

PR Influencers Weigh In On Trends Transforming the PR Profession (#7 Trending Article in 2019)



Rich Jachetti, Senior Partner, [The Stevens Group](#)

2020 is right around the corner. And if the coming year is anything like what we saw last year, and the year before that in our profession, the competition to stay relevant and compete across once siloed agency category lines will continue to blur, according to 16 leading lights in the PR profession. Data analytics will become ever more ascendant as the driving force behind proof-of-value communications campaigns that meet the ever intensifying, bottom-line centric needs and demands of clients and employers. No surprise the elephant in the room for firms of any size and stripe with a yearning to scale up will be the need to attract talented people with the skills and the experience to understand the differences and the symbiosis of quantitative vs. qualitative strategies.

Over the past year the [The Stevens Group](#) has probed the psyches of 16 (more to come) undisputed masters of the art and science of PR and has gathered insights from them that can be accessed online via a series of podcasts our firm produced in conjunction with *CommPro.biz* called [The PR Masters Series](#). Among the agency luminaries on our guest list to date were Steve Cody, CEO, Peppercomm; Peter Finn, Founding Managing Partner, Finn Partners; Andrea Johnson, President, W20 PURE; Jim Joseph, Global President, Burson Cohn Wolfe; Richard Levick, Chairman & CEO, Levick; Beth Monaghan, CEO & Founder, Inkhouse; Mark Penn, Managing Partner & CEO, The Stagwell Group; Bob Pearson, Strategic Advisor, W20 Group; Andy Polansky, Chairman & CEO, Constituency Management Group; Barri Rafferty, Global CEO & President, Ketchum; Marian Salzman, SVP Philip Morris International; Kass Sells, Global Chief Operating Officer and President of International, WE Communications; Barby Siegel, CEO, Zeno Group; Shelly Spector, President, Spector Associates; Patrice Tanaka, Founder & Chief Joy Officer, Joyful Planet; Ronn Torossian, CEO, 5WPR; and Larry Weber, Chairman & CEO, Racepoint Global.

Surfacing consistently were common themes culled from more than 20 hours of recorded conversation with the aforementioned guests. Space limitations here allow for us to bring you only the highlights of the themes most of our guests emphasized when Art Stevens and I interviewed them. To listen to the full podcast series go to www.commpro.biz and click on **PODCASTS** in the tool bar.

As PR Further Aligns with Digital Marketing, the Lines Will Keep Blurring And the Need To Attract Top Talent With Whole New Skillsets Will Intensify

Mark Penn

President and Managing Partner, [The Stagwell Group](#)

I think we've seen the line between advertising and public relations become blurrier. There are capabilities now in PR that we just never had before. I don't think today you can launch a product strictly out of the CMOs office without significant PR elements, whether it's a combination of influence or performance marketing, social posts and social content. In fact, no one today can effectively launch a product without cutting across the entire spectrum of communications and without fully integrated teams of data analysts and storytellers.

Andrea Johnston

President, W20 Pure

The world is now digital, and PR is one component of the overall marketing and communications mix. We've historically defined PR as earned media, or media relations teams going out and pitching reporters. I think that's still going to be important and that it will always be a core focus for PR. But it's also going to be important that we think in the context of paid, earned, shared and owned. You need to understand which channels can contribute where and how they work together to really amplify a brand narrative. To me, that's going to be critical to remain competitive and successful, and also to do right by your clients.

Barri Rafferty

CEO, [Ketchum](#)

To remain relevant, it means continually shifting our business model and attracting new talent. At Ketchum, we have been repositioning ourselves toward a much more future-forward communications consultancy and we're constantly on the lookout

for people to help us bridge that gap. In today's business, we need deep vertical and industry expertise, as well as specialist expertise. The balance has shifted to make sure there's the right combination of the right talent, and that we can do project work, visual storytelling, video and influencing as much as we can do to change management and traditional public relations.

The Importance of Big Data and Data Analytics

Bob Pearson

Strategic Advisor, W20

Once upon a time, data was just focus groups posing as market research—it gave insight and information into how your customer is feeling or how other stakeholders are feeling or what they're looking for. But in order to take data and translate that into a valuable insight, it requires an understanding of emerging digital technologies coupled with deep insight and judgment with respect to the interpretation of big data and its uses. It also involves instinct and creativity. Looking ahead, it's going to be important for all of us in the industry to be savvy about digital and to be even savvier about how and where those applications can be relevant. That's what makes it game changing.

The Role of Mergers & Acquisitions

Jim Joseph

Burson Cohn & Wolfe

I think acquisitions are always going to be a part of a good growth strategy. At our agency, we're always looking at acquisition as a way to expand and improve and add into our capabilities—whether it's market-based, capability-based,

industry-based or whatever might be the focus at that moment.

There's a lot of activity globally now, as everybody knows that many industries are in transformation. As communications strategies reach beyond the borders of any one country, so too must agencies look beyond borders to acquire firms that know the customs and cultures of those countries where their clients do business.

Storytelling, Brand Awareness and Authenticity Are Still Critical

Andy Polansky

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Constituency Management Group (CMG)

If you consider the world within which we live, you have to earn attention—there are so many platforms and so much information, so much noise. How do you think about that, and understand the environment in a compelling way?

We must come up with content that breaks through the noise. One common denominator increasingly is that earned media and earned attention is at the core. That's where things have impact and begin and end. It's quite different from 20 years ago. PR firms have—and will continue to have—more and more impact on clients

Steve Cody

Founder and CEO, [Peppercomm](#)

Many people were proclaiming the death of public relations three years ago. I think PR has had an amazing renaissance. We PR professionals understand how to tell a story that will engage an audience and won't come across as selling something or selling someone. Consequently, in an age of distrust and disinformation, public relations has never been more valuable.

I think the future for PR is limitless.

In our industry, we innately understand how to tell a credible story. Credible storytelling is never going to go away, and recognizing how best to reach a stakeholder audience, engage in an authentic dialogue, have a transparent conversation and understand the right way in which to hopefully enter your client's product or service into the conversation and consideration—that will never go away.

Marian Salzman

**Senior Vice President, Global Communications,
Philip Morris International**

Communications is a more important skill than ever. Effectively motivating people, changing behaviors and changing perceptions will matter more than ever before. Ultimately, what matters most is developing the skills that you need so you can be part of the constantly evolving narrative.

Larry Weber

CEO and Chairman, [Racepoint Global](#)

We are going to see PR programs and engagement programs start telling a story around what we can do better for humanity. Today, we have huge social channels focused on technology and innovation, and a number of influencers that are set up to discuss and recommend different technologies to help your business. It takes a lot more research to ensure you have influencers at your disposal to create content that's impactful enough to have them discuss you.

Also, earned media is on the rise. Society in general wants the truth, and they want stories that help them feel good about what they are buying. The role of this transparent storytelling and content creation is only going to grow.

