communicator, wrote it.

A prevailing belief is that there's a built-in animosity between the legal and communications teams. This is ironic, of course, since legal and communications have the same goal: to protect the brand.

There are legitimate reasons for communicators and legal to be at odds. Legal prefers staying out of the limelight. Preventing stories is their job, not creating them.

Lorri Christou is VP, external communications and PR, at **Choice Hotels**, a hospitality franchisor based in Rockville, MD. Publicly traded, the 80-year-old company is one of the world's largest hotel chains, owning brands like **Quality Inn**, **Cambria Hotels** and **Clarion Hotels**. In 2018, it franchised nearly 7,000 properties in 40 countries and territories.

A GREAT RELATIONSHIP

A veteran communicator, Christou reports to the General Counsel's (GC) office. She says she has "a great relationship" with her boss. "I like her as a person," Christou said.

From a professional perspective, Christou says the GC's legal prowess has "helped me do my job better."

Since Choice Hotels is a franchisor, as opposed to the owner of individual hotels, precise communications are required during a crisis. Her relationship and regular collaboration with the GC have honed Christou's skill in creating such communications. This, she feels, is a distinct advantage. "It helps me craft communications that are more legally sound," she says.

In addition, Christou has benefitted from observing the legal thought process. "Lawyers do a thorough job of preparing and consider an issue from many angles" before they enter a situation. These qualities have rubbed off on Christou. They have made her "a more a strategic communications professional."

"As trained advisors, GCs are equipped to help communicators think through options, weigh trade-offs and complicat-

ing factors and make intelligent decisions," **Jo London** and **Jim Moorhead**, senior PR pros at **APCO Worldwide** wrote in *PR News* last August.

Christou says the GC has learned from her, too. "She appreciates the way I use words to position things...how I supply context and color" as opposed to reciting facts coldly. In short, the GC appreciates her storytelling abilities.

DIGITAL CREATES A PARTNERSHIP



Elisa D'Amico
Partner
K&L Gates LLP

Elisa D'Amico, a partner at law firm **K&L Gates, LLP**, agrees that a strong relationship between legal and communications benefits brands and organizations. She sees this partnership as a necessity in a digital world, particularly during a PR crisis.

"Information is moving so quickly, if a company doesn't respond" rapidly when warranted, it risks alienating customers and other stakeholders, she said.

Ignoring or covering up a crisis will not make it go away. While there may be certain situations that warrant a conservative approach to crisis response, in today's social media-fueled world, companies generally lack the luxury of waiting to respond, D'Amico says. The best course of action often is to quickly triage and evaluate the situation, and respond publicly. Having legal involved will ensure that the company's response contemplates potential legal ramifications from any company statement, she says.

With legal and communications "in the same room" during a crisis, she said, legal can "pivot quickly...and bless PR's work." PR can do the same for legal.

Besides protecting the brand, legal and communications share at least one other element—both work throughout the enterprise. As a result, they must be adept at building relationships in all parts of a company. Perhaps this explains an advantage of the PR-GC reporting structure. An example is how Christou and the GC's office revised Choice Hotels' press release process.

When Christou arrived at Choice Hotels, at least four sets of eyes from the GC's office were needed to approve a release. Christou and her legal colleagues streamlined the process.

They were able to do so, she says, "because they have a relationship with me...they trust me and know that I respect their legal perspective...I'm part of their team." She adds, this relationship "helps us get things done...and leads to quicker approvals." This smoothly functioning situation belies the enmity that exists, perceived or actual, between some legal and communications teams. ■

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A Novel Approach to Crisis Management: Focus on Internal and External Factors



[Editor's Note: Recently one of our staff was searching for a good read on **Amazon** and came across “Spin,” a novel with a PR crisis at the center of its plot. The author, **Jim Lindheim**, was practicing the adage, “Write what you know.” A former chairman of **Burson-Marsteller**, Lindheim worked on more than a few PR crises during his long career. For this crisis edition of PR News we asked him to provide a hybrid column. The first part uses elements from his novel’s fictional PR crisis to provide tips on the best practices. The second part offers more crisis tips from years in the trenches.]

PART I: THE SETUP

The company is in a crisis. Key executives gather around the boardroom table for a strategy session, but the conversation is far from strategic.

Rather than identifying short- and long-term objectives, clarifying messages and deciding on a plan of action, a lawyer is huddled over his tablet marking up misstatements in the media, the board chair is evading responsibility, the CEO is screaming at the consultant for the bad press the company is getting, and the senior PR executive is told she should order more coffee.

If this sounds ridiculous, then you haven’t been inside a crisis.

THE BASIC RULES OF CRISIS RESPONSE

Most of the speeches, articles and books about crisis management and crisis communications talk about rules for a proper response. The basic rules encourage brands in crisis to react with honesty, to show concern, respond quickly and keep communicating.

Those who write about PR crises often cite good and bad case studies. Some hand out grades based on how the company responded. Was its response timely? How about the tone of its apology? Did the company take full responsibility for its mistakes? Were key stakeholders informed in a timely manner? Has it said how it will make sure the mistakes won’t recur?

BACKSTAGE IN A CRISIS

Unfortunately the literature almost never addresses what actually goes on inside a company when a crisis is raging. The experts fail to take readers backstage to see what transpires when the going gets rough and chaotic.

When PR pros are thrown into the raging rapids of a crisis, they have to do a lot of fast-action paddling. They confront organizational dynamics among people who have different titles or come from various departments. And they must deal with the tensions and taboos of reporting relationships.

PERSONAL DYNAMICS

Plus, there are all the personal undercurrents—rivalries, friendships, cultural differences, prejudices—as well as their

own past interactions with the critical players.

All of these elements—some of which may have played a role in creating the issue—become magnified in the cauldron of a crisis.

THE PLAYERS

Want insight as to why savvy brands seem to make the same mistakes during their crises? Picture this scene. We see an egotistical CEO (imagine that!) who doesn’t want to adopt a “show-concern” strategy. Instead the CEO wants to vanquish the enemies.

We see a lawyer who likes to operate secretly. Then there are several excellent executives. Unfortunately, since they are females they are forced to struggle against rampant misogyny.

The H.R. chief is running from a larcenous past, and the CFO knows that a train wreck is coming.

CAT HERDING AND A TIMELY RESPONSE

The challenge is how to herd those cats toward a crisis-management strategy that follows all the golden rules. For example, it’s hard to be transparent when the truth keeps slipping around the room, and some people may be lying.

The crisis rule that urges brands to respond in a timely manner is difficult to enforce when a powerful person in the C-suite has decided that the crisis will blow over.

As a communicator you advise the company to show concern, own the mistake and take responsibility. That’s great advice until the high-powered outside lawyers arrive. Chances are all of them have studied liability law, but they haven’t a clue about crisis management in the digital era.

GUIDE STARS NOT ROADMAPS

There is no rule book for crisis management. The well-worn adages that are in every book and article are guide stars, not roadmaps. Similar to a play’s script, they don’t assure a great performance without the proper actors, scenery, costumes and lights.

TWO STRATEGIES

Every crisis-response requires two strategies. The first is a strategy for dealing with the world outside the boardroom; handling the internal situation is the second strategy.

Succeeding in crisis management requires the ability to cope with intense personal and organizational dynamics.

When people call crisis pros “spin doctors” what they fail to understand is that most of the spinning is happening inside the company. The real challenge is forging a coalition of agreement among the key decision makers inside and out-

side the C-suite. This can be complicated. But it is the most critical element of success in crisis management.

PART II: A PR CRISIS CHECKLIST

My career in issue and crisis management started with **Tylenol** (yes, I was there!) and included work with brands like **Coca-Cola**, **Pfizer**, **Mobil**, **Kraft**, **Miller Beer** and **L'Oréal**.

I've learned that the various "rules" of crisis management are always good to remember: show concern and apologize when warranted, act quickly, be honest, be as transparent as possible, own any mistakes the company has made, etc.

But from the vantage point of years of experience, here are four tips that, perhaps, transcend the well-worn catechisms.

THE MANUAL WON'T DO IT FOR YOU

I've seen many crisis manuals/crisis guidelines and checklists in my day. And I've written more than a few. But I have rarely found them to be of much use in the actual environment of a crisis. Like a river going around a rock, crisis strategies unfold irrespective of a manual. Following a manual is like trying to nail **Jell-O** to the wall.

The best (and last) manual I wrote was on two sides of a laminated page. It was designed to remind crisis managers of the questions they needed to be asking themselves and others.

Examples: Do we have clear short-term and long-term objectives? What does "responsible" mean in this situation? What are our brand loyalists hearing and thinking right now?

I kept a copy of this "manual" in my briefcase. It was always helpful when things hit the fan.

- ▶ **What to Do:** Write down your set of pertinent questions. Keep it close-by. Consult it when trouble comes. It's your cheat sheet for staying focused at a time when it's easy to become lost in the whirlwind of a crisis.

ALMOST EVERY CRISIS EXISTS ALREADY

Think about **Volkswagen** and the other auto companies that cheated on the testing of diesel emissions. Or **Wells Fargo** opening up phony consumer accounts and committing many other improper practices.

The common theme in both of these crises is bad actors doing bad things inside the company. These situations didn't occur suddenly, though it might seem so when they storm onto the pages of newspapers and pop on social media. They took time to develop and eventually were waiting to explode like a mine.

And the C-suite often knows about the potential crisis. Take **Facebook**. Several employees raised red flags about the dangerous misuse of the platform in Ukraine, in Myanmar and in the U.S. But management kept swatting the information away, wanting to keep everyone focused on the positive, on growth, on the mission.

Look at **CBS** and its longtime chief **Les Moonves**. The CBS board received word of Moonves' improper activities

before **The New Yorker** reported them. Similar to Facebook, the board failed to act on these earlier reports. Sound familiar?

- ▶ **What to Do:** Never stop raising red flags. Work with risk managers, HR managers, marketers and everyone else to surface latent crises. And keep an eagle eye on the changing world of issues. Something that was abided yesterday can become a scandal today. Want some proof: Take a look at the list of those fired as a result of getting caught in the thicket of #MeToo.

DON'T COPYCAT ANOTHER BRAND'S SOLUTION

For decades following the nationwide Tylenol recall in 1982, it was praised as a model of crisis management. In 1990, the **Perrier** brand followed that model after it discovered traces of benzene in its product.

Eager brand managers copied Tylenol and decided on a nationwide recall, even though the **FDA** said it wasn't necessary and the issue had received almost no attention. Perrier executives went on television and proudly proclaimed their social responsibility.

Some say the Perrier brand has never recovered from that decision. The recall publicity escalated public awareness and, in the long period when Perrier was off the shelf, competitors swooped in to seize the opportunity and gain market share.

- ▶ **What to Do:** Pay attention to case studies but don't ape them. Every brand has its own character and competitive framework. Each crisis challenge has unique characteristics. In crisis, there's no such thing as 'one size fits all.' The strategy has to be appropriate to the particular confluence of factors you face.

FORGIVE AND FORGET

In 2019 most people have forgotten the Perrier story. And how many can remember the details of **New Coke**? By the ways, some people believe it was the biggest marketing blunder ever.

But that's the point. Before too long, most people won't be able to tell you which car companies cheated on diesel emissions or which bank opened phony accounts.

People forget. And brand loyalists usually are quick to forgive. Often they are eager to do so. This is why building relationships with your audience is crucial. If the bonds to your consumers are strong, they also will be resilient.

- ▶ **What to Do:** Always, always keep your eyes on your key stakeholders, not the media. And realize no one will be reading your bad coverage as closely as you will be. The media is not your prime audience. Your customers and consumers are; they are the people whose opinions really count. ■

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Communicators Trade Tactics for Getting Bigger Budgets, Building Relationships with Media

Editor's Note: Prior to PR News' Media Relations Conference in December in Washington, D.C., PR News and partner **PublicRelay**, a media monitoring and analytics firm, convened a Communications Leadership Roundtable. During the 90-minute session, 18 senior communicators (listed below) exchanged views on trends, developments and best practices.

Major themes are summarized below. Per agreement, their remarks are unattributed. Following that is a summary of questions and responses during the session.

DATA

The difficulty of working with data was a common theme. Several of the participants said they were overwhelmed with data and needed guidance on what to collect and measure. Many said their top challenge was getting the C-suite to rely more on data and less on hunches. "Let the figures guide you," was the plea of one participant to the C-suite at her company.

SOCIAL MEDIA, TRUST AND NOISE

With the session coming only weeks after the **NY Times'** expose of **Facebook**, trust and reputation came to the fore. Several participants wondered aloud about the future of PR's reputation in the wake of the Times' story.

The story included details of Facebook's hiring a D.C. PR firm that allegedly collected and disseminated negative stories about other tech companies to divert attention from Facebook. It also allegedly spread negative information about Facebook critics. Facebook fired the firm the day the story appeared in the paper.

A roundtable participant said her top issues are guarding against fake news on social media. Another is breaking through social's noise so the brand's narrative can be heard.

Another chimed in, "Bots are taking over the world. So many tweets come from bots and are fake news." Difficulty knowing when to engage with critics on social media was another challenge the executives mentioned, as was difficulty measuring the effectiveness of social media. "We're measuring, but we're unsure if we're doing it correctly," one participant said.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND RELATIONSHIPS

"It's a sea change. Reporters have opinions...I thought reporters were supposed to be objective...but since they are judged by clicks and how many followers they have," it influences the kind of stories they do, one participant said.

This led another participant to confess that while her brand desires earned media, "We're concerned about putting our executives in harm's way." Another added, the number of reporters has risen in cities such as NY, LA and DC, but in general newsrooms are smaller. "Brands are having a hard time because the few reporters left seem to be constantly chasing" the big stories of the day.

Many at the table agreed when a participant said, "All our CEO cares about [is coverage] in the **Financial Times** and the **Wall Street Journal**."

While several agreed the state of media was worrisome, there seemed to be consensus when the importance of relationships with reporters and other stakeholders was discussed. "Communications still depends on relationships," said one, though she conceded reporters' increased duties in smaller newsrooms makes forging ties difficult.

On the other hand, another participant said, "Who's media? And who's an influencer?"

There was agreement around the table when a participant mentioned journalists were not alone in being asked to work harder. "Communicators are being asked to do more with less...less budget and staff...and the expectations are the same," one participant said. This participant added, "How do you concentrate on being strategic when you spend so much time putting out fires?"

WHAT IS THE STATE OF MEDIA?

There was an audible gasp from some of the assembled participants when one discussed battling the marketing department, which wants all news broken on social only, not shared with traditional reporters.

"Marketing is constantly in the C-suite's ear pushing this [strategy] to control the narrative," the participant said, adding, "We feel [a social-only policy] is cutting off a lot of the audience."

That led to talk of marketing breaking unconfirmed news on social, putting PR in a tough spot when reporters call to get confirmation. "We can't confirm" so much of what comes out of our company, the participant said, adding, "How do you then make an announcement about a story that's already been out there" for a while?

Other participants mentioned employees breaking news on social ahead of communications making an announcement. "Employee activism" on social is only going to grow, one said. Another noted, "I want our employees to talk, too, but there have to be guidelines...we had to set some examples...it wasn't pretty."

DISCUSS MEASUREMENT AT YOUR COMPANY

Measurement was an area that many participants identified as a struggle. What to measure was a key question.

One participant said, "We measure impressions only, even though it's the least reliable metric around." Another said, "Impressions may be meaningless, but they're a starting point." Said one participant, "Our C-suite laughs when we use impressions...what's most effective for us is comparing [metrics] year over year." Another said, "We look at how people are engaging with our content."

"In my company all they seem to measure is sales...I remind myself daily that many people in it don't realize how PR"

raises awareness, which can help lead to sales, one person said. “This is why education is a must.”

Several participants discussed whether it’s possible to make a direct correlation between PR and sales. “Companies are out there saying they can” do this, one executive said, “the technology works, but the analytics are suspect... tying sales” directly to PR “is the biggest bugaboo.”

For example, this person said, if a news article mentions a murder near a **Starbucks**, should that story get credited as a mention of Starbucks? “It’s AVE all over again.”

One participant said “the most powerful metric we have is stories [PR] killed...that goes to reputation management.”

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

“At the end of the day,” one participant said, “PR is all about building relationships...my mother was a PR professional years ago. She always told me, ‘Pick up the horn.’” Several agreed, with one saying, “I tell my young staffers it’s not enough to email” journalists, “you need to call them.”

Said another, “That’s an issue for millennials...they don’t like the phone...[but] I don’t know how else you build trust” with journalists and “offer nuance.”

In response, a participant said, “But you have millennial reporters who only respond to **Snap** and texts.” Said another, “Let’s face it, it’s still important to pitch media, but young people come [to PR] not knowing how to do that.”

An executive added, “With our budgets tightening, earned media is free...so relationships with journalists are critical.” Another pointed out the importance of relationships for building “a reservoir of goodwill...you need it with external audiences but also with media.” This participant said her department sends birthday cards and wedding gifts to journalists. Another added, “Most of what I do has nothing to do with our business. I ask [journalists] about how they are, their parents, what schools they went to...relationships are critical.”

TO WHOM DO YOU REPORT?

This question received a range of answers. A sampling:

“I report to marketing. It’s a struggle.”

“I report to sales. My boss has a PR background and also is a lawyer. It’s bizarre.”

“I report to corporate services and share a budget with sales.”

DISCUSS BUDGETS/INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

The discussion of resources and investments was spirited, and responses varied widely. “After staff costs, what’s your biggest spend?” was among the questions put to the group. “Paid social is my top cost,” said a participant, who added, “I’m trying to reduce [PR] agency spending...I prefer [working with] our people, since they are closer to the business.” Several participants said they were struggling with the question of agency vs in-house work.

Another executive said, “We continue to do more with less...our budget will remain flat [in 2019]...the estimation of PR’s worth is strong [at my company], but it’s not translating into more budget.”

One participant shared a budget trick that led to a lot of conversation. “I look at others’ communications efforts. If they’re good, I tell my bosses...it’s an example of what communications can do.” Another participant added, “I look at a competitor doing something great...then I tell my bosses, ‘we can do that too, but we need a larger budget.’” On the flip side, one communicator mentioned tracking examples of competitors’ communications gaffes. “I take these to my bosses and show them how these mistakes hurt the company’s market value. This can be very powerful in the C-suite.”

Added another, “We’ve talked about the importance of building relationships with media, but we also must have them with the C-suite...with budgets, we are salespeople.”

When proposing a budget, one executive said, it’s critical to know the audience. “Are you pitching the CEO, the CTO, the CFO?” Several communicators agreed. Yes, one said, “You have to read the room and know whom to ask for money and when.” Along those lines, one executive admitted creating content profiling influential company executives. “It helps when I get around to more important topics.”

Added another, “You have to tell your story [to get budget] and you must use data.” Yet another executive said, “I’ve found it effective to argue, ‘What’s the cost of *not* spending for communications?’” Another participant agreed and added, “Nobody will remember that you didn’t spend money... they’ll remember you built” an effective communications program. One executive noted, “My team grew by being responsive to business priorities, I pushed sales. Sales loves us.”

“I shamelessly milk what we do in the community...I rarely get turned down when I ask for budget for community relations,” another said. ■

The Participants

Doug Duvall, AVP Corporate Communications, Amtrak

Carolyn Evert, Head, Northeast Communications, JP Morgan Chase

Jen Warren, Director, Global Communications, Belkin

Sheryl McGaw-Douse, PR Group Manager, Sandals Resorts

Amanda Miller, Director, Corporate Communications, Paypal

Jennifer Mastin Giglio, Executive Director, Communications, Washington Nationals

Lorri Christou, VP External Communications and PR, Choice Hotels

Rosemary Jones, Head, Communications and Marketing, Bermuda Business Development Agency

Bob Lapinsky, Media and PR Advisor, Accident Fund

Tricia Ross, SVP, Financial Profiles

Spencer Shireman, Marketing Director, RR Realty

Rachel Stultz, Sr. Manager, External Communications, Alliance Data

Kahina Haffad, Community Relations Manager, Loyalty.com

Katie Hoxtell, Marketing Manager, Oshkosh

John Haber, President, Cascade Strategy

Eric Koefoot, President/CEO, PublicRelay

Diane Schwartz, SVP/Group Publisher, PR News

Tyler Suiters, VP Communications, Consumer Technology Association

TAKEAWAYS

Takeaways from PRN-Meltwater Survey, Crisis Tips and New to the Resource Center

In each edition of PR News we highlight takeaways from select articles as well as important additions to the PR News Subscriber Resources Center, available to paid subscribers at: <http://www.prnewsonline.com/subscriber-resources/> You can also access the Center by clicking “Resource Center” at the top, middle of the prnewsonline.com home page.

SELECT TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Influencer Survey** (pp 1-6): While the definition of influencers remains fluid, the PR News-Meltwater survey shows nearly half (49 percent) of communicators and marketers are regularly deploying influencers. On the downside, communicators still seem to be uncertain about how to measure influencers’ ROI and whether or not to compensate influencers. A surprise is that while influencers often are thought of as a way for brands to get younger, our survey showed the primary reasons for using influencers is to gain third-party legitimacy and an authentic voice.
- ▶ **Mastercard Logo Change** (p. 7): Avoid making a substantive change to your logo quickly and without conducting thorough research. Insure employees are involved with the change and receive communications about it before, during and after the logo is redesigned.
- ▶ **Crisis Roundtable** (pp 8-9): In today’s digital era, speed during a crisis is essential. Preparation and social monitoring technology also are critical to allow communicators to craft rapid responses when they are indicated.
- ▶ **PR and Legal: A New Paradigm?** (p. 11): In the first of a new series about organization, we find the speed of the digital world prompts communicators and the legal staff to work harmoniously.

NEW TO THE RESOURCES CENTER

- ▶ **Intel Social Media Guidelines:** A resource guide need not be voluminous to prove valuable. That’s the case with the compact but extremely useful Social Media Guidelines for employees from Intel (see our Social Media section). Besides containing a slew of important rules and tips, it’s loaded with great links that provide additional resources on topics such as information security, the company’s programs for digital influencers and social media practitioners.
- ▶ **U.K. Documents about Influencers:** Many readers are familiar with **Federal Trade Commission** regulations concerning social media influencers and disclosure. While the FTC has reached agreements with brands and a few influencers in the past few years, its penalties seem to pale in comparison with what British authorities do to influencers who misbehave. In short, influencers who fail to disclose their relationships to brands in Britain face jail time, up to two years. Since many U.S. influencers also work overseas, it’s important communicators are familiar with Britain’s rules, which are similar to the FTC’s. We’ve compiled a selection of documents to help you become familiar with them (see our Social Media section). ■

CRISIS MANAGEMENT SUMMIT

REGISTER TODAY AT BIT.LY/CRISIS-SUMMIT2019

The conference for forward-thinking communications leaders.

Hosted by the leading brand for communicators, PR News, the Crisis Management Summit will be held on February 27-28, 2019 in Miami, FL. This is your graduate course in managing your organization's brand and reputation in a time of crisis and a unique opportunity to connect with like-minded peers. And we're doing it all at the beautiful Eden Roc in Miami because we know that with all this crisis talk, you will need to chill out!

"Leadership is a way of thinking, a way of acting, and most importantly, a way of communicating"
— *Simon Sinek*, Author of Start with Why

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