

2024

FOCUS REPORT

PR IN CENTRAL EUROPE

EMBEDDING AI

.....

*NURTURING
CORPORATE REPUTATION*

.....

***BUILDING ESG
STRATEGIES***

.....

***MANAGING THE
GENERATIONAL DIVIDE***

.....

**FIGHTING FAKE
INFORMATION**

**MEASURING
COMMUNICATION
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THE COUNTRIES COVERED IN THIS REPORT



INTRODUCTION

For those of you who know little about Central Europe (CE), let alone the twists and turns of the region's PR industry, climb onboard for an interesting journey as you delve into the unique insights cultivated in this publication, the first edition of our Focus Report 2024: PR in Central Europe.

As you're likely to glean from these pages, there's a legacy of resourcefulness in this region. It reminds me of an old wisecrack, that when a Hungarian enters a revolving door after you, she will, miraculously, come out on the other side ahead of you. No doubt, such regional sentiments reflect the way PR activities are conducted in the CE region (while others might not).

One thing, however, is sure: as the PR industry in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia is considered to be under-resourced in comparison to large-scale markets, the success of PR activities in Central Europe is a testament to the creativity and broad-based know-how of their public relations industries. It's **the intuitively inventive and resourceful public relations specialists in Central Europe who have proven they have the capacity to produce stellar results** with smaller budgets than their Western counterparts, while also possessing the ability to work across various industries and oversee multiple projects simultaneously. Surely, CE PR specialists are the kind of practitioners you want on your side in these challenging times, according to what I've seen across the globe.

Focus Report 2024: PR in Central Europe assembles these countries' top PR experts, who share their knowledge and insights on everything from global challenges, such as how AI is impacting content creation and strategy, to regional considerations like media consolidation and the decline of traditional journalism.

We are grateful to the four participating PR associations—the Czech Association of Public Relations (APRA), Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association (PPRCA), Hungarian Public Relations Association (HuPRA), and the Association of Public Relations Slovak Republic (APRSR), for their assistance in putting together this invaluable thought leadership for our industry.

Following the success of the first *PR TrendReport*, crowdsourced and published by HuPRA in 2021, which included deep insights from more than 100 senior communication experts in Hungary, Focus Report 2024: PR in Central Europe paints a portrait of these four emerging markets, identifies their key characteristics and distils what we believe are the main takeaways for the public relations and communications sector.

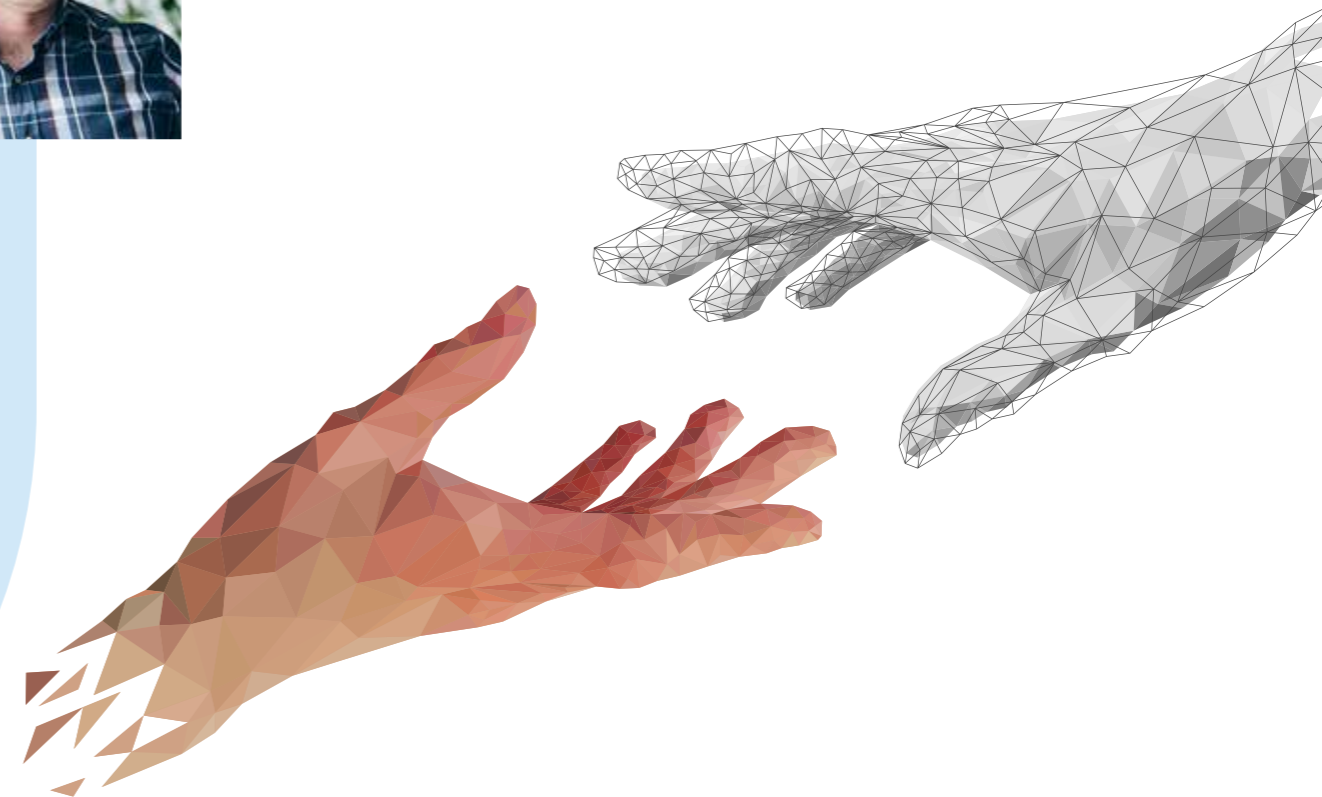
Not only do we think the knowledge and best practices shared herein could prove enticing for those interested in doing business in the region, but we also believe **this publication is an essential tool for regional PR players to facilitate knowledge transfer between the people, companies and brands in Central Europe**, while also bringing together the industry's different generations to strengthen our professional cohesion.

Lastly, I'd like to give out a 'high-five' to all of our spectacular PR specialists in the region who were kind enough to add their grey matter to this publication, which should prove riveting to its readers, regardless of where they are from.

Enjoy!



András Sztaniszláv
President of HuPRA
CEO at ICCO
founder of Focus Report





I'm glad you have taken this snapshot representing the practice of public relations in Central Europe in your hand, or rather, that you have opened it on your screen. I invite you to read through our Focus Report to gain a first-hand account of the challenges and solutions PR practitioners in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia offer to their clients and their employers. **The areas that our public relations experts cover reads like an A-to-Z list of contemporary organisational and business issues:** embedding AI, building and implementing ESG strategies, fighting the rise of fake information, developing post-COVID and climate crisis era communication, nurturing corporate reputation, managing the generational divide, channelling social media—and the list could just go on. What connects these issues is that PR practitioners follow a strategic approach in addressing these issues. By analysing and understanding the factors in depth, developing a strategy, engaging with the target audiences, delivering well-planned and innovative programmes and campaigns, and measuring their impact, our colleagues give testimony to the relevance of PR today.

Concepts, principles and structures of public relations have not changed over the last hundred years. **We still represent ethical communication as a key asset for any organisation, believe in engaging stakeholders and consider communication to be a strategic element of the C-suite toolkit** – and these concepts are all part of the PR education programmes in the region. What has fundamentally changed are the 'what' and the 'how' of communication. In today's world where every single person with a smartphone in their hand is a medium on their own, and can create and share information in an instant, the role and responsibility of organisations in communicating effectively and ethically have increased fundamentally. PR experts serve as guide boats in managing the perilous journey of their clients and employers.

The Focus Report gives evidence of how the central European region plays a leading role in creating a new chapter for PR. Countries of the region share certain historical and cultural links, however, the articles demonstrate the diversity of the region. What connects these diverse approaches is the positive and constructive attitude each author manifests in their field. In their distinctive roles, they are there to support their clients and their employers in achieving their organisational objectives. My hope is that by sharing their experience, they will be able to support the wider community as well, in understanding, engaging with and benefitting from the practice of public relations.

Enjoy reading our Focus Report!

Gábor Sarlós

Editor-in-Chief



In today's world, nearly everyone engages in some form of PR—whether they realise it or not. Many people on social media are building their personal brands, positioning themselves, sharing content and responding to news events in their communities. They're shaping their image, even if it's unconscious, and most wouldn't describe what they're doing as PR.

However, this doesn't mean we live in a region of 100 million PR professionals. What it illustrates is that an interest in PR doesn't necessarily lead to expertise or value. We live in a time where **the internet, search engines and AI give us an illusion of limitless capability. But no digital tool can substitute for experience, intuition or a well-developed network of contacts.**

True PR cannot be mastered in isolation from the industry. It's about understanding stakeholders, navigating media landscapes and building relationships with the right level of management at media outlets, as well as with journalists who are constantly chasing the next big story. PR is, at its core, an interdependent relationship in which a win-win dynamic is essential: exclusive information exchanged for prominent coverage.

Not only the means, but the life cycle of news has also drastically changed over the past decade. Today, everyone is bathed in the glow of social media, striving to be seen as an insider by sharing content or breaking news first within their micro-communities. But once that information is out, the genie is out of the bottle—news takes on a life of its own. And there's no PR professional who can contain it afterwards.

PR is not just about distributing content; it's about timing, targeting the right audience and managing the fallout. It's about not only how we communicate but also what we communicate, and the trust we build over time. **One misstep can destroy years of hard-earned credibility, especially in today's fast-paced, high-stakes environment.**

Public relations requires more than technical proficiency—it demands strategic thinking and a long-term vision. This is why communication professionals are increasingly burdened with greater responsibility. There's no room for second chances or trial and error. When an issue arises, the moment is there and decisions must be swift, recommendations sound and solutions immediate. This all goes down to one thing: in a seemingly tech-driven era, human capacities, personal relationships and strategic thinking are not likely to disappear but the contrary—they're more important than ever before.

Péter Pantl

Group Corporate Communications & Marketing Vice President

MOL Group

COUNTRY REPORTS

CZECH REPUBLIC

PR AGENCIES' REVENUES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC ARE GROWING. IN THE FUTURE, THEY WILL SAY GOODBYE TO UNPROFITABLE CLIENTS AND STRENGTHEN THE USE OF AI.

PR agencies in the Czech Republic are experiencing good times. Their average revenue grew last year, and they also see 2024 as a positive year. In fact, a total of 52% of agencies expect better results. This is according to a survey by NMS Market Research, conducted on behalf of the Public Relations Association (APRA).

While 2022 was a return to normal for PR agencies after the COVID-19 pandemic, 2023 could be called the first step towards a successful future. The median revenue of agencies increased by one million crowns to CZK 33.4 million (EUR 1.4 million) compared with 2022.

REVENUES ARE GROWING, BUT SO ARE EXPENSES

60% of agencies saw their revenues grow last year. At the same time, however, two-thirds of agencies also saw their expenses grow, with a third of respondents seeing an increase of more than 10%. The most significant cost item for agencies is staff costs, which accounted for 68% of their total costs in 2023.

In light of rising costs, over 70% of agencies increased their prices last year, most often by up to ten percent. Almost a third of agencies then increased their prices by over 10%.

FLUCTUATION IS AT A HEALTHY LEVEL

While 55% of agencies renewed their teams in 2022, last year it was three-quarters. However, overall, only 11% of staff left their job at a PR agency last year, a relatively low and healthy level of team turnover. The most common changes were at the account executive position.

While as recently as 2021, 42% of agencies faced a drop in demand from job seekers, while in 2023 only 8% did. Conversely, 40% of agencies saw an increased demand for agency work in 2023.

The environment from which new jobseekers come is also changing. In previous years, new hires were most often recruited from competing agencies. They have now been replaced by graduate programmes, which are now the most important source of talent. It is still the case that retaining key staff is the biggest challenge for agencies, but they are increasingly having to work to motivate younger managers, according to the survey findings.

Working from home continues to be one of the biggest benefits offered by agencies. At one in five agencies, employees can use homeworking at any time, with the standard being the use of a home office two to three times a week.

GROWING INTEREST IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND INSIGHTS AND PLANNING

Last year, demand for media relations services grew the most (64%), followed by demand for consulting (60%). Agencies expect demand for social media and community management to grow the most in 2024, with insights and planning also emerging.

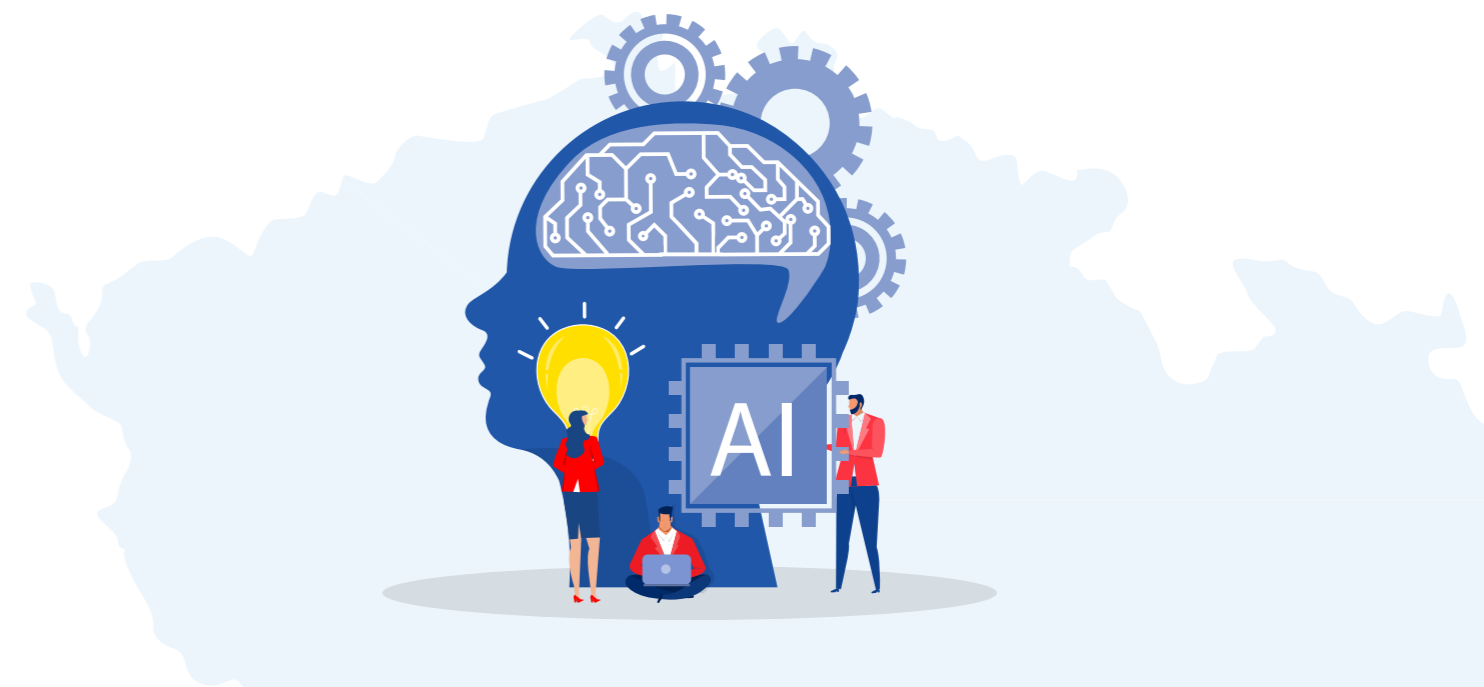
The most anticipated trends for PR agencies are the use of AI (68%), an emphasis on social responsibility (60%) and a stronger human touch (56%). As many as 48% of agencies expect to

say goodbye to non-profit clients in the near future.

The Public Relations Association (APRA) represents 25 leading local and international PR agencies in the Czech Republic and 15 associated members—PR departments of client organisations (<https://apra.cz/agentury/>). For twenty years it has been organising the prestigious industry competition the Czech PR Awards (<https://cenapr.cz/>) and the PR Summit conference, which is part of Forum Media, the largest industry event in the field of marketing and communication.



MAREK HLAVIC, The current director of the PR association belongs to the founding personalities of the PR business in Czechoslovakia, later the Czech Republic. In the mid-1990s, he founded and led the Impact agency. Subsequently, he worked in senior positions at Philip Morris, Citibank, ČEZ utility company and Pilsner Urquell. In the last almost twenty years, he has managed the international advertising festival PIAF and the Association of Communication Agencies. He has also worked as an independent consultant. He returned to the PR agency world last year with the aim of strengthening the role of their profession.



HUNGARY



The Covid pandemic was a watershed moment for the Hungarian PR industry: leaders realised in a once-in-a-generation crisis that communicating with key stakeholders is a strategic priority and an essential business function. This led to a nominal 63% growth in estimated national PR spending between 2019 and 2023, to just under EUR 50 million. And, coupled with the activity of the Hungarian Public Relations Association (HuPRA) over the last several years, the PR profession has taken its well-earned seat at leadership (and marketing & communications industry) tables.

In a country of approximately 9.5 million residents (total population is 9.99 million, but many work abroad), we estimate that close to 5,000 professionals work in the PR industry, either on the client side or with the 150+ agencies we track. As Hungary is a relatively small market in many respects, almost all agencies are generalists and very few specialise, although we do have expert firms in culture, the legal profession, healthcare and the energy industry, for example.

The agency sector is almost completely locally owned: only Grayling runs a fully owned subsidiary in Hungary, which operates as a regional financial hub. Many of the global players have affiliate partners, but just a handful of brand partners remain, chief among them FleishmanHillard Café. Regionalisation is both an opportunity and a threat. With several flagship Hungarian corporations operating throughout CEE and the wider Eastern European region, a high level of proficiency in English, and agency experience in leading multi-market campaigns, there should be significant growth potential in building hubs in Budapest. At the same time, while many multinationals used to have regional headquarters in

Hungary, most have consolidated subsidiaries' communications activities in other markets, some as far as Western Europe.

Our key industry challenges are to secure and keep our seat at the executives' table by attracting and training talent to provide the next generation of professionals; to successfully navigate the radical transformation of the media landscape; and to win adequate budgets for the sustainable, profitable operation of the sector for both agencies and the communications & PR departments at enterprises. With a challenging economic environment, generational shifts in consumer attitudes and expectations, and a suddenly lively political sphere, we expect that the rest of the 2020s will be just as exciting as the last several years.

Facts & Figures

- Population: 9,994,993 (2024)
- GDP: USD 265.037 billion (2023)
- PR industry turnover: EUR 50 million (2023)
- PR professionals: approx. 5,000
- Agencies: 150+
- Key trade media: Kreatív, Marketing&Media
- Key awards: Prizma (Kreatív), PR Excellence Awards (PREXA, HuPRA), the Effies

About HuPRA

The Hungarian Public Relations Association provides advocacy, professional development and services for the Hungarian PR industry. Founded in 1990, HuPRA is the strongest professional body in the public relations scene in Hungary. The association runs well-respected professional recognition programmes such as PR Excellence Hungary and the Employer Branding Award. It provides a platform for personal development, discussion of the hottest topics in communications and networking opportunities through its monthly Drinks&Links events, and places significant emphasis on higher education and securing the talent pool for the sustainability of the profession.



BALÁZS SZÁNTÓ is the managing partner of leading Hungarian communications consultancy Noguchi and a member of the board of HuPRA. Primarily a strategist, he's especially interested and experienced in crisis & issues management.



POLAND

THE FLOURISHING PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY IN POLAND

The PR sector in Poland is not just growing—it's thriving and evolving daily. This dynamic industry comprises both international network agencies and homegrown firms powered by Polish capital. For over two decades, the Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association (ZFPR) has been at the forefront, advocating for Poland's leading PR agencies and setting high standards for the industry.

In an increasingly turbulent and complex world, companies turn to PR professionals for guidance to navigate polarising opinions, generation gaps and uncertain labour markets. Polish PR agencies are continually adapting to meet these challenges, evolving from traditional task execution to offering strategic counsel and forming deep partnerships with company management.

One significant change in the market is the broadening scope of PR services. Agencies are expanding their competencies to include emerging fields such as ESG communication, data analytics and the application of artificial intelligence. This transformation is turning PR agencies into sophisticated, all-encompassing service providers capable of addressing the multifaceted needs of modern businesses.

Moreover, the increasing demand for transparency and corporate responsibility is pushing Polish PR firms to innovate and integrate these new competencies into their core services. As a result, the industry is not just reacting to trends but actively shaping the future of communication in Poland.

The Polish PR market is thriving, driven by a wide array of projects and initiatives from both agencies and associations. Like other markets in the region, the Polish PR industry has seen remarkable growth in recent years, achieving a level of professionalism that meets international standards. The future appears promising, with the industry consistently adapting to new challenges and evolving market demands.

The Association of Polish PR Firms (ZFPR) was established in 2001 to represent the professional PR industry in Poland. ZFPR, which unites 37 member agencies, aims to enhance the position of PR firms in Poland through embracing the opportunities and tackling the challenges agencies are facing.

- **Ethical standards:** upholding ethical standards is a top priority. To this end, the association has developed its own ethical code, which has been adopted by Polish agencies. A report and a successful campaign have debunked the outdated perception of PR as mere propaganda.

- **Talent attraction:** a prominent aspect of ZFPR's efforts is its commitment to promoting the PR profession and engaging with younger generations. Initiatives such as PR Crush and Next Gen PR, which target young professionals, showcase the industry's appeal and rapid growth, and aim to attract and retain emerging talent.

- **Procurement practices:** the goal is to elimi-

nate improper procurement procedures and educate businesses on the strategic value of PR. The vision is for PR experts to be recognised as partners who provide premium, specialised services that drive superior business outcomes.

- **Promoting excellence:** ZFPR's flagship initiative, the annual Golden Clip awards, celebrates outstanding PR work. The 21st edition in 2023 attracted nearly 500 entries, which were evaluated by 100 jury members.

- **Maintaining high standards and practices:** the LSPR Academy is the only public relations course in Poland that offers an international certificate from the London School of Public Rela-

tions. ZFPR has been running this programme for over a decade in collaboration with its British partner, LSPR. To date, over 600 graduates have earned this prestigious certificate.

- **Client-agency alignment:** the Club of PR Directors, which unites communication leaders, was established in collaboration with ZFPR. This group aligns with ZFPR on key industry issues, such as PR measurement standards, RFP frameworks and the use of AI.

AGATA ZEMAN, managing director of 24/7Communication Agency and Vice President of the Polish Association of PR Agencies. She is a PR professional with over 20 years of experience in strategic PR communication consulting for local and international clients. She has worked in PR communication agencies across Europe and Asia, as well as in Polish and European public administration including the European Parliament and the European Commission in Brussels. She has carried out complex campaigns on reputation management which were presented with the most important industry awards. She has been a jury member of several competition such as Effie Poland, Golden Clips, Young Creatives Cannes Lions, and in 2023 she was awarded the AdWoman2023 title for being 'the best PR pro in Poland.'



SLOVAKIA

STATE OF THE SLOVAK PR MARKET IN 2024: CHALLENGES, TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Slovak PR market has shown resilience, with a 17% growth in 2021 and a 9% increase in 2022, according to data from TheMarket-eris.biz. PR agencies revenues exceeded EUR 34 million in both 2022 and 2023.

The Association of Public Relations of the Slovak Republic (APRSR) played a pivotal role, with its 18 member agencies accounting for 35% of all PR agencies and achieving 55% of the total market turnover in 2023. The APRSR agencies saw a 6% year-on-year increase in market volume, whereas other agencies experienced stagnation or slight decline.

SHIFTS IN CLIENT STRATEGIES AND INDUSTRY TRENDS

In 2023, the PR market began to reflect changes in client strategies and the rise of digitalisation. This trend is evident in PR project competitions, which highlight emerging communication trends and the qualitative performance of agencies in Slovakia.

For instance, Slovak agencies secured seven nominations at the international SABRE Awards. Additionally, the 14th annual PROKOP 2023 competition unveiled emerging trends, highlighting a pronounced emphasis on the digital aspect in PR and the strategic utilisation of data analytics in communication efforts.

ESG HELPS TO ENHANCE CREDIBILITY

The increasing focus on environmental issues is another significant trend. Companies are under pressure from both the public and regulators to demonstrate sustainability and transparency. PR agencies must incorporate ecological concerns into their strategies and assist clients in communicating their sustainability commitments and activities. Environmental, social and governance (ESG) aspects are becoming increasingly important for companies in Slovakia, especially with new European regulations.

COMBATTING DISINFORMATION

The growing threat of disinformation and hoaxes presents a significant challenge for PR professionals. A March 2024 survey conducted by CEDMO revealed that 39% of Slovakia's population feels exposed to disinformation. In the digital media era, false news spreads faster than ever, potentially damaging corporate reputations. PR agencies must therefore develop effective strategies to combat disinformation and ensure the credibility of their communications, including monitoring the online environment and quickly addressing false information.

TALENT RETENTION AND EMERGING SKILL SETS

The evolving landscape of PR in Slovakia is driving a significant shift in the skill sets required for professionals in the field. Beyond traditional PR competencies, agencies are now seeking in-

dividuals with proficiency in data analytics, artificial intelligence and digital storytelling. The ability to interpret complex data sets, leverage AI for predictive analysis and create compelling narratives across various digital platforms has become crucial. Crisis management skills, particularly in the context of social media, are also in high demand. To address these changing needs, PR agencies in Slovakia are revamping their hiring practices.

MEASUREMENT AND ROI

With short-term tactical projects surging, clients increasingly demand tangible results. The industry is thus moving beyond traditional metrics

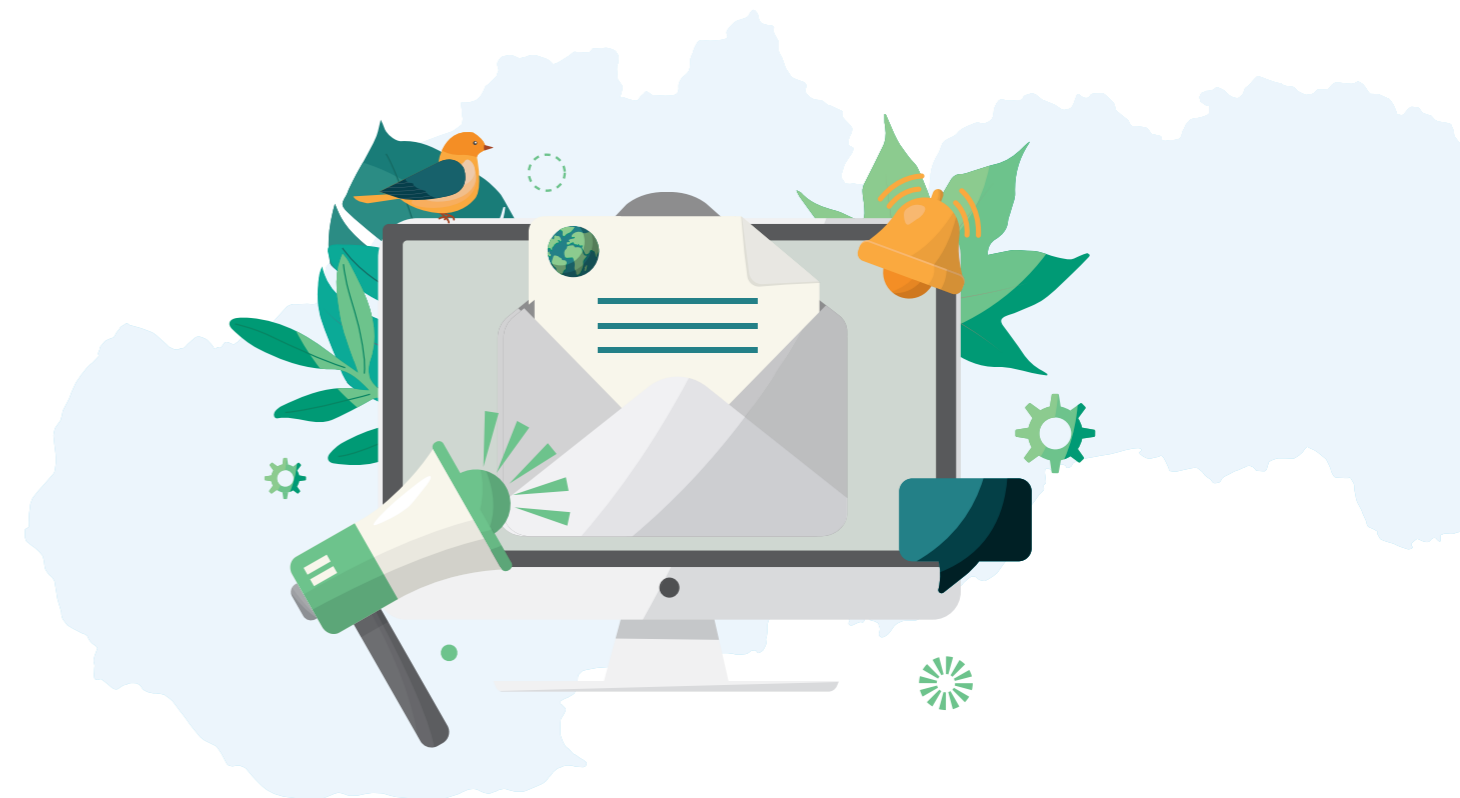
towards more sophisticated, business-aligned KPIs. This shift is fostering closer collaboration between PR teams and other business units, as agencies work to integrate PR metrics with broader organisational goals. The challenge lies in educating clients about these new measurement paradigms and showcasing how PR efforts contribute to long-term brand value and business growth.

CONCLUSION

The future direction of the Slovak PR market will depend on agencies' ability to innovate, adapt to changing conditions and effectively address the challenges they face.

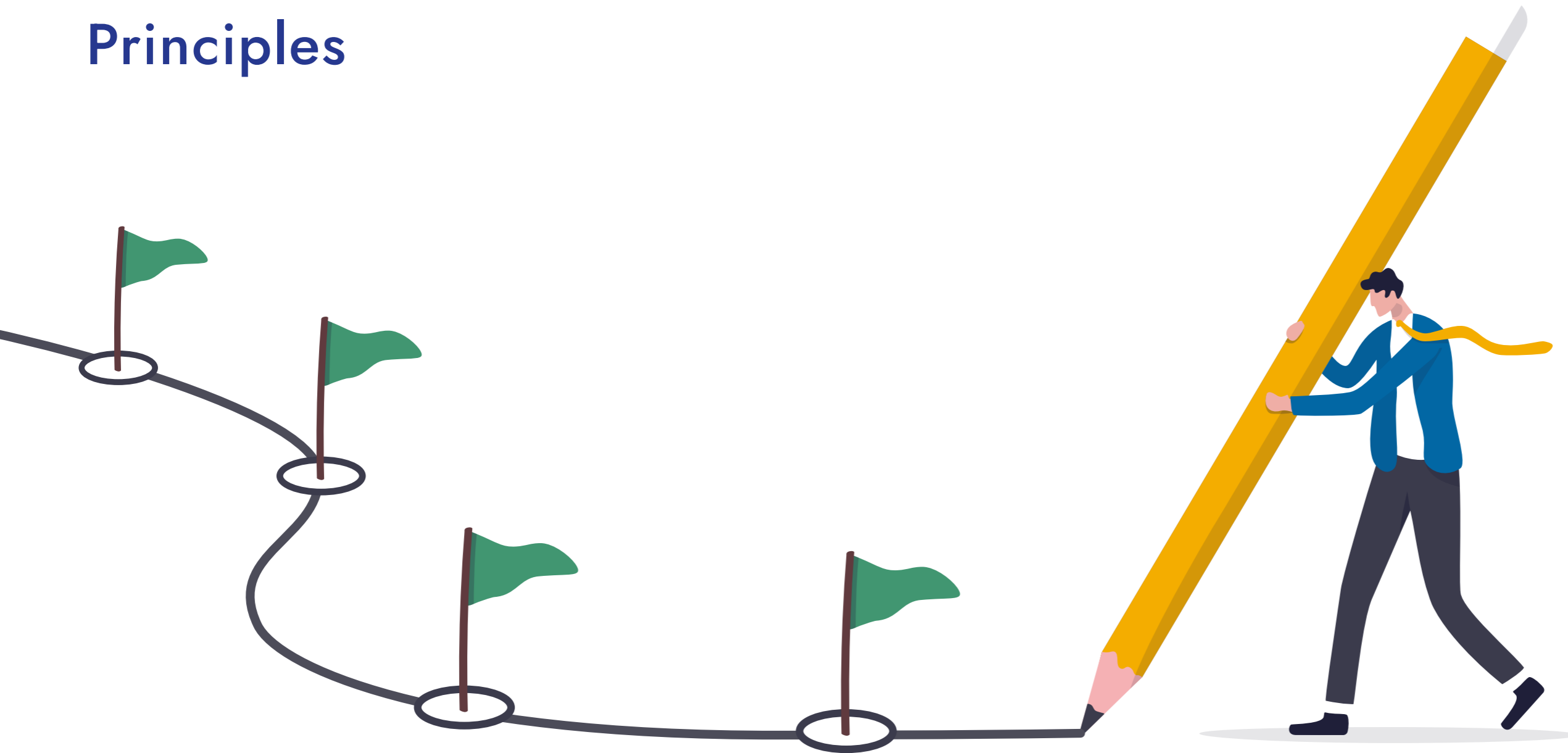


SOŇA LEXMANOVÁ has been the President of the Association of Public Relations of the Slovak Republic since 2018 and the managing director at SKPR Strategies. With over 20 years of experience in public relations and communications, she specialises in corporate social responsibility strategies. Under her leadership, SKPR STRATEGIES has won the agency of the year title multiple times. Within the PR association, she leads diverse strategic initiatives, including the Fair Tender Initiative. She holds a Master's degree in Secondary Education and Teaching from the University of Mateja Bela in Banská Bystrica.



01

Principles



STRATEGIC ROLE OF PR

*Does PR have
a strategic role?
A definitive yes.*

INTRODUCTION

When considering the strategic role of public relations (PR) within organisations, the question often arises: Does PR really hold a strategic position, or is it simply a supporting function? The answer lies in the multiple responsibilities that PR professionals have—managing the company’s reputation, profiling their CEOs, often handling internal communications and always navigating crises. These functions are central to the success and survival of any organisation.

Also, based on my discussions with colleagues from advertising or media planning, we, as PR professionals, are more frequently in contact with company CEOs than they are. But does this mean that PR is more important than marketing? I don’t think so. Both disciplines are strategic, and they work best in tandem.

The importance of PR becomes especially clear when considering its role in managing a company’s reputation. A strong reputation can protect a company during potential crises, maintain customer loyalty and attract new customers. Conversely, a damaged reputation can lead to loss of customers, negative media and social media coverage, and share value decline in the case of publicly traded companies. This makes PR not just a communication function, but a strategic partner in safeguarding the organisation’s long-term interests.

Based on the latest Authenticity GAP study by FleishmanHillard, nearly two-thirds of consumers expect brands (and their CEOs) to speak publicly about topics that may not have a big impact on their business but have an impact on society. In an era where consumers and stake-

holders are increasingly sceptical, authentic communication can differentiate one company from others. This underscores the importance of PR in crafting messages that are not only accurate but also resonate with audiences on a deeper, more meaningful level.

While marketing and PR serve different functions, both are indispensable to the strategic direction of a company. Marketing drives sales, but without the solid reputation that PR builds, those sales can be short-lived. Similarly, PR alone cannot sustain a company without the revenue generation that marketing ensures. Together, they form a powerful duo. The strategic role of PR, therefore, is not only to manage communication but also to align it with the organisation’s overarching goals, ensuring that every message, whether internal or external, contributes to long-term success. I hope you will enjoy reading the opinions of our industry experts on the strategic role of public relations.



RADEK MARSIK serves as managing partner of FleishmanHillard’s Prague office, working with clients from various industries. In addition to his expertise in reputation management, public affairs and digital communications, he provides crisis communications and media training. Radek currently serves as chairman of the Czech PR association APRA. He started his career as a journalist; in his last media job he was executive editor of Business World magazine.

PR BEYOND THE SPOTLIGHT: THE POWER OF MULTIDIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION

Public relations (PR) has long been recognised as a key function in managing an organisation's image and reputation with consumers. However, its strategic value goes far beyond customer relations. PR plays an increasingly important role in engaging with different stakeholders and provides a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the organisation and the brand it represents. This is particularly true for multinational organisations, like the OTP Group, which is present in 11 countries, and which needs to be sensitive not only to the stakeholders within each market, but also to the cultural and structural differences between markets.

Among these stakeholders, employees have particular importance, which became even more evident during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis underlined the importance of internal communication when organisations faced unprecedented challenges such as lockdowns lasting several weeks. As internal brand ambassadors, employees provided invaluable insights that shaped organisational strategy and crisis management. By connecting with employees, PR professionals gained on-the-ground perspectives that revealed the true pulse of the company, especially in times of uncertainty.

One of the beauties and challenges of PR is that, in addition to customers and employees, it has

to build and manage relationships with the media, social media, regulators, supervisory bodies, vendors, competitors, representative organisations, rating agencies, etc., to ensure that the expected multi-directional flow of information is successfully established and facilitated. This approach positions PR not only as a mouthpiece for the organisation, but also as a critical channel for feedback and information. The dual role of PR—representing the organisation outwards while channelling information inwards to management—increases the strategic importance of PR. It allows PR to inform management on key issues, from employee morale to market perceptions, from regulatory risks to diplomatic opportunities, ensuring that strategic decisions are based on a comprehensive understanding of internal and external updates.

In today's dynamic business environment, the ability to gather, interpret and use information from all corners of the stakeholder community is key. The role of public relations is essential in this process, transforming it from a simple communication function to a strategic partner in organisational decision-making.

By taking on this wider role, PR not only reinforces its importance, but also enables the organisation to navigate complex challenges with flexibility and foresight.



BENCE GÁSPÁR, *Head of Communications at OTP Bank*. Early in his career, he spent 3-3 years at PwC and Hill&Knowlton, and then spent four years as Head of Communications at MAG Hungarian Economic Development Centre. For 13 years, he has been working at OTP Bank, the largest and fastest growing banking group in the CEE region, where he is responsible for the strategic management of external and internal communications. He is Vice President of the Hungarian PR Association and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Prima Prímissima Foundation. Married, father of two children.

Financial managers and CEOs sometimes perceive public relations as an intangible service, difficult to measure and easy to cut. However, in today's digitalised and interconnected world, communication is omnipresent and a key cornerstone of an organisation's success or failure. Due to rapidly changing technological tools, the profession of communication specialists has become much more demanding and technically challenging. Volatile security and the geopolitical situation also call for careful stakeholder management and preparedness for various risk and crisis communication scenarios.

STRATEGIC ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Therefore, public relations must transcend its traditional service function to assume a strategic and advisory role, embodying the principles of strategic communication. This involves systematic, deliberate and managed activities that monitor, analyse and leverage communication to further organisational objectives in relationships with the public and various stakeholder groups. Strategic communication utilises a range of tactics, tools and methods, such as storytelling, internal and external messaging, and creating communication opportunities, to align organisational plans and objectives with its overall direction.

Historically, figures such as Scott Cutlip and his colleagues were influential in shaping the effective role of PR, introducing the '7 Cs' (clarity, consistency, etc.) in the 1950s. James Grunig later

advocated for excellence in PR, striving for a strategic role for the profession, although in many cases it remained service-oriented. With the evolution of digital media, scholars like Ans-



gar Zerfass, Dejan Verčič and Betteke van Ruler emphasised that communication must be integral to company management sitting at the board level—this is now termed strategic communication. Despite this evolution, a large part of PR work remains service-oriented, focusing on fostering relationships, building trust and gaining stakeholder feedback, which is also important, but must not stop there.

Freedom of speech, public trust and transparency are essential prerequisites for strategic communication to be effective. These values ensure that communication professionals can operate without manipulation, and foster an environment of trust and openness. Therefore, integrating ethical considerations and critical thinking into both the theory and practice of communication

is vital. This integration ensures that communication efforts are genuine and avoid manipulative influences on individuals or groups, maintaining the integrity of the profession.

The strategic role of public relations involves not only managing information flow but also advising on communication strategies that impact overall organisational success. By focusing on long-term goals and fostering meaningful relationships with stakeholders, public relations as a strategic function can drive organisational growth and adapt to changing public expectations and market conditions. This strategic approach requires a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation, to ensure that communication strategies remain relevant and effective in achieving organisational objectives.



DENISA HEJLOVA is Director of the Research Centre for Strategic Communication at the Faculty of Social Sciences within Charles University. She conducts research, teaches and consults in the areas of strategic communication, public relations, public affairs and political communication. From 2011 to 2023, she led the Department of Marketing Communication and PR at Charles University, She previously held the roles of vice-dean for PR and PR manager at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dr Hejlova was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in 2014 and studied intercultural communication at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies from 2005 to 2006. She is the author of comprehensive books on public relations and strategic communication tailored for the Czech audience, published in 2015 and 2024 respectively. A prolific contributor to academic journals, she has also been a guest lecturer at several universities in Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and Japan.

What is the strategic role of public relations and how can brands create meaningful relationships with consumers in the online and AI era?

Having just a quality product is no longer enough for customers today. They consider it a standard part of the purchase and expect much more from a brand. This is where strategic public relations (PR) plays a crucial role.

In the era of the online world and artificial intelligence, the ways brands communicate with consumers are changing. Consumers now actively discuss about brands, read reviews and share their experiences online, sometimes even 24/7. An inappropriate response to negative feedback can have adverse consequences, while proper communication can strengthen the brand. AI technologies can assist PR professionals in many areas, from real-time sentiment analysis to personalised communication with customers. However, despite technology streamlining many processes, the human factor remains crucial.

PR professionals are also indispensable in creating strategies that build meaningful relationships with customers. According to recent surveys*, up to 86% of customers state that authenticity is a key factor when deciding which products or brands to purchase, and 81% emphasise the im-

portance of brand transparency. PR is an effective tool that connects all of this, utilising topics that are informative, engaging, and tailored to the needs and interests of the target audience. Unlike advertising, often seen as a promotional tool and also significantly more expensive, PR allows to create deeper and lasting relationships with customers, to build credibility and a positive brand perception.

Therefore, the strategic role of PR in the communication and marketing mix is invaluable. PR shapes how people think about a company, product, service or brand representatives. It can increase visibility and improve a brand's reputation by creating a unique, consistent message and stronger brand identity. One that can attract customers, boost product sales and enhance its competitiveness.

How Consumer Preferences Shape Buying Decisions and Loyalty, 2024. Jannik Lindner



KATARÍNA DROPOVÁ acts as managing director with a specialisation in corporate and crisis communication at the agency 10/10 COMMUNICATIONS. She has been active in marketing, communication and PR for over 25 years. She managed communications for brands such as Tesco Stores, Pepsi Cola, VÚB Bank, Tchibo Slovakia, Colgate-Palmolive, Fast Plus, PPG Deco, SodaStream, Metro Cash & Carry, Budvar and others. She was behind the creative idea of the guerilla campaign on the occasion of the launch of the Slovak Olympic collection 2012 created by the Alpine Pro brand and also participated in the follow-up communications. She was also responsible for successful crisis communication resolution of the methanol affair for the Spirits Importers Section of the Slovak Trade Association.

KPI TRUST: The vital role of PR in building trust across generations

Today, nothing is more precious than trust, and there is no trust without effective public relations. How can we achieve this in line with the current expectations of all generations?

As we move through 2024, the world feels like a sci-fi novel. Political gridlock, economic tremors and rapid innovations generate uncertainty, thus strengthening the role of trust in society and business. Today, trust is like Wi-Fi—invisible, but when it's gone, everyone notices. It is the backbone of social harmony, effective governance and economic growth. It influences our willingness to engage and cooperate. For companies, trust holds customer loyalty, brand reputation and employee morale together, driving innovation and growth. Trust turns customers into fans, employees into advocates and strangers into friends.

Unfortunately, trust in governments and traditional media is at an all-time low, while businesses are the best of a bad bunch, though globally

they reached the 63% trust threshold (Edelman). This is why trust is crucial for CEOs and board members. The role of PR is to support them strategically and manage communication so that trust is never lacking.

Gaining trust requires commitment, but above all, openness and clear, consistent communication that aligns with company values. Brands should engage in meaningful dialogue and show their ethical side, but each generation needs a tailored communication approach. Generation Alpha, the digital natives, thrive on interactive content and appreciate brands committed to education and the environment. Generation Z values authenticity and transparency, wanting brands involved in social causes. Millennials focus on sustainability, innovation and personalised experiences, preferring brands that stand out with eco-friendly values. The Silver Generation, or baby boomers, value reliability and personal interaction, building trust through straightforward communication and stability.

While gaining trust is far more challenging than losing it, paying close attention to your audience's needs and demonstrating sincere intentions ensures a promising path forward. In a world where trust is more valuable than ever, it is the cornerstone upon which strong relationships and sustainable success are built. Brands and PR agencies that master the art of trust will find themselves not only surviving but thriving in the complexities of modern society.



With a degree in Cultural Studies, KLAUDIA CHMIELECKA is passionate about observing reality, asking questions and seeking insights. In her role as a Senior Communication & Creative Strategist at 24/7Communication, she is always trying to discover unconventional solutions. Her approach combines curiosity with creativity, and she is always striving to find the hidden narratives that make brands resonate with their audiences.

Strategic, credible communication has never been so important. Almost every day we can see the consequences of its absence. Failures by well-known influential authorities, consumer boycotts, investor withdrawals and reputation crises. Even the biggest market players can lose everything in the blink of an eye. The adage 'from rags to riches' is still apt, although so is its opposite: 'from hero to zero'.

PR IN THE BOARDROOM: How to bring value to the C-suites?

However, not all business leaders are aware of this. There is still a belief that PR is far from business. Nothing could be further from the truth! But how to prove this? How to ensure a first-row place for PR consultants in boardrooms?

TIP 1: ASK YOURSELF THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Before meeting with C-suites, think about the priorities and concerns they may have, their individual goals and companies' KPIs. Answer the following question—who am I meeting with? What is the personality of this person? Are there any conflicts on the board?

All of this will set you on the path to the boardroom.

TIP 2: SHARE YOUR DATA AND INSIGHTS

When you're already there, tell your story basing it on strong market insights and benchmarks. PR is a bridge between the internal and external worlds, executives and teams. From the top it's hard to see details—so try to be a guide.

TIP 3: SHOW THAT COMMUNICATION GOALS ARE BUSINESS GOALS

Number of clippings? Impressions? Social media likes? Who cares? At the end of the day, impressions don't mean anything if you haven't impressed anyone. You need to deeply understand business goals and support them in your PR strategy.

And then to report it use business language—impact on market share or revenue, ROI, strategic value for brand reputation. To measure this, you need to implement the right tools (surveys, consumer research, SoMe analytics), as well as closely cooperate with the business departments of the company.

TIP 4: DON'T BE AFRAID

The role of the strategic advisor is to ask critical questions and challenge the status quo. We are not here to make someone happy. We are here to be a sparring partner and trusted consultant. We are here to protect from bad decisions and to help make new and better ones. Isn't this what we all want—regardless of position?

When we challenge C-suites in a smart strategic way and keep the right balance, we can win trust and respect.



MILENA ZACHARZEWSKA is a business unit director responsible for food, retail and consumer goods sectors at 24/7Communication. She is a strategic advisor for leading Polish and international companies, such as McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Danone, supporting them to gain trust and achieve priority business or sustainability goals. Milena started her career as a journalist and has cooperated intensively with all major industry bodies, as well as with ministries and regional authorities.

INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS: WHO WILL STEP UP THE ROSTRUM?

IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY, INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS BECAME GENERAL IN MOST OF THE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY.

At the same time, PR is building trust for the long term, which needs a strategic way of thinking. If PR leads the orchestration, then the first step is to build up a long-term vision with all the tools PR has. And if PR has a long-term vision, it will be easy to drive all parts of marketing communications, events, social media actions, internal communications, etc. If they have a strong standard

of long-term vision, all communication parts can be directed by the conductor of the orchestra. The Hungarian PR Association recognised the necessity of all these above by including integrated & PR driven campaigns in its annual contest PREXA (PR Excellence Award).

IT HAS THREE MAJOR PARTS:

1. Small for-profit and non-profit companies, foundations, trade unions, small non-governmental bodies, and even small political parties. They have one-person communications 'departments' or only a couple of employees. These mini units have to do every task connected to marketing, inner and outer PR and event organisation. It means that their job is integrated communications, as such.

2. Medium-sized and large companies, multinationals, big governmental and non-governmental bodies. They mostly had separate departments for marketing communications, internal and external PR, events and social media. And now, under the flag of integrated communications they must cooperate: to plan and to execute in close cooperation.

3. Full-service agencies that have to serve both small and big clients. Both types of clients need comprehensive advice, planning and execution.

It is obvious that type 2 and 3 must orchestrate their activities—but this type of orchestration needs a central, inner leadership. Integrated communications work as an orchestra. Every group has its part, sometimes solo, sometimes just background music, but together they give a full musical experience. Without it, sooner or later the entire activity sinks into chaos, and the 'integration' falls apart.

Who should lead the integration? Who will step up on the rostrum as conductor? This is the 'hot spot' of orchestration.

There are several opinions and reasonings. Some of them are worth considering. In my opinion, public relations is dedicated to being the leader, the conductor.

WHY?

All other actors, like those who work in marketing and event organisation, are deeply influenced by the ROI approach, and mostly short-term (or at least project-based) planning. Even trendy purpose-driven marketing is fully influenced by the necessity of showing short-term results.



DR PÉTER J. SÓS (SPJ) Communications expert, honorary lifetime member of the Hungarian PR Association, Honorary University Professor, owner of PR Agency B. SWAN Partners. He started his career as a journalist working for 22 years from junior to editor-in-chief. Later he became president and CEO of Academic Publishing House, Budapest; then CEO of the first Hungarian electronic book wholesaler company Sunbooks. Dr Sós started his PR career in 1994 at Burson-Marsteller Budapest. He established his own PR company B. SWAN Partners with his partners in 2002 as well as started to teach PR and marketing communications at Kodolányi János University. He has taught several courses in Austria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Portugal, Romania and Russia. He became member of the Hungarian PR Association in 2000. He gave lectures at PR Summer University in Csíkszereda (Romania) for over five years. Later he established and organised the most popular yearly PR Academy series in Hungary. He became also Vice President of the PR Association. Dr Sós has written six books. One of them — a PR study book— has five editions, and is obligatory reading at some universities in Hungary. He has edited a further four books and was professional lecturer of further four books.



ETHICS

Ethics first

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, marked by the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the economic recession, society has experienced significant polarisation and a rise in negative sentiment. This is a global phenomenon, and the V4 region, comprising Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia is no exception. According to a 2023 GLOBSEC survey, approximately one-third of the population in the V4 countries, and over half of the population in Slovakia, are prone to believing in some form of conspiracy theory.

These challenging times have also impacted the business environment. The pandemic and subsequent crises have made it more difficult for companies to maintain ethical behaviour. The EY Global Integrity Report indicates an increased willingness among institutions and their top management to act outside the bounds of rules, ethical norms and codes compared to previous periods (EY, 2022).

Periods of societal pessimism and growing polarisation emphasise the importance of establishing and adhering to ethical principles, even beyond standard expectations. All sectors of society—government, public administration, business, the third sector and media—must play a crucial role. According to last year's Edelman Trust Barometer, business is regarded as the only global institution that is both competent and ethical, far surpassing government, media and the third sector, giving it a comparative advantage. The public expects businesses to champion truth, provide reliable information, support civic dialogue and hold sources of false information accountable by engaging in ethical communication (Edelman, 2023).

Therefore, ethics must come first. Today, it is a key attribute of professional and high-quality PR. In an era marked by the uncontrolled spread of fake news and misinformation, the strong influence of social media in shaping public opinion, and the rise of artificial intelligence—which presents both opportunities and threats—PR professionals bear significant moral responsibility. They must actively monitor the information landscape, ethically leverage technology, and manage communications responsibly to ensure the dissemination of truthful and verified information. Their responsibility extends not only to protecting their clients' reputations and brand integrity, but also to strengthening public trust in the reliability of information.

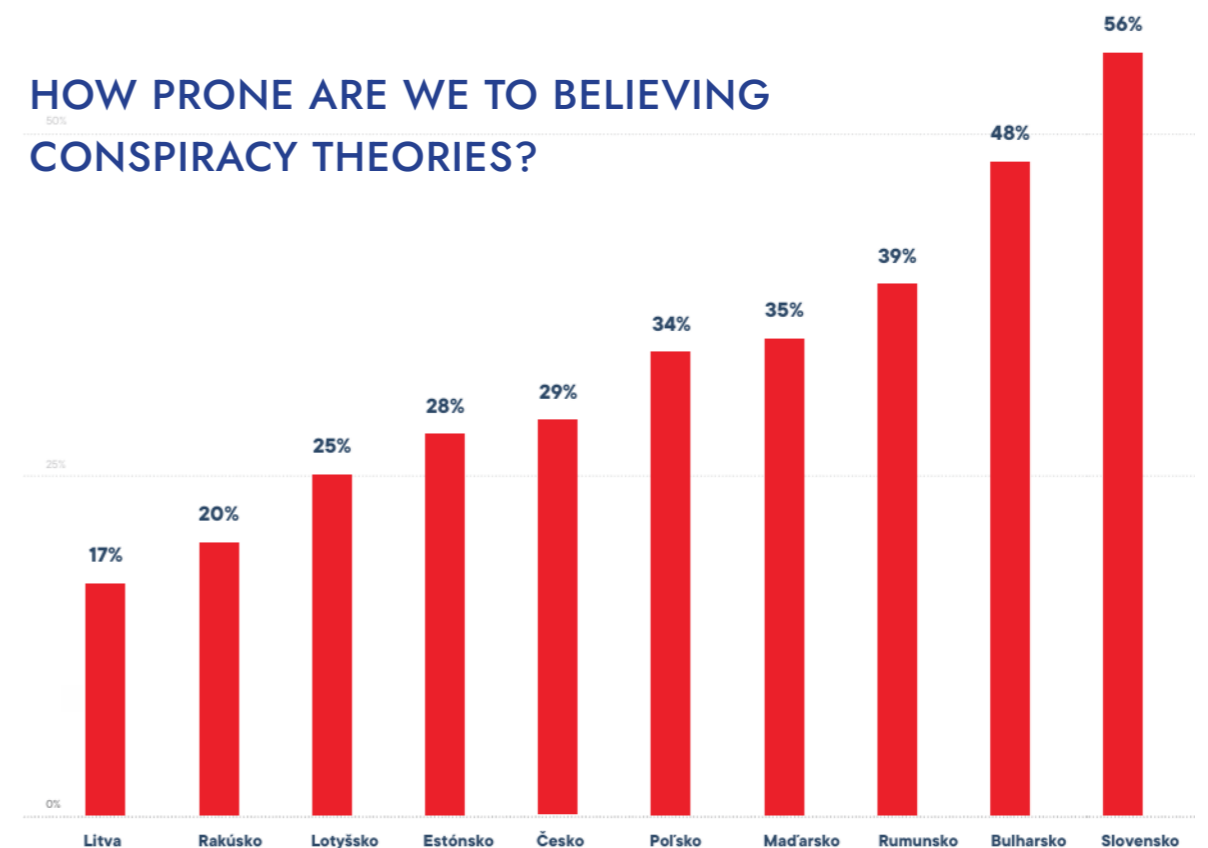
HOW PRONE ARE WE TO BELIEVING CONSPIRACY THEORIES?

Based on a survey conducted across CEE countries, GLOBSEC identified five key factors contributing to the susceptibility to believe in conspiracies and falsehoods through logistic regression analysis:

1. Willingness to trade rights and freedoms for other benefits.
2. Support for an autocratic leader.
3. The belief that the media are not free.
4. Dissatisfaction with the system.
5. Dissatisfaction with life.

Graph / countries translation:
Lithuania, Austria, Latvia, Estonia, Czechia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia

HOW PRONE ARE WE TO BELIEVING CONSPIRACY THEORIES?



KATARÍNA REMIAŠ is a member of the Presidium of the Association of Public Relations of the Slovak Republic and serves as chair of the Ethical Committee. She has dedicated 25 years to the field of public relations and is the owner and CEO of the PR agency 1st CLASS, where she focuses on strategic communication and reputation management. She holds a degree in marketing and communication from the University of Economics in Bratislava and has further enhanced her expertise in PR with certifications from LCCI in London and Cambridge University.



PR ETHICAL ISSUES AND INSTITUTIONS

Rapid environmental and technological changes determine professional and organisational PR ethics and morality. New world trends such as the information revolution, digitalisation, robotics, new media and its tools, as well as the pandemic and the global economic crisis have brought about changes that challenge the PR profession and have induced the development of new PR strategies and tools. The rise of populism, manipulation, fake news, disinformation and the advent of AI have given rise to new PR ethics.

We can observe that the situation of PR ethics is deteriorating, as indicated by the increase in the number of ethics cases and the emergence of new types of cases. The main categories of ethics cases reported to the HuPRA Ethics Committee are:

- violations of personality rights, defamation of reputation, public defamatory statements;
- quality, professional and financial complaints against the PR Agency's service;
- problems in media relations;
- creative-, event idea copyright;
- harm to PR client relationships, business secrets;
- the PR tendering process and leaking of results;
- employment issues for PR professionals, free probation work.

Ethical institutions play a crucial role in addressing ethical breaches (see Figure 1). Ethical corporate behaviour—which focuses on institutionalising ethics and integrating organisational and human fundamental values into everyday

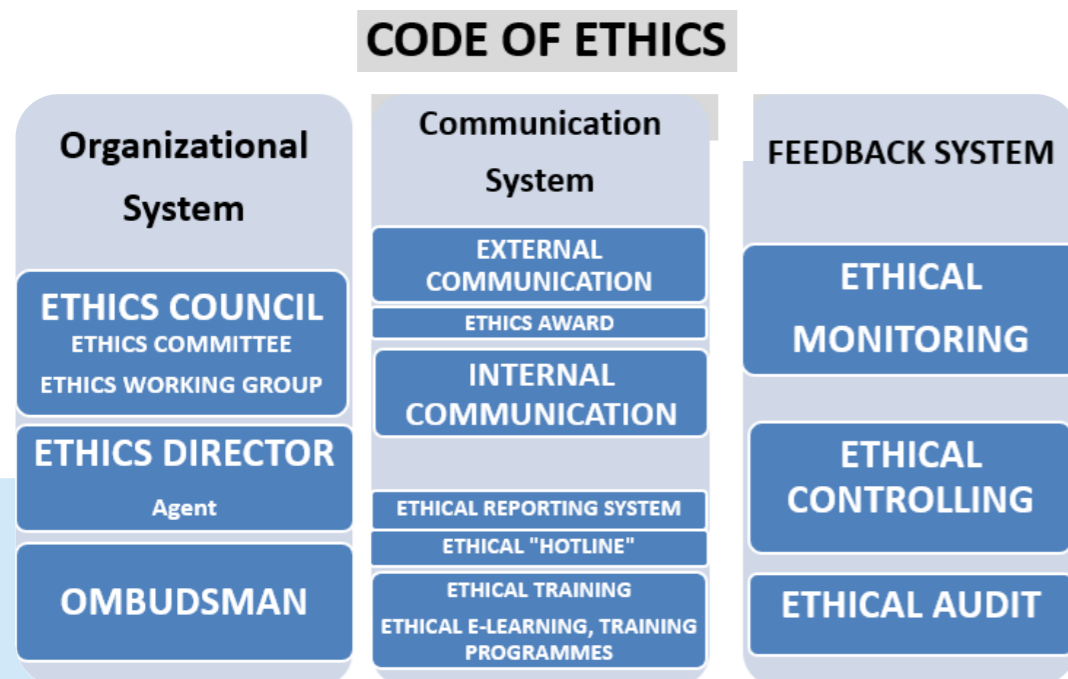


Figure 1 - Ethical institutions
Source: Buday-Sántha, Andrea 2016. 37

corporate life—is a fundamental requirement of PR and reputation management. The basic instrument of the institutional system is the Code of Ethics, which serves as a guideline for ethical corporate behaviour. It declares the patterns of behaviour expected by the company, setting boundaries and promoting adherence to values. For companies with a code (see Figure 2), the research report shows that ethical monitoring, internal communication and internal PR are the most popular.

Under the EU Whistleblower Directive 2019/1937, companies are required to establish a whistleblowing system to facilitate the disclosure of legal and ethical issues in companies. The big challenge for the future is to address the ethical issues related to AI, which will continue to accompany and shape public relations ethics for a long time to come.

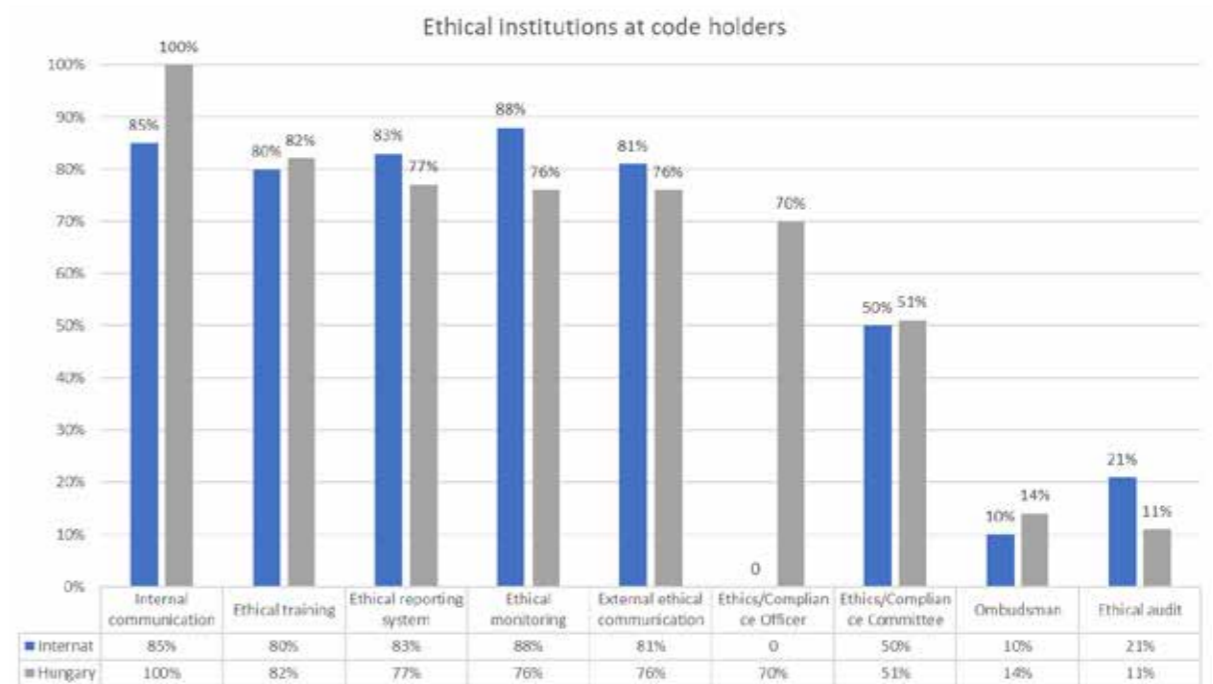


Figure 2 - Ethical Institutions at code holders
Own editing; Source: Hungarian Business Leaders Forum /HBLF (2016).
Institutionalising ethics in business. Budapest: HBLF p. 2

DR ANDREA BUDAY-SÁNTA, PhD, lawyer-economist, Honorary Member of the Hungarian Public Relations Association, Habilitated Associate Professor at the Budapest University of Economics, researcher of communication and PR, communication law and ethics. She has decades of professional experience as a communication and PR professional and manager. She is a leading officer at HuPRA as a member of the board, three times re-elected Chairman of the Ethics Committee and Honorary Member. She is the recipient of several scientific awards and professional honours.



Populism and the polarisation of society are growing in Europe—and not only here. One of the key factors pertaining to such growth is the communication of politicians which customarily facilitates increases in the intensity of polarisation during various elections. Parliamentary elections, presidential elections, and European Parliament elections took place in Slovakia in the space of just over one year. Hungary had European Parliament elections and municipal elections this year. A presidential election was held in Czechia, and important parliamentary elections are set to take place in a year's time. In Poland, the parliamentary elections took place in 2023, municipal this year and the presidential election will take place next year. All elections were and are connected to campaigns—many of which were considered to have crossed the boundaries of decency and ethics.

DO POLITICIANS NEED A COMMUNICATION CODE OF ETHICS?

However, even after the elections, the populist style of communication ordinary people have begun to accept as standard has not stopped. The communication of several political parties and politicians reflects the global trend of polarisation in society, and we increasingly see extreme forms of expression and violence. For example, Slovakia has experienced an increasing polarisation of society, growing tension, hostility and aggression over a sustained period of time—which is a direct consequence of incorrect and unethical communication within society. Decent and ethical communication by politicians is essential in order to reduce tension and polarisation in society, as well as for building public trust in politics, and for maintaining stability and democracy in society.

Elected politicians and political parties who rule the country, manage the state, create legislation and handle citizens' finances should serve as role models and ethical authorities. We should in no way accept that during election campaigns and political communication, the end justifies

the means. Lying, using unfair practices, inciting fear, building on negative emotions, and polarising society is common practice among politicians and a legitimate tool utilised in the struggle for power and governance.

This enduring situation and atmosphere in the country was highlighted by a unique initiative of the Slovak PR Association—which has prepared a draft code of ethics for election campaigns and set ethical communication rules for politicians and political parties. This code is based on customary ethical standards in society, in religion, and also from ethical codes of campaigns and communication common in the commercial sphere. It is furthermore based on the principles of fairness, transparency, truth, respect and decency, but also on the protection of privacy and dignity of individuals, the responsibility of politicians for their words and actions, and compliance with applicable laws and customary standards.

The feedback has been varied so far. While

some Slovak parties have no issues with the principles of the code, parties mostly with populist rhetoric and their communication experts consider the code naive and, directly or indirectly, also suggest that lying is a legitimate tool in political communication. It's a long-term effort.



DANIEL GAJDOS, began his career at MMD, now known as Grayling. After a few years, he started to build his own agency, initially focused on theatre and event management which gradually transformed into a fully-fledged communications agency. He has been working in the marketing, event and communications fields for almost 21 years. In recent years, he has contributed to the preparation of communication strategies and the implementation of various projects for clients such as Slovak Telekom, ZSE, Accenture, HOPIN, BMW, IDC and others.



KEEP CALM AND BE ETHICAL

How to behave ethically in times when disinformation sells

In the pursuit of lead generation, brands increase the production of press releases. The problem is that their competitors do the same, in turn reducing the visibility of each company's activities. To break through with their communication, many companies focus on the volume of content, instead of its quality. Brands are co-creating native content in partnership with publishers, and are becoming more and more calculated about doing so. Information is provided selectively and often misleads readers (exploiting the fact that they only read headlines and leads). But customers don't like to be cheated. They no longer believe every piece of clickbait information and may even boycott unfair brands. This is a positive trend. However, there is still a lot to do and we as PR agencies have a mission to accomplish. Ethical behaviour in the communication space should be one of the most desirable values we hold to. Let's make our clients aware of how important it is to be responsible for our words—both for ethical and financial reasons. The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection in Poland regularly detects unfair practices when companies mislead consumers. In spring this year, they imposed a fine of approximately EUR 0.88 million on a manufacturer of men's formal clothing for providing false information about the materials of the clothing (this is the highest fine in the history of the Polish clothing industry). Moreover, consumers themselves are becoming more aware and they are starting to pay attention to whom they buy from.

As EU Member States are increasingly obliged to comply with the principles of sustainable development, this is becoming more and more important in many areas, including communication (and as we know, ethics is a fundamental aspect of corporate social responsibility). But changes in consciousness occur slowly. According to the European Sustainable Development Report 2023/2024, prepared by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network in cooperation with SDSN Europe and the EESC, the EU continues to perform poorly on sustainable consumption and production.



IGA KOŁACZ is the account manager of the Finance & FinTech Department at Human Signs, a Polish PR and marketing communications agency. She is responsible for implementing projects for clients in the financial sector. Her tasks include, among others, maintaining contact with clients, planning and implementing PR activities, and building tactical and strategic communication solutions. Kołacz has 14 years of experience in media as a journalist and editor—for half of that time she specialised in writing about marketing, PR and the advertising market. Author and co-author of many reports, including Advertising Panorama (a detailed analysis of PR agencies and media houses in Poland, a publication issued every year by Press magazine).

WHY ESTABLISHING FAIR TENDER GUIDELINES IS VITAL FOR INDUSTRY SUCCESS

In the dynamic world of the creative industry, significant investments are poured into tenders. It is crucial they are conducted efficiently to ensure that they not only yield optimal results but also inspire both clients and consultants to pursue the best possible solutions. While the theory emphasises fairness and effectiveness, the reality is starkly different. According to a recent survey by the Slovak Association of Public Relations (APRSR), nearly 60% of tenders encounter significant challenges.

The marketing industry in Slovakia spends more than EUR 4.5 million annually on tenders that are not conducted according to the principles of a fair tender. Several common issues frequently arise, including ambiguous criteria, overly large assignments with insufficient time, and non-transparent selection criteria without providing feedback. These challenges can hinder the tender process and compromise the quality of outcomes. Based on these observations, the Slovak creative industry, including APRSR, has launched an initiative called Fair Tender (ferovyntender.sk). The initiative aims to establish clear guidelines, ensure transparency and foster genuine competition.

The Fair Tender initiative is the result of an unprecedented collaboration in the creative industry, launched by five leading industry associations representing 72 agencies with a total annual turnover of EUR 370 million. In addition to raising transparency standards, the initiative aims to save costs, time and talent on both sides—client and agency—and, most importantly, to ensure a high-quality outcome for the client throughout their cooperation with the selected agency.

A well-conducted fair tender maximises the chances of success and the quality of the future partnership between the client and the agency. It is said that at least 40% of the success of future cooperation is determined by the initial moments. Establishing a strong foundation for cooperation is therefore essential, as it not only maximises outcomes but also cultivates an environment where clients and creative professionals are motivated to develop and implement the most innovative solutions.

The Fair Tender initiative has also prepared comprehensive recommendations and briefs on how to conduct a fair tender. The guidelines draw from examples of best practices from both Slovakia and abroad, as well as from our extensive knowledge of the agency and client environments. Although the application of the fair tender principles is voluntary, we believe that widespread adoption of these recommendations will bring significant benefits to all participants and stakeholders.

The communication linked to the Fair Tender initiative has reinforced industry standards and also recorded significant media and industry attention.



JURAJ CARANEK is a member of the Ethical Committee within The Slovak Association of Public Relations (APRSR) and a partner at Seesame, the largest Slovak PR consultancy. For two decades he has been working in corporate communication advising public, private and non-profit organisations to reach their communication goals. Juraj graduated in marketing at the Faculty of Management at the Comenius University in Bratislava.

GUARDIANS OF INTEGRITY: UPHOLDING ETHICS IN PR

In public relations, ethics is vital for trust and credibility. However, professionals face challenges with transparency, media ownership, media assessment and state autocracy. The erosion of public trust in media and public relations is evident in CEE.

Concentrated, politicised media ownership leads to biased reporting and challenges in honesty. State autocracy adds pressure on PR professionals to conform to state narratives, compromising ethical standards.

And, of course, we have to mention interest groups... Sounds a little hopeless, doesn't it?

We can't forget the lessons from 'Wag the Dog', where manipulation and spin are used to divert attention. In our real world, we strive to uphold truth and transparency, and resist pressures that push us toward unethical practices. How do we ensure that we don't fall into the trap of spin and manipulation?

To address these challenges, we must engage in continuous education and foster critical thinking. Understanding ethical dilemmas and developing strategies to address them enhances the

profession's integrity. And, of course, so does advocating for media independence.

That's why we should support initiatives that promote media independence, collaborate with watchdogs, support independent journalism and advocate for policies limiting undue influence.

But perhaps most important of all is the responsibility of each and every one of us as individuals. It is about every single human choosing the right path, standing up against unethical practices and committing to ethical standards. If we decide to maintain our integrity and confront wrongdoing, we can make a substantial difference. Each individual decision to act ethically contributes to a collective movement towards a more honest and trustworthy profession.

We may not get rid of the dog waggers completely, but at least we can train them together to be 'good boys'.

'Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching.'

— C.S. Lewis



MARTINA BECHYŇOVÁ is a freelance creative director, copywriter and idea maker. She has helped dozens of brands including Foodora, Ambiente, Pivovar Matuska, Philips and Signal Festival. One of her biggest achievements is the case of fighting trolls on the Liftago brand, for which she collected many awards including ADC Czech Creative Awards and Talent of the Year at Zlatý Stredník.

YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT

My mom always taught me to live a life where I can 'look into the mirror without having to spit on my image.' In other words, live a decent honourable life by staying on the narrow road of righteousness. Little did I know as a child that I would choose a profession where these internal rules are even more important and much harder to follow.

We PR professionals make a living by influencing other people's thoughts and actions. Influencing means that the receiver is aware that someone intends to have an impact on their thinking. When the receiver is not aware that they are being influenced, it's called manipulation. When you manipulate, you direct one's opinion without them realising that you are controlling their mind.

And this is what we do to an ever-increasing degree. Not because we are malicious—at least most PR professionals are not—but because the level of intelligence and the attention span of the public has changed dramatically in the last few decades. Social media has brought a total [change of behaviour](#) with less sense and more sensibility. The speed of communication has increased drastically, people receive information and make decisions in a split second. Frustration is high; thus emotions engulf, and we react, comment and share without stopping for a minute to think. A study actually shows that [angry posts bring more likes](#) on social media.

Understanding that you are being influenced presumes some brainwork, but in our faster-than-

light world, there's no time to think. So how can people realise manipulation if they don't permit themselves to think because of 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) or simple laziness? In an ideal world, fake news wouldn't exist, because people would question what they hear and would read more than clickbait titles. But our world is far from ideal, so fake news and deepfakes run wild and this is only the tip of the iceberg. Generations grow up without the habit of questioning and doubting, not because they don't have the ability, but because they don't devote time to it. According to a 2020 [global study](#) on why people believe in conspiracy theories, every fifth person thought climate change was not real.

This is why those who have the knowledge and the means to influence and manipulate must stick to very strict [ethical rules](#) set out by the professional bodies. When the audience is not responsible or mature enough, professional communicators should hold back and make sure that they don't accidentally slip into controlling minds. Just because you have the knowledge and the opportunity to do something, doesn't mean you have the right as well.



ZSÓFIA LAKATOS is Member Emeritus and former president of the Hungarian PR Association (HuPRA), former managing director of Hill+Knowlton, founder and MD of Emerald PR, owner of Valsag112, Business Sustainability Program and Smaragd Akadémia. She is an internationally recognised PR and sustainability expert, writer and speaker at conferences. Member of the Superbrands and Green Brands Committees, board member of the Clean Air Action Group and the Budapest Club, and member of the Global Advisory Board and Speaker Bureau of WCFA.

02

Practice areas



ESG

“ESG – understood as a business transformation that incorporates environmental, social and governance factors – has no chance of happening without communication”

INTRODUCTION

Public relations specialists widely agree that **ESG is emerging as a key aspect of corporate communication. However, I would argue more forcefully that ESG—understood as a business transformation that incorporates environmental, social and governance factors—has no chance of happening without communication. Only communication has the power to engage employees, customers, contractors and all stakeholders in creating the real change that is the foundation of ESG. Additionally, communication can provide an understanding of ongoing processes and prevent their negation and rejection. Finally, in the ideal model, communication will accelerate ESG transformation.**

While nowadays the focus is often placed on environmental and social issues, the equally important aspects of corporate governance tend to linger in the background. Implementing ethical standards, anti-corruption policies, and whistleblowing mechanisms for suppliers and third parties are all areas that require robust internal and external communication. Demonstrating that the company is guided by clear ethical principles, ensuring its activities are aligned with internal standards, and taking remedial actions in case of any infractions—these are the key elements in building the reputation of the employer and business partner. Undoubtedly, these governance considerations are just as crucial as the environmental and social factors when it comes to driving a comprehensive and credible ESG agenda. Effective communication around the company's ethical framework and compliance mechanisms can significantly bolster its image as a responsible and trustworthy partner.

Undoubtedly, ESG represents a huge business opportunity for the public relations sector, and it is a commitment to have. However, as our expert explains, ‘you need to have a more-than-surface understanding of the term ESG’ and ‘be there where ESG goal-setting is taking place.’ One can go further in the footsteps of another author, who postulates that every PR agency should create its own ESG strategy.

We are entering a very dynamic and interesting age of sustainable communication. I am looking forward to the coming months and years when, in addition to the now common questions of what to communicate regarding ESG strategy, it will be equally important to demonstrate the emerging practice of how to conduct communication in an effective, distinctive and engaging way, without risking accusations of greenwashing, greenhushing, and various other ‘greens’.

I invite you to meet our great experts from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia who provide different perspectives on ESG and how to navigate this field.

AGNIESZKA BACIŃSKA has nearly two decades of experience in the field of communications. She holds the position of CEO of Walk PR and CSO (Chief Sustainability Officer) at the Walk Group. She is a member of the Programme Board of the United Nations Global Compact Network Poland. She served two terms as Vice President of the Polish Public Relations Agencies Association. Agnieszka has been a juror for numerous industry awards, including the Effie Awards, Cannes Lions, Young Creatives and the Lisbon Advertising Festival.



COMMUNICATIONS as a key component of success in companies' ESG transformation

It all started by asking us communication specialists for just a little help in compiling the reports. By now ESG is much more than a voluntary, nice-to-have task: it has become embedded in general business strategy and, as such, communicators should have a complex role in this.

First of all, one needs to have a detailed understanding of the term and practise of ESG.

Communications specialists must be there where ESG goal setting is taking place. Based on the SMART criteria, communication is heavily involved in delivering insights concerning the social and economic environment and adjusting goals to an organisation's corporate identity. Commenting on goals to reveal possible risks in terms of achievability and timing is also a task communicators need to be part of.

A recent survey by Deloitte has found over that 40% of Gen Z and Millennials would switch jobs over climate concerns unless they see appropriate sustainability actions. To engage employees in the ESG process, corporate sustainability goals, benefits, as well as tangible results should be transparently communicated.

Building a reputation is one of the most profitable assets of communications. Unlike CSR, commitments taken as part of the ESG strategy are there for the long run. Transparent, evidence-based and

consistent communications will grow the organisation's reputation, which will then affect shareholders and investors' attitude towards the company, and is manifested in profit growth, as well.

In line with the European Green Deal objectives, companies under reporting obligations have to prepare their Taxonomy Report* annually. These reports become valuable assets for leverage in communication. To build advantage, first, let's put on our ESG specs and have a thorough look. Are these results newsworthy? Have we done more than the required minimum? Have we achieved the goals we had previously set? Would our claims be valid for the full supply chain? One may decide not to communicate (greenhushing) or focus on only what is unquestionably a green deed and highlight only that (greenlighting). Or one can focus on the convenient goals only (green rinsing), in order to securely obtain them. Some might join an association to hide amongst others (greencrowding). Being aware of these options makes it even harder to decide on what to communicate and how to do it. Communicators should be prepared for these challenges and be present throughout the ESG transmission, from the very beginning of setting goals until the end. If there is an end at all.

**EU taxonomy for sustainable activities - European Commission (europa.eu)*

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TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN, neither does sustainability

The sustainability landscape in Europe is rapidly evolving, propelled by new EU regulations like the Corporate Social Responsibility Directive (CSRD) and ones aimed at combating greenwashing. These shifts have elevated the area to a level of importance comparable to other corporate activities. In this context, akin to the rise of AI-driven tools, we face the challenge of augmenting our ESG knowledge and competencies. But let's look at it as an opportunity.

The sustainability milieu is influenced by a broad spectrum of stakeholders with different expectations, including consumers, investors and employees. Understanding its complexities allows us to consciously build trusting relationships with them and respond to their needs, while responsibly pursuing our client's interests. This is no longer just a trend. EU regulations have made sustainability a strategic aspect to businesses, impacting not only their image but also their financial situation. By expanding skills in this area and providing guidance, we can position ourselves as strategic advisors who bring value beyond reputation building.

And although here our work is often brought to the communication of companies' environmental activities, it is worth noting that, as PR consultants, we have long been actively involved in managing stakeholder relations and initiating activities across all aspects encapsulated by the ESG acronym. Developing professional sustainability skills allows us to mitigate image risks and ensure compliance with relevant regulations, potentially reducing financial hazards. A thor-

ough apprehension of the field, coupled with market monitoring, also helps define both clients' 'license to operate' in sustainability and areas where they can truly demonstrate leadership and excellence by relying on solid, evidence-based information.

Now, the choice lies with us: do we merely adapt to these changes or actively drive them? This represents an opportunity not only for additional profit but also for establishing a PR consultant advisory position. Soon, navigating this area will be as obvious to us as daily media monitoring. By gaining knowledge and experience early enough, we can prove our crucial role in creating a transparent and stable communication environment for companies. It is also a chance to showcase one's flexibility and natural change management abilities—skills so valued in the job market.



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CONSUMER TRENDS:

Declarations vs. actions. Will 'S' replace 'E' at the top of priorities in ESG strategic communication?

'Brands must act for the planet to atone for their sins', I recently read in a focus group analysis. Many Poles share this sentiment, with 40% believing that large businesses bear responsibility for climate change. When communication regarding decarbonisation reaches an impasse, how can brands build trust through ESG communication?

Recently, the term 'ESG' has become part of our everyday vocabulary. Its history, however, is not extensive. Hardly a few years ago, incorporating sustainability into business strategies and reporting impact by large brands generated significant interest. Although legislation does not yet mandate this, growing awareness and the race to gain consumer trust among industry leaders have led to the widespread popularity of ESG reporting. From a communication perspective, this presents a challenge: how to communicate an ESG strategy in an impactful way?

Decarbonisation, environment, ecology... Analysing brand communication related to ESG, one tends to forget that it encompasses three areas. Studies confirm this, with 30% of entrepreneurs stating they include 'S' and 'G' in their strategy only to a limited or no extent.

How does this relate to the feedback from the focus group referred to at the beginning of the article? Evidence suggests that while the world has moved forward, brand communication strategies have stagnated. The pandemic highlighted how immediate challenges can overshadow problems that do not directly affect us in the here and now. In our efforts to combat the virus, we used disposable masks, and the planet had to take a back seat. Despite COVID-19 being less of a threat, factors such as inflation and the war in Ukraine have shifted social sentiments in Poland.

How do these realities impact ESG strategies? This is a time when gaining trust requires empathy. Success will come to those who accurately identify and thoughtfully respond to the needs of consumers, employees and local communities. This could involve supporting marginalised groups, launching professional development programmes or engaging in mental health dialogues. It is also worth closely examining the needs of the immediate neighbours of production facilities, who could become natural allies or opponents of the brand. While social actions are challenging to measure or scale, those who address these issues can create distinctive and credible communication, balancing care for both the planet and people.

JUSTYNA WRÓBEL, With a decade of experience as an advisor in PR agencies, Justyna oversees projects concerning corporate and brand communication. She provides counsel to clients on communication strategies and issue management. Her expertise lies within the HoReCa sector. At 24/7Communication, as a senior account manager, she leads the team supporting McDonald's, one of their key clients. In her past roles, Justyna advised renowned brands such as Huawei, TK Maxx and Kompania Piwowska. She is a graduate of the University of Warsaw and Collegium Civitas.



ESG AT THE HEART OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

In recent years, several significant regulatory changes have been adopted at both the EU and Member State levels regarding sustainability. One of them, the obligation to report on the fulfilment of an ESG strategy and individual targets, will have a major impact on the overall development of companies, as well as on their competitiveness. Closely related to this is the company's communication of its ESG goals to employees, clients, suppliers and public authorities. On the other hand, there is a strong, primarily political trend that questions the importance of the sustainability agenda and the regulation associated with it. As this issue is not only of concern to a small group of large corporations, but also extends to small and medium-sized enterprises, we can expect to see growing pressure to change certain policies in the coming years. From a public relations perspective, the key challenge will therefore be to set up corporate communications in a way that is sustainable in the long term. But what does this mean?

First, it is necessary to have business, ESG and communication strategies go hand in hand, by not contradicting each other, avoiding setting conflicting goals and trying to build on synergies. This needs to be a top priority for management, the ESG department and communications. Second, if there is strong, well-established collaboration between these functions, internal communication within the company is crucial and could bring the desired advantage, if performed well. Employees are always the best advocates of the company's values and culture outwards. ESG is not only about environmental issues, but also about taking care of people, creating safe working conditions and opportunities for employees to fulfil themselves to their potential. It is also about company culture, management skills and leadership responsibility.

It can therefore be expected that the communication of ESG goals will become a key part of corporate communication towards employees, clients, public authorities as well as the broader public.



MATEJ KOVÁČ leads the Public Affairs team of Grayling in Slovakia. He has extensive experience in politics and the public sector, working there for the last thirteen years. He has also a strong background in public relations, where he led several successful campaigns and worked as a spokesperson for more than 5 years. Now, he is also responsible for ESG at Grayling.



HOW WILL YOU SATISFY CONSUMERS' DESIRE TO SAVE THE PLANET?

The way your organisation approaches social issues, the environment and what's happening in the world is more important than ever. The PR industry should reflect on the growing importance of ESG for organisations and their stakeholders. PR professionals will need to lead a discussion on how their organisation should be perceived as one that 'does good' in the world.

Engagement with ESG determines how a company is perceived by their employees, candidates, investors, suppliers and customers. One should not be fooled into thinking that one can satisfy stakeholders' desire to 'save the world' with concepts like CSR, sustainability reporting, diversity or awareness campaigns.

A company can't just choose one and neglect the other. Everything must be connected and spring from a common foundation, which is the purpose of the organisation. This is what influences the behaviour of the company in every aspect of its operations and ultimately all its stakeholders. The company's purpose and its real impact



will determine whether stakeholders decide to dedicate (or not) their time, energy and money to the organisation in the future.

For these reasons, every PR agency should proceed to develop an ESG strategy and subsequently a report, even though this is not legally required. Respectively, all PR agencies should include every element of the ESG strategy in the company's purpose statement as well as in its core strategy and business plan.

According to a global survey by Ernst and Young at the end of 2020, investor interest in non-financial information increased by a staggering 30% over the previous two years. In fact, for 91% of respondents, ESG parameters play a key role in deciding whether to invest in a given project or company. The global value shift is evident across all stakeholder groups. This means only one thing: companies that do not address and communicate sustainability will soon cease to be of interest to all stakeholders who have a stake in their future success.

PATRIK SCHOBER is the founder and managing partner of PR agency PRAMConsulting and a partner in the global consulting firm Agency Experts. He was Chairman of the Board of the Czech PR Association and Chairman of Worldcom, a group of independent PR agencies. He was awarded as PR Personality by the Czech PRKlub and with his team he has won several global and local PR awards. Patrik is the author of the book *The Art of Leadership through Public Relations: The Future of Effective Communication*.



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Technology cannot replace the expertise of specialists

INTRODUCTION

Public affairs is a distinct area of the communication industry, targeting stakeholders in the public sphere, including politicians, decision-makers and key opinion leaders. It encompasses a wide range of analytical, monitoring and advisory activities. As one of our experts highlights, it also involves creative, often unconventional actions that border on CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and are aimed at gaining the attention and openness of stakeholders, particularly in local communities.

The public affairs sector is rapidly developing and becoming more professional across the CEE region. More companies are establishing positions dedicated to public affairs, and PR agencies are responding to this trend by enhancing their capabilities in this area. This professionalisation reflects the increasing recognition of the importance of public affairs in navigating complex political and social landscapes.

Our authors highlight the growing significance of new tools in public affairs, such as digital advocacy and viral campaigns. However, the most transformative development is the role of AI. It can streamline and accelerate many aspects of public affairs work, from data analysis to strategic planning. Despite these advancements, our consensus is clear: technology cannot replace the expertise of specialists who understand their markets, local politics and specific conditions. Algorithms and AI cannot substitute the human element of relationships and networking, which are crucial in public affairs. The human touch in building and maintaining relationships is paramount,

ensuring that public affairs strategies are both effective and resonant with stakeholders.

In conclusion, public affairs continues to evolve in CEE, and the integration of recent technologies will undoubtedly play a significant role in its further development. The intersection of technology and human expertise underscores the need for ongoing professional development within the industry to keep pace with these changes. Moreover, given the observed trends and the increasing focus on stakeholder management within business strategies, the role of public affairs is likely to expand. I encourage you to explore the articles which present the perspectives of our industry experts on these trends!



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LOBBYING TODAY – a blend of top-notch technology and profound knowledge to build dialogue with critical stakeholders

Each passing year brings groundbreaking innovations that significantly influence all aspects of our lives. The public affairs industry, intricately linked with communication, has not been left behind in this wave of transformation. It has evolved into something much more than just ‘expanding the net of contacts.’ The adoption of new technologies in PA has always been met with enthusiasm, as they empower us to understand our topics better and craft more compelling narratives.

Public affairs and lobbying consultancies continually rely on solutions that help analyse large data sets and effectively reach a specific circle of stakeholders with key messages and rationales. However, the landscape is changing, and today tech tools are no longer the exclusive domain of the largest companies. They are becoming more affordable, democratising access, and levelling the playing field for all.

Is the client aiming to create a social campaign to reach the broadest possible audience, including decision-makers? With the right strategy

and the ability to create viral content, it does not have to require substantial financial outlays. Or are we raising a socially important topic that we also want to be attractive to public administration? By leveraging AI to engage representatives of various communities, we can create research or data content tailored to the algorithms operating on the Internet. This approach allows us to reach a precisely defined audience and achieve our aims more efficiently.

Working in a public affairs agency, I currently observe an arms race in which we build our advantage based on consulting experience and a blend of top-notch technology. Those who limit themselves to interacting only with their ‘contact list’ fall behind in achieving the designed clients’ aims. New technologies offer new opportunities and can revolutionise our work. However, an experienced consultant, familiar with a variety of projects and critical situations, is still essential to harness the potential of these new technologies.



JAKUB BUDNY is a senior consultant at StrategyWise Consulting who has been working in the public relations industry since 2015. He gained experience working for the UN agenda and PR agencies. His specialisation concerns public affairs and issue management projects, especially in the trade industry. Jakub is a graduate of the Faculty of International Relations at the Vistula Academy of Finance and Business.

BUILDING THROUGH CULTURE

When working in the field of public affairs, we always have our direct stakeholders in mind, for whom we take extensive action and use proven tools. Sometimes, however, we forget that our audiences are also human beings and, in addition to their functions, they are members of their local communities; they may be fans of sports or even the arts. So, in searching for new forms of communication aimed at a wide audience, isn't it worthwhile from time to time to step outside the current communication bubbles and start boldly exploring other communication fields?

A good example of this is the project ‘We are building a climate of culture’ carried out by the construction company STRABAG, which decided to co-create culture in selected regions of Poland by cooperating with philharmonics, theatres or implementing cultural initiatives,

important from the point of view of local communities. The brand, previously associated mainly with infrastructure, the construction of industrial facilities, railways, roads or bridges, in addition to its presence on construction sites, began to be strongly present in the life of the regions precisely through the cultural initiatives created there. The company is ultimately strengthening its image among employees, business partners, and above all, local communities. STRABAG is the only general contractor in Poland to become involved in supporting cultural institutions in the regions on such a scale. Admittedly, the juxtaposition of construction and a philharmonic hall is not obvious, but this way, the brand emphasises how important it considers the local community. It not only builds for the community, but it also gives something of itself by emphasising the value of local culture.

This is not about stopping current communication, or trying to be original or controversial, but about looking for new ways of expression and creating effective links that can bring image benefits and give room for cooperation and conversation with stakeholders on other levels, such as culture, sport or education.



KATARZYNA TYSKA, Account Director, SEC Newgate CEE. For the past 15 years, Katarzyna has been involved in a wide range of communication activities including corporate, product, crisis and public affairs communications, along with team management and innovation. She creates strategies and leads projects for local and global brands. The effects of her work are appreciated by clients and the PR industry, as evidenced by the awards she has received, among others 3 „Złote Spinacze”, 2 IPRA Golden World Awards, Demes and Stevie Awards. Katarzyna Tyska is a graduate of Media Education and Journalism at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, she also studied in Belgium at KU Leuven University and completed postgraduate studies at the Warsaw School of Economics in Asian-European Financial-Economic-Legal Relations and Design Management at SWPS University.

LOBBYING IN THE TIME OF AI:

How will artificial intelligence shape the sector of public affairs?

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are transforming industries at an unprecedented rate. As these technologies continue to progress, many sectors will face significant disruption, and the field of public affairs is no exception. AI's integration into public affairs is not just a futuristic concept but a reality. It brings unprecedented capabilities in policy monitoring, data analysis and stakeholder engagement. While this revolution can bring new opportunities and enhance the precision and effectiveness of lobbying campaigns, it also brings ethical challenges.

By automating repetitive monitoring and analytical tasks, public affairs experts can devote more time to strategic work. Traditional methods of policy monitoring often involve manual tracking and periodic updates, which can be time-consuming. In contrast, AI systems can go through vast amounts of data from various sources—government websites, news outlets and social media platforms—and provide timely and comprehensive insights. AI tools can analyse stakeholders' public statements or social media posts to generate sophisticated profiles of their positions, priorities and potential openness to certain arguments. It can also help quickly process vast amounts of legislative texts or analyse complex datasets to identify trends and patterns, which is a crucial capability for developing evidence-based strategies.

While AI offers powerful tools for enhancing lobbying efforts, it is essential to balance its use with human judgement and ethical considerations to mitigate potential risks. AI systems can perpetuate existing biases present in the data they are trained on. The use of AI in lobbying can also raise questions about transparency and accountability. At the same time, the collection and analysis of vast amounts of data could lead to privacy concerns.

Despite the challenges, AI also holds the potential to democratise lobbying by making it more accessible. It may reduce the cost of lobbying-related activities in a way that makes them more affordable to non-profits and individual citizens compared to well-funded organisations. For example, AI platforms can provide small NGOs with affordable access to sophisticated data analysis and monitoring tools. This could allow a broader range of actors to participate in the policymaking process and making it consequently more inclusive.

AI will bring significant changes to the public affairs sector; however, it is, and always will be, inherently a relationship-driven field. Personal connections and trust built through face-to-face interactions are crucial for success. Solely relying on AI could undermine these human elements, potentially reducing the effectiveness of any campaign. It is clear that AI can enhance the effectiveness of lobbying by augmenting, rather than replacing human persuasion and relationship building.

MICHAL ŠIFFNER, Head of Public Affairs, Grayling Czech Republic. Michal has been working at Grayling since 2019 and he has been leading teams on accounts across various sectors. Since January 2024, he has been the Head of Public Affairs at Grayling Czech Republic. Prior to joining the company, he worked at the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Over the past several years at Grayling, he has successfully led multiple public affairs campaigns ranging from legislative lobbying, third party coalition building to awareness raising.



CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Really powerless against the effects of crises?

INTRODUCTION

Our world is huge. Sometimes, however, the whole planet shrinks to a tiny point and people run around confused like nervous inhabitants of an excavated anthill. It is enough for an oversized cargo ship to cross the Suez Canal in the wrong direction or, as happened recently, for a cybersecurity company to issue a wrong update to Windows. In such cases, we are faced with the fact, in black and white, of just how vulnerable we are and to what extent all business and technological processes are intertwined. There are no isolated cases. There are times when we are lucky to escape serious problems, but at other times the system collapses like a house of cards.

We are talking about crises in a period when we have just experienced the direct effects of a pandemic and are currently suffering the negative effects of war raging in the world and in our region. The main question is: how vulnerable are we? Are we really powerless against the effects of crises?

The response of experts who deal with crisis communication cannot be other than that we are able to substantially change negative processes. Our company, brand and industry cannot be at the mercy of good luck; we cannot be just passive victims of change in the world. We often cannot prevent crises, so our task is to ensure that the organisation is sufficiently prepared for *force majeure* situations and is able to communicate effectively with the outside world, with the authorities and with employees within the organisation as well.

Expert colleagues from all over the region who contributed to the Focus Report draw at-

attention to the fact that business processes are being tested by new challenges. Our authors see artificial intelligence as the latest source of danger—at least in terms of threats to reputation—and, in this context, they point to the dangers caused by deepfakes and fake news. The climate crisis that affects us all cannot be ignored either, and companies are tested in this regard by the modern expectations of ESG and the danger of greenwashing. The world is huge—but mankind is very efficient when it comes to destroying it. It's good to bear in mind that crisis experts also have an important role in handing over the Earth in a—relatively—good condition to future generations.



KORNÉL BÓHM, communications consultant, PR Expert of the Year, partner at Impact Works, author of two books on crisis communications. Founder and former head of the Crisis Communication Department at the Hungarian Public Relations Association. His main areas of expertise are crisis communication, reputation management and personal branding. He regularly publishes in domestic and international professional journals and magazines, and is a speaker at conferences, professional workshops, business events and higher education institutions. He is a frequent guest on TV shows, radio shows and podcasts. His own podcast can be heard on the radio and online.

I COME FROM A TIME WHEN IT WAS CONSIDERED GOOD PRACTICE TO SEND PRESS RELEASES TO EDITORS BY EMAIL AND FAX SIMULTANEOUSLY. AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, I VIEW ANY NEW SOLUTION INTRODUCING AUTOMATION INTO OUR INDUSTRY, AND OPTIMISING OUR WORK TIME, AS PRICELESS, AND AI IS NO EXCEPTION.

AI VS. THE POSSIBILITY OF A GLOBAL COMMUNICATION CRISIS – OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

However, what could be a blessing as it makes the work easier for us, such as monitoring media, planning digital campaigns, analysing social media data—just to name a few, can also be our curse. Fake news or deepfakes generated by AI may have a real impact on the decline of business. This was certainly the case for Elon Musk in 2021, when a deepfake video released on social media in which he announced Tesla's bankruptcy caused the company's value to plummet by over 10%, leading to a market loss of around USD 14 billion. Although the company responded swiftly, denied the authenticity of the video, reported the matter to law enforcement, and worked with social media platforms to remove the video, it suffered significant reputational and financial losses.

Would it have been possible to avoid this? Could the company have reacted better/faster/more precisely to reduce the impact of the deepfake? In my opinion, no. And that's perhaps the

most terrifying thing about AI. Deepfakes are becoming our everyday reality. More advanced and increasingly growing in number, they will have an even more devastating impact. We can say that it is up to us as consumers, journalists, business owners or decision-makers to decide what we accept as true and how we react to it, but is it really?

2024 is considered the election year. Over 2 billion people will participate in 65 elections worldwide. How public opinion can be influenced with the use of AI tools was already exposed by the 2020 US presidential election. This year, the role of AI will undoubtedly be much greater. This will apply to both the generation of false content and the launch of all crisis prevention, media monitoring and analytics systems. Therefore, let's be vigilant and not believe everything we see online, even if it looks so true.



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7 BENEFITS OF CRISIS TREND ANALYSIS:

what can we learn from regional crisis reports?

Published by the Hungarian PR Association, the 'Crisis Map of Hungary: Annual Crisis Communication Report' was released every year from 2017 to 2020 and again in 2024, following the pandemic period dominated by COVID-19. The research, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods, is extremely useful for company managers, industry analysts and communication specialists on one hand, and researchers, university professors and students specialising in PR on the other. It evaluates all the significant crisis cases of the previous year—usually around 500 scandals annually—summarising trends by sectors and industries, classifying cases by their occurrence, characteristics, severity, progression time, manageability and underlying causes.

As a PhD in crisis communication, regular co-editor of the publication and practicing PR direc-

tor, I find it highly important to encourage more professionals to create their regional crisis trend analysis for the following main reasons.

1. It helps to forecast future macroeconomic processes and changes of customer needs.
2. It gives guidelines for organisational development, best practises for leadership training and enhances a crisis-sensitive approach.
3. It provides a fundamental methodological background for media and stakeholder observation.
4. Besides helping to react responsibly, it highlights the necessity of prevention and preparation which mitigates destructive impacts.
5. It draws the attention of organisations to dedicate resources to create their own crisis scenarios and set up a crisis management team.
6. It offers aspects on how to draw conclusions from crises and how to integrate the results into the overall strategy.
7. It has a huge science popularisation impact. As a result of the report, an increased number of experts chose to specialise in this complex field.

In conclusion, I believe that it is not sufficient to handle the symptoms: we need to understand the root causes of the 'diseases' by digging deeper into the depths of organisational malfunction. Analysing crisis trends is significant in order to have real and long-term solutions.



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TRUST CAN ONLY BE BUILT BY TRUST

The resilience of a company to a crisis is influenced by many factors, one of the most important of which is its reputation. The trust that a company has consciously built up over many years is a prerequisite for how much damage it is able to take in a crisis. At Budapest Airport, we have had to deal with several crises over the last five years, with COVID literally grounding aviation. We have also had to deal with the shutdowns and the refugee situation caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine, let alone the chaos experienced during early summer with aviation across Europe.

Looking back, I can highlight two important principles that have determined our response and our survival in all crises. One is credible and transparent communication, which I believe is the basis of every crisis situation, and the second is reputation building, raising PR to a strategic corporate level.

In 2019, the year I joined Budapest Airport, just shortly before the COVID outbreak. We made reputation building one of the long-term strategic pillars of the company. In doing so, we effectively determined the fate of the company, or at least its image, and while we did not know it at the time, we developed its ability to successfully emerge from the crises of the next 5 years.

A conscious confidence-building process began, in which we redefined the identity and image of the company and communicated this image transparently to the outside world. The first

results of this professional and continuous communication-building process were visible after a few short months, and during the two years of COVID, we were able to completely reverse the previous image of Budapest Airport.

A crisis situation is a challenge for the company's management and owners, but it is also an opportunity. There is time and space (and of course pressure) to reassess structures, strategies and attitudes. Things that have been undervalued or overvalued by the company need to be put in place. A balance in assessment of the situation can be struck that provides a long-term framework for the company's operations after a crisis.

Communication and reputation became focus areas for us, as every crisis has shown that crisis management measures can only be effective in parallel with communication. It also became apparent that it is too late to communicate only in a crisis situation; constant presence and visibility are needed to maintain and reinforce trust.

I consider it fortunate that Budapest Airport has continued to attach strategic importance to reputation building since, and that we have all the necessary tools for this at our disposal. Not only the appropriate budget, but also an attitude that pervades the whole company and the confidence in our activities. Because trust can only be built with trust.



KATALIN VALENTÍNYI has nearly a decade of experience as a journalist and 17 years of experience as a communications consultant, executive and government relations manager. She has been responsible for corporate communications and government relations at Budapest Airport (BUD) since 2019, leading communications, reputation, CSR and stakeholder management activities as an executive director.



THE RISE OF AI: OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT?

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) is significantly transforming various public relations disciplines, including crisis communication. The development of large language models (LLMs) appears to be an opportunity to facilitate and simplify certain aspects of this key communication discipline. PR agencies in Central Europe currently perceive both opportunities and threats in this respect.

AI can help beginners when used as a checklist of tasks not to forget during a crisis situation. It also simplifies ideas by converting complicated texts into simple and understandable points. This saves a lot of time. If the PR specialist has a solution to the crisis scenario prepared in advance, it is enough to provide this to the AI and merely specify the context of the specific situation in more detail. If not, simply outlining the context of the crisis situation can greatly speed up the preparation of a statement. AI can in particular help to vary the text to provide a unique statement tailored to each target audience—from the media to company employees.

On the contrary, the main obstacle to the use of AI tools in crisis communication is the lack of trust in this technology. Many PR professionals have concerns with this tool as to where the data will end up and whether it can be misused. Crisis communication often deals with very sensitive information that institutions wish to protect. Many people therefore feel that presenting such information to AI and then risking its misuse poses a major risk.

So, how should we involve AI in crisis communication? Several Central European PR agencies combine both approaches. The use of AI in crisis communication helps them create and vary their statements, while maintaining anonymised access to potentially sensitive information. Meanwhile, we can expect more and more PR professionals to resort to this approach in the years to come. After all, there will be ever greater pressure on the speed and accuracy of communication.



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Reputation and crisis management are indispensable components of the daily work of communication experts. These tasks have become increasingly demanding and complex in an era where information spreads rapidly, only to be swiftly replaced by new updates. The media landscape is evolving, much like any other industry. Readers and followers are inundated with new information, often mixed with social media hoaxes, leaving little time for proper evaluation of their credibility. In their quest for attention, often measured by specific KPIs like page views, journalists frequently grasp at emerging stories. Despite their brief lifecycle, such stories can still inflict significant damage on a company's reputation. Thus, our success hinges not only on strategic thinking and effective tactics but also on our agility and ability to swiftly adapt to change. When evaluating the potential for a media crisis, one must not overlook how the media operate today and the fierce competition for readers' attention.

NAVIGATING NEW CRISES: AI, greenwashing and the media battle for reader attention

The rapid pace and complexity of contemporary crises present a significant challenge for us as PR professionals. We must skilfully navigate these complexities, accurately assess reputational risks and provide sound advice to companies. This underscores the importance of a deep understanding of phenomena such as artificial intelligence, along with its associated benefits and risks. Over the past few months, AI has been a frequent topic of discussion, yet research indicates that numerous companies, not only in Poland but across Europe, remain hesitant to fully implement it in their operations. Nonetheless, its

continued development is inevitable, and communication advisors must stay abreast of these advancements. One should be aware that AI leverages widely available knowledge, making it crucial to be mindful of the information we share about our projects and the materials it generates. As we venture further into the realm of AI, we must also be cognisant of the accompanying risks—disinformation, environmental impact, labour unrest and copyright violations.

More companies are realising that ESG (environmental, social and governance) communications involves more than making promises; it requires

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delivering on them. This is another area where, by enhancing our expertise, we can effectively advise clients on communicating honestly and effectively during a crisis, or better yet, prevent it altogether. Making unsubstantiated promises to consumers is a recipe for greenwashing, which not only threatens reputational harm but also induces legal consequences. Lawsuits against companies with unreliable environmental communications are becoming increasingly common.

The emergence of new challenges makes crisis communications more intricate, and demands that we not only react swiftly but also stay informed of current trends and continuously expand our knowledge. We face interesting times ahead, but when were they not, right?



RESILIENCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Since the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, crisis communication has taken on a new, profound significance. What was once a secondary aspect of business has now become a central and dynamic challenge. The shifting geopolitical landscape and supply chain vulnerabilities demand constant vigilance from communications teams. The era of peaceful stability is behind us—speaking strictly from a PR perspective, though other sectors can easily share this sentiment. While one might lament this, I believe the strength of a team lies in how well it can navigate such challenges. If a team is built on solid foundations, with a bit of fine-tuning, it can either develop the internal capacity to handle these pressures or bring in the right external partners. Quick, precise responses are crucial in this fast-moving digital age, where delays can result in significant reputational damage due to the rapid flow of information on social media and online platforms.

Looking ahead to 2024, several key trends are shaping crisis communication strategies for PR professionals. The increasing use of AI-driven tools for real-time social listening and sentiment analysis will be crucial in monitoring public perception and identifying potential issues before they escalate. In parallel, the need for personalised, human-centred messag-

ing is more prominent as consumers expect tailored responses rather than generic corporate statements. Finally, sustainability and corporate social responsibility are emerging as non-negotiable aspects of crisis management. How a company responds to global challenges, such as climate change, can directly impact its reputation and long-term credibility.

Therefore, we need to approach crisis communication from a fresh perspective. We cannot push our messages in isolation, ignoring the shifts in communication channels. It's no wonder companies invest heavily in social media monitoring, while agencies scramble to manage the flood of online comments. It feels like a constant battle—one where there's no opportunity to sit back and relax.

In this fragmented media environment, everyone involved in crisis communication must focus on minimising damage by implementing effective systems and getting the job done efficiently. I don't believe anyone in this field can hold a lasting position without adapting to these realities. While AI is already playing a role in managing certain tasks, I'm convinced its influence will grow, allowing us to allocate human resources to more strategic efforts and discussions—those that simply can't be outsourced to a 'digital colleague'.

As we move forward, the landscape of crisis communication will continue to evolve, presenting both challenges and opportunities. The integration of technology with thoughtful, human-centred strategies will be essential in navigating this complex environment.



PÉTER PANTL has been the Group Corporate Communications & Marketing Vice President at MOL Group since 1 September 2020, overseeing the communication for one of the largest corporate groups in the region. He earned his degree in Media Studies and Communication from the University of Szeged. He began his career as a journalist and later worked as an editor-in-chief. At Marquard Media, as content director, he was responsible for the entire men's division. As the Communications and Marketing VP at MOL Group, his team manages communications for approximately 30 countries, including internal communications, PR, marketing communications, sponsorship and events. In 2022, he was appointed to the board of HUMDA, and he is a board member of the Hungarian Advertising Association, the Hungarian Marketing Association and the Hungarian Basketball Federation.



EMPLOYER BRANDING

Authenticity, employee ambassadors and a focus on culture are essential

INTRODUCTION

Gone are the days when EB was used just to promote job openings and was the sole responsibility of HR. Nowadays, a growing number of companies are beginning to understand that it's not just a recruitment tool, but an opportunity to tell a company's story. And people are excited to hear it.

In today's difficult job market where companies lack available talent, attracting and maintaining talent is key. To do so, it is now much less about 'hard facts' such as salary and job responsibilities. Gallup notes that in 2023, four times as many people left jobs due to 'Engagement and Culture' or 'Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance' compared to 'Pay/Benefits'.

What does it mean for EB? It means candidates care not only about what the company does, but how it achieves it, and how it cares about its own people and those around it. Current trends focus on authenticity and letting candidates 'peak behind the scenes', humanising leaders along the way. Put simply, people want to hear from the companies, even on polarising societal issues.

With this goal in mind, a special group is rising in importance—own employees as ambassadors. And this makes sense. Just like someone interested in buying a new phone or TV reaches out to a friend who owns one, the same goes for jobs. Open positions are becoming commoditised, and 'active users' aka existing employees are growing in importance due to their own personal experience.

But for companies to be able to capitalise on this trend, they need to engage their employees. The bad news is, according to Gallup's recent State of the Global Workplace Report, only 23% of employees are engaged. This cost the global

economy USD 8.9 trillion last year, with Europe holding the title of least engaged region worldwide.

Companies need to look hard into their culture and what they are doing to engage employees so they are willing to do more than just show up. As a result, EB is now the responsibility of leaders, just as much as the managers. Employees and candidates examine the company as a whole, with special focus on its values. Not the values listed on the website, but those lived in the company's corridors every day. How does a company support its employees at a time of grief or illness? How does it treat those representing disadvantaged communities? And what does it take to stay relevant to the younger generations?

That is why the current trends in employer branding are authenticity, employee ambassadors and a focus on culture, with special emphasis on diversity and inclusion. In this chapter, you will hear from top expert consultants and clients with direct experience in these trends. Learn more about how they will shape communication in the future and how to implement them in any company.



ZUZANA OZANOVA is a communication specialist with more than a decade of experience in internal and external communication. In her role as head of employer branding at Seesame, Slovakia, she provides strategic consultancy to companies, institutions and large international brands. With the help of research and behavioural insights, she guides brands in how to best communicate their values, and helps them build a good reputation as employers. She is a big believer in data-driven insights and in giving employees their voice.

DEI BECOMING A SIGNIFICANT PRIORITY IN CANDIDATES' JOB SELECTION



Randstad's latest employer brand research in Hungary indicates that workplace atmosphere, support for well-being and work-life balance are more significant factors in a candidate's job selection than in previous years. In addition, equal treatment is emerging as a new priority in the top ten job selection criteria. Consequently, strategies that focus on social responsibility (CSR & ESG) and equal opportunities (DEI) are crucial to employer branding.

INTEGRATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INTO EMPLOYER BRANDING STRATEGY

Integrating DEI into employer branding is neither a short-term initiative nor an occasional programme, but is a long-term strategy in which diversity and inclusion are embedded in the corporate and leadership culture, and reflect the company's operations, philosophy and values. Doing this requires a thorough understanding of the company's perception and sensitising, and training managers and employees, so that DEI impacts the entire organisation.

The key question is how the company can be more inclusive. This involves defining the employer image, identifying values which authentically represent the company and integrating them into communication strategies. Companies can take several steps to ensure retention, such as addressing equal opportunities (pay gap, promotion criteria, female employment, pay transparency), establishing programmes to support recent graduates and young managers, designing family-friendly policies, and consciously supporting employees' well-being and health. In recruiting, diversity initiatives, candidate bene-

fits, culture and values should be all reflected in job advertisements, annual reports, career pages, social media channels and the application process itself.

INVOLVING AND ENGAGING EMPLOYEES IN DEI INITIATIVES

Experience has shown that the success of DEI depends on two factors: the active participation of managers and the involvement of employees. Managers' involvement is crucial as their opinion and actions shape the perception of DEI initiatives. Therefore, it is beneficial to designate individuals responsible for supporting and implementing the programme. Sensitisation training

and workshops can foster understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures, programmes and teams. Employees can be involved by sharing stories of DEI initiatives, participating in sensitisation processes, creating communication channels and forming employee resource groups (ERG) to help everyone find their place in the organisation. When developing a DEI employer branding culture, it is important to recognise that it is impossible to create a workplace culture that suits every individual, but striving to create an environment where employees feel valued is paramount.



GEORGINA MEZEI, communications specialist and co-founder of the Morselli Employer Branding Agency, holds a bachelor's degree in Communication and Media Studies from Kodolányi János College and a postgraduate diploma in Public Relations from the Budapest University of Economics and Business. She has collaborated with several large multinational companies and gained significant experience in employer branding strategy building, branding and campaign design. Several of her projects, created in collaboration with her clients, have been recognised with national and international awards. Georgina believes that successful employer branding is grounded in the values and culture of the company, adaptations to market changes and response to the target group's needs.

In the digital age, storytelling has become a powerful tool for shaping and strengthening employer brands, particularly when it comes from authentic and credible sources. When employees share their personal stories and experiences, it adds a layer of trust that traditional marketing efforts often lack. At Auchan Retail, Hungary, we are leveraging this potential through our internal influencer programme, where employees act as brand ambassadors.

HOW CAN AN INTERNAL INFLUENCER PROGRAMME WORK IN A MULTINATIONAL COMPANY?

What are the benefits of this programme?

In 2023, we launched this innovative internal influencer programme, which pioneers a new form of collaboration in the retail market. Employees selected for this programme represent the company's values, initiatives and products on their own social media platforms. This not only humanises the brand but also allows for a more personal and engaging connection with their au-

dience. A recent employer brand survey showed a 4.7% increase in attractiveness of Auchan as an employer since the programme launched, highlighting the project's effectiveness.

One major benefit is the impact on employee engagement. Acting as brand ambassadors instils a sense of pride and ownership among employees, leading to higher job satisfaction,

loyalty, productivity and innovation. The organic reach of internal influencers, by leveraging their extensive social media networks, amplifies the company's message beyond traditional channels, and enhances credibility and engagement.

Additionally, the programme serves as a powerful recruitment tool. Potential employees are influenced by the authentic experiences of current employees, which makes the company more attractive to top talent.

Furthermore, the internal influencer programme supports internal communication as well. Influencers maintain constant social media connections with colleagues, and share information about company events and initiatives outside

the work environment. This fosters a sense of belonging and ensures an efficient information flow within the company.

For the programme to work effectively, it is essential that these internal influencers are continuously supported by corporate communications with timely information, training and technical tools. The success of the programme is evident, as applications for the role of influencer doubled within the first year.

In summary, by leveraging employees' true stories and experiences, companies can build a credible and relatable brand image, which leads to sustained success and growth.



KLAUDIA ANGOUJARD currently serves as Head of Employer Branding at Auchan Retail Hungary, where she is credited with implementing the company's successful internal influencer programme. In her role, she is responsible not only for employer branding but also for the company's internal communications and the organisation of corporate events. Prior to this, she spent over a decade as PR and marketing director at five-star hotels, honing her skills in brand communication. Klaudia possesses extensive experience in brand communication, and leverages her creativity and storytelling approach to drive impactful marketing strategies. Her expertise in crafting compelling narratives and her innovative mindset make her a valuable asset in promoting organisational values and enhancing brand visibility.

AUTHENTICITY AS A KEY ELEMENT TO BUILDING TRUST IN EMPLOYER BRANDING COMMUNICATION

There are many elements that contribute to building trust in a company. Without trust, it is difficult to talk about business success—and this is true when building a strong team. An important part of creating trust-based relationships with current or potential employees is communication, which plays an increasingly important role in organisations today, regardless of the sector they operate in.

Thoughtful and effective activities in the field of employer branding and internal communication which focuses on authenticity are today a crucial foundation for companies that want to build trust. Without it, it is difficult to cope with challenges such as high employee turnover, understanding the needs and expectations of Generation Z or intensive transformation of an organisation in the spirit of ESG.

Building both employee and consumer trust requires authenticity and transparency in communication. However, once established, trust can be quickly lost. This is especially easy in difficult situations if they are not managed properly. Structural changes or collective layoffs are moments when well-planned and honest internal communication is necessary to maintain trust.

What about external communication? Key to EB communication is a comprehensive and honest sto-

ry about working in a given company—so as not to fall into the trap of overpromise. A new employee will quickly verify the reality. Too much discrepancy between expectations and reality will not be helpful to anyone. There is no sense in denying that a given position involves, for example, physical work. Anyone who is not prepared to do this will quickly say goodbye to the company after the probation period. What is important is finding the right employee who will stay with the company for a long time, not the number of CVs received.

What is crucial in all this is employee experience. If the organisational culture is healthy, one can easily transform employees into company ambassadors. And who do we trust more—people or companies? According to the 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer, businesses are still more trustworthy than government or media. But just 51% of respondents trust CEOs in comparison with 63% who trust 'citizens of my country' and 74% 'someone like me'. That is why it is so important to engage employees and build ambassador programmes. With a little bit of encouragement, we can really make it work and as a result have authentic communication which will help us build trust for our employer brand.

2024 Edelman Trust Barometer:
<https://www.edelman.com/trust/2024/trust-barometer>

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CYCLE OF SUCCESS: Building employee loyalty and engagement

CREATING EMPLOYEE LOYALTY AND ENGAGEMENT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ROCKET SCIENCE. FROM MY TIME AT HENKEL, OVERSEEING CORPORATE COMMUNICATION FOR 3 COUNTRIES, I'VE LEARNED THAT A POSITIVE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE IS ALL ABOUT MAKING SURE PEOPLE FEEL APPRECIATED, INFORMED, VALUED, HEARD AND CARED FOR. HERE'S HOW WE DO IT:

1. ONBOARDING EXPERIENCE – a great start matters. A thoughtful gift on day one helps new hires feel valued. Make sure the gift reflects your business and comes from someone who can mentor them. At Henkel in Slovakia, we give new employees our products in a sustainable, reusable bag with a portrait of the company founder and the slogan 'It's all about chemistry.' It ties our core business to our rich history.

2. BUDDY PROGRAM – new hires need support. Pair them with experienced colleagues who can show them the ropes and help them settle in. These buddies not only guide newcomers but also sharpen their mentoring skills in the process.

3. COMMUNICATE VALUES – from day one, make your values clear and make sure everything aligns with them. Encourage employees to live these values by joining groups like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), sports teams and

expert networks. These groups help employees feel valued, build new skills and strengthen their connection to the company. Keep everyone updated on these activities and highlight those who embody your values to keep the momentum going.

4. REGULAR FEEDBACK – keep the feedback loop going. Regularly asking for feedback helps improve and recognise efforts. At Henkel, we collect feedback after major events and use it to tweak our activities. This approach not only addresses concerns but also provides clear evidence of how employee input has shaped changes.

By following these steps, one can surely boost employee satisfaction and drive success. Ready to give it a try?

ZUZANA KAŇUCHOVÁ, Cluster Head Corporate Communications CEE (Slovakia, Hungary, Czechia) Henkel. Zuzana has worked at Henkel for over seven years, handling brand positioning and reputation in the CEE cluster. Her efforts have won her awards like PROKOP and Hermes – Communicator of the Year. As a mental health advocate, she launched a successful podcast and employee CSR programme, and co-leads the local company foundation. She also manages crisis situations and sits on the ENVI-PAK Supervisory Board. Zuzana has a mass media degree from the Faculty of Art in Presov and an MBA in Digital Marketing.



03

Success factors



MEASURING EFFICIENCY

Rethinking PR: harnessing data and measuring value

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, where every second of attention counts, the fundamental role of public relations is to make brands and their messages stand out in a sea of information. Traditionally, PR has been about crafting compelling stories and delivering them to the right audience, but in the age of the attention economy, its role has significantly evolved. No longer is it just about crafting the right message—it's about ensuring that the message cuts through the noise in an ever-competitive landscape.

With this shift, the tools and methods employed by PR professionals have transformed dramatically. One of the most notable changes is the integration of data-driven strategies. For years, data-driven communication has been recognised as essential, yet it often encountered obstacles. PR processes have sped up, but the collection and analysis of data remained sluggish for a long time. However, with the acceleration of digitalisation, PR practitioners now have access to unprecedented tools and technologies that allow them to extract, analyse and utilise data more rapidly and accurately than ever before.

Digitalisation has given rise to app-based research companies capable of providing representative studies with a turnaround time of just 48 hours. The wealth of insights and data available from website, PPC and social media analytics further enhances the ability to target desired audiences with precision. Additionally, the advent of AI has revolutionised the field, offering innovative solutions for data analysis, audience engagement and content creation.

Despite these advancements, many PR evaluation systems remain outdated. The use of AVE as a metric is still demanded by numerous clients, even though it does not accurately reflect the impact of modern PR efforts. In PR, quality has always trumped quantity, and today, the true value for brands lies in a combination of quality and frequency. Reaching a consumer once is no longer sufficient to make a lasting impression. Brands must be present consistently across various channels, using diverse tools to engage their audience effectively.

The upcoming articles will delve into the importance of leveraging data, media intelligence and new PR metrics in 2024. Our international contributors will explore how PR professionals can embark on this path by providing insights for harnessing these resources to drive successful campaigns.



ANNA ZÁMBÓ is the content director at Republic Group Advertising Agency. With nearly 12 years of experience, she has managed the full spectrum of content areas (PR, PA, social media, influencer management, PPC, content creation). She joined Republic Group in 2015 to build their in-house PR division and, in late 2020, integrated the agency's content areas into a single division, adding PPC, media planning, and content production. In the past 4 years, her content team has become the agency's fastest-growing business unit.

UNDERSTANDING DATA IS JUST THE BEGINNING; THE REAL POWER LIES IN HOW WE USE IT

IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS, THE AXIOM 'KNOWLEDGE IS POWER' HAS EVOLVED INTO 'DATA IS POWER'. IN AN ERA OF UBIQUITOUS INFORMATION, PR PROFESSIONALS CAN CRAFT MESSAGES THAT RESONATE MORE DEEPLY WITH TARGET AUDIENCES BY LEVERAGING DATA.

COLLECT, ANALYSE & USE

The range of tools for collecting and analysing data is enormous! We are all familiar with the most critical tools, such as Google Analytics, social media listening platforms and customer relationship management (CRM) systems, which are indispensable. But that's not all: we now have access to much more advanced tools with analytical features and marketing automation (e.g. HubSpot), market survey tools (like SurveyMonkey), or simple data visualisation tools (like Tableau).

It's worth reaching for professional socio-scientific research tools, notably those used by independent research agencies. Social surveys allow the gathering of quantitative consumer attitudes and preferences data for gaining a broad overview. In contrast, focus groups offer significant insights by delving deeper into motivations, thoughts and feelings, and provide a more nuanced understanding and reveal insights that numbers alone might miss.

Once collected, data must be meticulously analysed: sentiment analysis, audience segmentation

and predictions can transform raw data into a strategic asset. These insights inform everything from content creation to channel selection, ensuring that communications are targeted and effective.

The use of data in communications raises several ethical challenges. Manipulating data, creating false information, even unintentionally, can lead to negative consequences. Moreover, over-reliance on data can lead to privacy concerns and potential breaches of trust regarding personal data protection. The sheer volume of data can be overwhelming which makes it challenging to distinguish valuable information from noise.

PR professionals must act ethically and transparently to build lasting, trusted relationships with their audiences and understand that data is a means to an end, not the end itself. PR specialists combine analytical prowess with creative storytelling to craft narratives that resonate on a human level. By doing so, they transform data into compelling stories that engage, inform and inspire.

MAŁGORZATA KARWICKA, account director at Planet Partners. Małgorzata started her professional career in radio and television. For more than ten years, she has been developing and executing communication projects for both B2B and B2C clients, primarily in the technology and lifestyle sectors. Her expertise lies in media relations and communications consulting. Małgorzata Karwicka has been at Planet Partners since 2017, and currently plans and supervises the work of the team. She holds a degree in social communication and journalism from the University of Lodz, and a second degree in sociology.



MEDIA INTELLIGENCE IN PR: The key to success in a dynamic environment

Do I suffer from FOMO (the fear of missing out) or is this new channel a substantial trend? Is everyone really talking negatively about us? A PR professional who asks similar questions without being able to answer may lack the right tools and processes for measuring communication.

It is good to know that media intelligence experts in general specialise in earned media, i.e. in describing who is talking about a company, its products, clients, competitors or any topic of interest. Finding suitable partners and combining measurement results with paid and owned media are crucial steps in evaluating every PR activity.

But what happens in between? Knowing what to measure is not enough. A PR strategy is complex, and so should be its evaluation. With the increase in data and channels, sharing specific information about strategic goals is a win-win.

If this sounds obvious, believe us, it is not. Based on our experience, we have also identified three major trends or challenges that we are currently facing.

The first is the expansion of channels. It is no longer sufficient to monitor print and online media. Clients demand evaluation of newsletters, podcasts and new social media platforms. We must explore new technologies, understand how new channels work and find ways to evaluate them together with PR experts.

Secondly, AI reduces the time to process large datasets (goodbye, manual coding of every single output). Thus, AI tools allow media analysts

to partly become consultants, talk to clients and understand their needs. Is there a clash between PR experts and media analysts? We see our relationship rather as symbiotic—we need each other.

Finally, clients are well aware of the rise of AI, and demand us to process more data faster. At the same time, they seem to be interested in context rather than numbers. The focus has shifted from reaching the highest possible AVE to understanding: What do the numbers mean? Are social media users talking about the topics we address in our content? And so on.

To sum up, our biggest task is to cooperate so that media analysts and PR professionals merge their knowledge and educate each other as well as clients, as sticking to old standards and strict role divisions do not make sense any more.



VERONIKA LEBEDOVÁ is the head of analytics and editorial at NEWTON Media where she oversees media monitoring and analysis projects, and participates in product development and innovation. Veronika holds two master's degrees in media studies and semiotics and has experience in the analytical support of PR, political marketing and crisis communication, as well as with social media management.

MEASURING PR RESULTS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: A new era of competitiveness

In recent years, PR has been transformed by the rapid growth of digital technology, evolving from traditional methods to sophisticated digital analytics that offer new levels of insights into the effectiveness of PR campaigns. This shift presents both challenges and opportunities that aim to demonstrate the value of work.

Digital transformation has changed how PR results are measured. Traditional metrics such as media impressions and advertising value equivalents (AVE) provided a basic understanding of PR effectiveness but often lacked depth and accuracy. Today, PR professionals have access to a wide range of digital metrics that offer a more comprehensive picture of their impact.

Tracking various metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) is essential for achieving visibility. Key metrics include website traffic, social media engagement and interactions that indicate successful communication with the target audience. Assessing the sentiment and tonality of online mentions provides a deeper understanding of public perception and helps PR professionals tailor their messages accordingly.

Besides media impressions, it is essential to measure conversions and track interactions where an expected action is taken, such as subscribing or downloading a tool that is part of a PR campaign.

While many metrics are common across marketing disciplines, some are unique to PR and offer

deeper insights into effectiveness. These distinctive metrics include qualitative indicators such as Share of Voice (SOV), Media Quality Score (MQS) and Message Pull-Through.

A key challenge in measuring PR results is the complexity of the metrics and the lack of a consistent approach. Developing a consistent measurement framework is essential for meaningful evaluation. Clear objectives, the standardisation of metrics, and integrated platforms for tracking data sources are necessary. Technology and data visualisation play significant roles in this process.

Measuring PR outcomes requires a strategic approach that utilises key metrics and technologies. A data-driven approach ensures that specific PR metrics are identified and used as qualitative benchmarks for measuring the effectiveness of PR campaigns.

As the digital environment continues to evolve, PR professionals need to adopt new metrics and methods. The ability to accurately and clearly measure PR results is not only an option, but a necessity for competitiveness and sustained success.



ESZTER SOÓS is the managing director of PR Agent Communications, a leading PR and communication agency in Hungary. With over 30 years of experience, she specialises in digital leadership and innovative PR solutions, working with international and regional clients. Eszter is also a member of the Digital Section of the Hungarian PR Association. She has completed numerous certifications and has a strong track record in creating effective campaigns and building high-performing international teams.



STRATEGY VS CREATIVITY

In Praise of 'Boring'

INTRODUCTION

The PR industry has something of an obsession with creativity. Clients always list creativity as a key requirement in an agency partner, and awards show juries value it highly, often almost exclusively. We're looking for that blinding moment of recognition, and the gnawing feeling of 'Why didn't I come up with that?' And yet, more often than not, the most effective programmes are, to put it bluntly, boring. They require months or years of slog and demonstrate an alarming lack of unicorns and fireworks. But you can't argue with the results.

One of my favourite examples of effective issue management, a strategic, high-stakes, impactful programme if I ever saw one, is Apple's masterful 180-degree pivot following Steve Jobs' first cancer diagnosis. Over a handful of years, they repositioned themselves from a company led by a visionary founder who returned from the wilderness—a genius with a singular vision into the future—to a professional organisation with, as the quintessential piece of media coverage stated, a 'deep bench' of management talent. If you look at the stock price (a problematic proxy for the business, but an easy one), there was a huge drop following the original announcement of Jobs' liver transplant, and significantly less panicked reactions to his second medical leave, let alone his retirement from the CEO role and subsequent passing.

In the meantime, the corporate communications team devised and executed a plan to demonstrate that it's more than 'just' Steve, and it has been for many years. Starting with a handful

of suspiciously well-sourced and timed investigations in key global media, the company allowed more limelight on its leadership team. Prior to that, in part to protect executives from poaching and retain its mystique, few Apple leaders communicated with the wider public, mostly during product launches at Macworld events. When COO Tim Cook, the eventual CEO, took over as interim leader in 2004, he was very much an unknown quantity. By the time Jobs announced his resignation in 2011, the succession was complete.

KIND OF BORING, ISN'T IT? BUT EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE.

There's a delicate balance between enviable creative brilliance and clearly demonstrable business results that move the strategic needle. My colleagues contributing to this section offer valuable insights into navigating that razor's edge.



BALÁZS SZÁNTÓ is the managing partner of leading Hungarian communications consultancy Noguchi and a member of the board of HuPRA. Primarily a strategist, he's especially interested and experienced in crisis & issues management. He has over 25 years of experience in the industry and has led major national and multi-market programmes for some of the best-known global brands.

CAN CREATIVITY DRIVE EFFECTIVENESS?

Crafting impactful communications

Who among us hasn't had a client or colleague dream of a creative idea that delivers that Wow! effect? But what does creativity truly mean in a business context, and can it stand alone without effectiveness?

WARC published a report titled The Health of Creativity based on data from major regional and global creativity and effectiveness competitions between 2015 and 2022. The results indicate that when ideas were highly rated for creativity, the likelihood of receiving an effectiveness award increased from 20% to 42%. The findings clearly show that creativity can boost effectiveness.

MEETING BUSINESS AND CONSUMER NEEDS

In today's fast-paced world, creativity in communication can't exist in a vacuum. It needs to address real consumer and business needs and solve their problems of the different target groups. Only then can it drive real change and impact.

The key is understanding that creativity isn't just about coming up with original ideas that make us stand out in the noise; it's about creating ideas that make sense for the brand and its goals. We must ensure that everything we do adds real value. This means knowing our target audience, their needs and expectations, as well as the business goals our actions should support. Creative solutions should be rooted in research and analysis to effectively communicate the message

and deliver the desired results, such as boosting sales or enhancing brand image.

BUILDING TRUST AND LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Successful examples of this approach can be found in campaigns that combine innovation with a deep understanding of the audience. In addition to capturing attention, these efforts effectively convey the brand's values and influence consumer decisions. Such an approach leads to building lasting relationships with customers, and increasing trust and loyalty.

STIMULATING OUR CREATIVE APPROACH

Realising that creativity enhances efficiency and helps achieve business goals, we should ask ourselves how to foster creativity within our organisations. Effective communication is about listening, observing and expressing. To create a culture that supports and boosts creativity, one should embrace diverse perspectives, reward innovative efforts and set aside time for creative tasks outside the routine work. It is crucial to understand that it takes time to develop unique yet effective projects.

All this ensures our actions are successful, make an impact and drive change. These elements are crucial in building creative and, what is even more important, effective communication.

DOROTA PIEJKO-FOLTYN has 15 years of extensive experience in strategic consulting and reputation management. She has successfully executed projects for both international corporations and local businesses in Poland across various industries. Currently at 24/7Communication, she leads the Technology & e-Commerce Business Unit where, together with her team, she provides strategic guidance to top-tier companies in the field. Her role involves advising clients on innovative strategies, building trust and reputation management.



WILL AI KILL OR ENHANCE OUR CREATIVITY?



AI-based tools enable more precise campaign planning, better understanding of audiences and more efficient management of resources. According to a survey by Prowly, two-thirds of PR professionals are already using artificial intelligence in their work. That begs the question: will AI kill or enhance the PR industry's creativity?

PR is a discipline that requires both strategic thinking and creativity: consistent, engaging and original campaigns are the key to success. I strongly believe that in the process of creating unique narratives and building authentic relationships with audiences, the human factor is irreplaceable. Sure, AI supports and streamlines some daily work, automating routine tasks such as data collection, media monitoring and sentiment analysis. The landscape of tools is expanding rapidly. Research published by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in early 2023 has found that there were over 5,800 tools for various applications such as research, planning, measurement, content creation and workflow management.

Despite the development of technology, AI still cannot fully recognise and analyse emotions. Although it's probably a matter of time—tools to

interpret a person's emotional state are being deployed in call centres and automation hubs. Currently, AI can generate raw ideas based on data, but these need the human factor of context, emotion and uniqueness. Those remain key ingredients to creating interesting campaigns.

AI-enhanced workflows allow PR professionals to focus on the more creative aspects of their work—generating ideas supported by relevant contexts and insights that relate to culture and values, news or trends. It is through such ideas that brand stories become engaging and memorable. There are many spaces for creativity in PR: from developing communication strategies, writing compelling content, engaging external experts, to designing visual elements of a campaign—or events, for example.

Rather than killing creativity, artificial intelligence can significantly enhance it by providing tools for important, but boring, tasks. Creativity in PR is of paramount importance, and AI can support it in many ways. As a result, it is becoming an integral part of modern marketing and PR campaigns, supporting professionals in their quest for even better results. And for those, you need humans.

ILONA RUTKOWSKA is the winner of the Young Creatives Cannes 2023 competition in the PR category, and the PR campaigns she has created have won awards in major Polish industry competitions. She has over 8 years of experience in the PR industry. For more than 6 years she has been working at the Polish independent strategic communications management agency Good One PR, which serves both Polish and global brands like iRobot, Wurth, Quick-Step, Subway, Carlsberg and Kearney.



A MILLION-PIECE PUZZLE

In today's world, PR professionals are chiefly responsible for shaping organisational culture. They are involved in every aspect and must oversee all elements of the organisation's operations. While creativity is integral to PR, in the fast-paced world of communication, it is increasingly a strategic exercise rather than merely a gimmicky use of tools. Despite our tendency to focus on methods and channels, driven by a constant influx of ideas, tricks and creative solutions from agency think tanks, the essence of contemporary PR lies in attitude. It is a strategic approach that not only influences the operation and perception of organisations but also permeates every detail. It is less about cooking and serving, and more about the approach to eating.

PR is fundamentally about reputation. A solid reputation serves as the gateway to trust. Its core lies in a managerial approach and a deliberate attitude, which are reflected in every facet of a company or organisation's operations—business policy, social and community responsibility, recruitment, sales, meeting systems, reputation management and change management, among others. Even the smallest details, such as logos, customer service style, call centre availability and the quality of information flow, are included. Crafting an image that conveys our reputation and credibility is akin to assembling a million-piece puzzle. However, when presenting our image, we should avoid the simplistic approach of defining boundaries first by focusing on easily identifiable corners and edges.

'Trust me! You can trust me!' Every company, organisation and even government uses this message in various forms. However, organisational,

market and social trust are nurtured by different sources and address different needs. With rising reputational risks and the rapid evolution of communication technologies, PR professionals are confronted with a jumble of diverse puzzle pieces: logos, visual and verbal images, offline and online footprints, media statements, advertisements, training, sustainability policies, internship programmes, stories, events, awards, work attire, gestures, postures, facial expressions, vocal communication, and more. These elements can only form a memorable and credible image that can be managed cost-effectively when they are strategically organised around a cohesive big picture, guided by PR. That is why, in recent years, HR departments and product development teams have increasingly become key collaborators with PR professionals, alongside CEOs and marketers.



JÓZSEF FERLING is the founding owner of the PR Agency FERLING and an Associate Professor at the University of Pécs. From 2000 to 2002, József served as Vice President of HuPRA, and subsequently as President until 2005. Since 2015, he has been a member emeritus of HuPRA. He has authored numerous articles and studies in the field, and his book, *The Great Public Relations Recipe Book*, was published in 2016. In 2023, he was ranked 16th in the TOP 50 list of the most successful Hungarian PR professionals. FERLING is Hungary's largest agency based outside Budapest. In addition to numerous Hungarian and international professional accolades, it was the first Hungarian PR agency to achieve ICCO's international agency accreditation.

DO WE HAVE THE COURAGE TO INNOVATE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS?

The practice of public relations is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven by the rapid emergence of new platforms and technologies. Social media, artificial intelligence and data analytics have revolutionised how we communicate and engage with audiences. While traditional PR methods still hold value, to remain relevant and effective, innovation is not just important—it's essential.

For PR professionals, embracing innovation means more than just keeping up with trends. It requires a commitment to developing creative campaigns that not only capture attention but also resonate deeply with audiences. This often involves experimenting with new formats that create immersive and engaging experiences. By leveraging advanced data analytics, PR teams can fine-tune their strategies to ensure messages are delivered to the right people at the right time, maximising impact.

BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

Despite a clear understanding of the importance of innovation, PR professionals may feel intimidated by the uncertainty that comes with new ideas. And clients may prefer to rely on tried-and-true methods, viewing them as safer options in an unpredictable environment.

Innovative campaigns often demand substantial investment—be it in time, money or effort. In peri-

ods of economic uncertainty, clients may be reluctant to allocate significant resources to experimental approaches, fearing the risk may outweigh the reward. And they may not fully grasp the potential benefits of novel creativity preferring instead to stick with familiar solutions.

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

Education and evidence play pivotal roles in cultivating a culture of creativity and innovation. By showcasing successful case studies and data-driven outcomes from past campaigns, PR professionals can build confidence and illustrate the tangible benefits of creativity. Demonstrating increased engagement and ROI may persuade clients to embrace new ideas.

Innovation doesn't have to happen overnight. Introducing it in small manageable steps, starting with minor tweaks and gradually implementing more significant changes allows clients to become comfortable with new strategies.

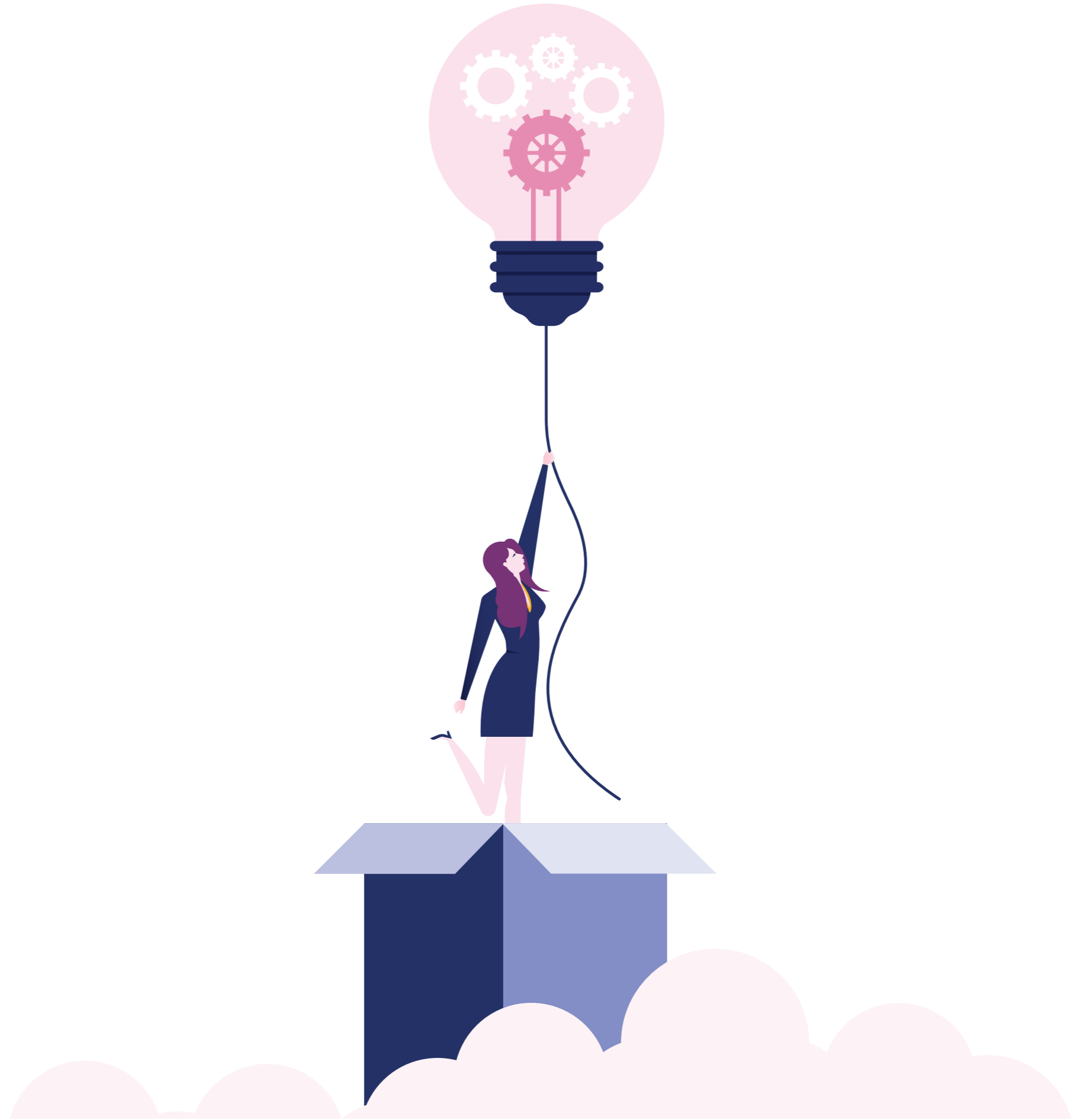
Finally, collaboration is key. By working closely with clients to understand their concerns and constraints, agencies can develop tailored creativity to address specific needs. By winning strong advocates on the client side, the partnership fosters trust and creates a shared willingness to explore novel solutions.



RADEK VITEK, Head of Brand Reputation, MSL Czech Republic. With over 30 years in public relations, Radek Vitek is one of the most experienced PR and communications consultants in the Czech Republic. His career began in 1992 at PRAGMA Communications, one of the first PR agencies in the Czech market. Radek managed leading Czech PR agencies GCI Praha, Ogilvy Public Relations and PR.Konektor. In 2020, he joined Publicis Groupe as the Head of Brand Reputation to establish and develop the Czech office of MSL Group. Radek was an elected member of the Executive Board of the Association of Public Relations for over 15 years and lectures at professional and university courses.

04

Vision for the future



EDUCATION

*Doing OK is not enough:
PR education has to
develop to meet the
needs of a rapidly
changing world*

INTRODUCTION

PR practitioners agree that their work is complex: it requires a wide range of skills and competencies to excel in the field. Some people claim PR is both an art and science, which, by the way, is reflected in the strategy versus creativity dilemma highlighted in another chapter, while others believe that unless one is a born communicator, they will not have a bright future in the industry.

Tertiary-level education of public relations has been present across the region for the last three decades. Communication models, research and media theory are taught side by side with PR practice and campaign management. PR education prevails and the quality of education is confirmed by the fact that graduates do usually not have difficulties in securing jobs in the industry. Higher education is complemented by a range of vocational courses offered in the region that focus on specialist areas, such as social media communication, digital communication and media relations.

However, there are warning signs on the horizon. Applications to PR courses are declining globally and several well-established courses had to redefine their curriculum and change their name. Digital communication seems to be the flavour of the years; it attracts students significantly better than previous PR courses. The fact that during the last two decades PR has lost ground to competing industries and practices means a wake-up call for education as well. As our experts highlight in this chapter, just continuing to do the same will not work. Curricula need to be redefined to embrace digital changes, AI, in-depth analytical skills, social media and alternative channels of communi-

cation. Complementing types of education need to be developed, including part-time offerings, short courses and vocational programmes, to serve the purposes of life-long learning.

Beside the skills and competencies, PR education has an important social function as well. We need to educate our students to understand and follow ethical codes and rules, have a critical approach towards fake information, respect governance requirements, and embrace the rapidly growing criteria of social sensitivity and environmental responsibility. Courses must include areas such as EDI, ESG and ethics not only as 'nice to have' components of the curriculum, but as essential parts of the knowledge base of any PR practitioner.

The current digital revolution and the rapidly emerging new set of criteria offer a unique opportunity for PR education in the region to actually offer what students want and need to study so they can become responsible and capable practitioners in the industry.

GÁBOR SABLÓS is a communications consultant and academic, and an Associate Professor of the University of Roehampton, London. He previously taught in the media department of the University of Wolverhampton, and later at the Worcester Business School. For two years, he led the undergraduate programmes at RMIT Vietnam's School of Communication. Before his academic career, he co-founded the Pepper 21 PR Agency where he managed several strategic communication campaigns for both business and non-profit sectors. In 2002, he won the IPRA Golden World Award and was also honoured by the 'Hats off!' award of the Hungarian Association of PR Agencies for their 'Change for the Small' pro-bono campaign for UNICEF.



EXPANDING PR EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

There are currently around 300 startups in Slovakia aiming to operate on an international stage. The success of a startup is significantly influenced by public relations, prompting even nascent companies to seek quality professionals in the communication field. This is driven by two main factors: first, to enhance the company's reputation as an excellent employer, thus supporting development in human resources; and second, to effectively communicate their products or services beyond national borders, helping the company achieve the critical mass of customers or investment required for further development.

To attract such talent, it has been essential to adapt education in public relations to meet this growing demand. Public relations is taught in Slovakia as part of marketing communication. At Comenius University, PR subjects are compulsory and are where students learn not only the theoretical foundations, history and basic terminology of public relations, but, through practical lessons, also how to prepare a communication plan, write a press release and place press materials in the media. As part of their coursework, students learn the differences in crafting press releases for the German, American or Japanese markets. They acquire theoretical knowledge about key markets and practical skills for engaging with international media. Upon graduation,

they should be capable of leading communication teams and understanding the principles of global public relations.

The problem, however, is that only 25 graduates complete their studies each year, and on average, only two pursue careers in public relations. Others become art directors, copywriters, account managers or strategists in advertising agencies. The Slovak labour market could absorb many more such graduates. Consequently, companies often resort to hiring PR professionals from other countries or employing local PR agencies, which significantly inflates their communication budgets. If more Slovak schools of marketing communication trained students in global public relations, a stronger community of professionals would emerge in Slovakia, facilitating the sharing of international market insights. Until now, PR education has not fully met employers' needs; in particular, startups are seeking global public relations specialists.

DANIELA VUNHU, has over a decade of PR experience and excels, at creating compelling brand stories that resonate. As a passionate storyteller and PR strategist, she helps startups navigate global markets. A dedicated educator at Comenius University, Daniela inspires the next generation of PR professionals who believe in the transformative power of PR and continuously push its boundaries.



Public relations education in Poland has a relatively long history: the first courses were offered in the 1970s and predated the development of the PR industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s (after the fall of communism). As in other countries, PR education in Poland serves both PR professionals who care for the technical and writing skills of students needed in PR jobs and the research agendas of academics based in mass media, journalistic and economic fields.

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN POLAND: FUNCTIONALIST, YET ETHICAL

Due to the constant growth of the PR sector since the 1990s and the strong relationships of academia with practitioners' organisations, PR education in Poland is predominantly functionalist and caters to the needs of the PR industry. It follows the dominant paradigm in PR scholarship and education, based on the excellence theory by James Grunig, which is popular globally and also in Poland. The majority of PR curricula in Poland are rooted in the dominant paradigm, with a strong sense of PR ethics, which is broadly supported by scholars, instructors and the PR industry.

Research studies reveal that the comprehensive PR curriculum, which includes technical skills, strategic competencies, critical thinking and values, is highly valued by both PR professionals

and students. Polish PR students, in particular, appreciate the emphasis on broader social issues, such as equality, ethics and ESG (ecological, social, and governance). They report that the inclusion of ethics, sustainability and social responsibility in PR studies is beneficial for their future careers.

PR education in Poland is thriving. The demand for PR courses is high, with the number of applicants often exceeding available places, even at masters level. PR specialisations or sequences are typically offered by journalism, mass media and communication faculties at general universities, as well as by economics or management faculties at business schools or universities of economics.

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EDUCATION IS ABOUT LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

What is the ideal profile of a good PR professional? According to Czech PR professionals, the key to success is networking, enthusiasm for PR, diverse experience and continuous education. A university degree, while common in the field, is not considered essential.

In the Czech Republic, individuals can enter the field of public relations with various backgrounds and no certification or vocational training is required. 87% of Czech PR professionals hold a university degree. Because Czech universities offer only a couple of programmes in communication and only during the last two decades, these are degrees in social sciences, mostly. While recruiters often target university students, a diploma itself is not seen as a unique selling point. Could this be because it is so common? Or are we overlooking the benefits of higher education?

University aside, despite the quoted importance of continuous education, a quarter of professionals do not participate in ongoing learning opportunities, such as comprehensive courses and practical lectures by professional organisations like APRA and PR Klub, or even annual conferences such as Forum Media or the Communication Summit. The lack of interest in these activities persists regardless of the type of organisation they work for, whether agencies, companies or non-profits. The reasons may include busy schedules and the demand to be available 24/7, which leaves little time for professional development. Alternatively, it might be the belief that the insights gained from work are sufficient, reducing the perceived need for case studies, conferences and workshops.

The keys to success in public relations involve

engaging with new people, experiences and perspectives. A good PR professional is a curious person, driven by a lifelong commitment to exploring and learning—a necessity given the constant changes in media and technology.

This shift demands a new approach to university education. It is crucial to offer practical skills, such as copywriting, strategy building and media planning, which not only facilitate young people's entry into the labour market but also meet the industry's rightful demands.

On the other hand, to serve the development of young people, a solid foundation in critical thinking, ethics, business principles and various social sciences is essential for the sustainable future of PR professionals' careers over the next 50 years.



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RACE AGAINST MACHINES: the future skills of PR professionals in the age of algorithms

The ongoing digital transformation is redefining the competitive principles in almost all areas of economic and social activities, including public relations. However, the widespread use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has only accelerated this process, reaching into the foundations of the PR profession. The gap between disseminating digital technologies and the level of teams' skills in using them effectively, safely and ethically can bring unwanted results leading to a decline in the quality and standards of work, and even a crisis of confidence in the profession itself. In the age of AI, we must ask boldly: how shall we train and educate PR professionals? The preservation of the essence of our profession is at stake.

Research conducted by the International Public Relations Network shows that 83% of PR agency employees are already using AI to carry out their daily tasks. Meanwhile, a McKinsey analysis shows up to 30% of hours worked could be automated and accelerated by GenAI (2030 outlook). Leaders already recognise the need for change. Over 8 out of 10 respondents of the Microsoft Work Trend Index survey claim that their employees will need new skills to prepare for the rise of AI.

Watching how GenAI is being used to improve PR activities, I see that the issue lays not only in technical skills, but primarily in analytical, strategic and social skills. From an internal analysis of the tasks managed by PR consultants using AI tools, it appears that skills such as critical thinking, social empathy, fact checking, quality and compliance are definitely gaining importance. Another element of the process that requires empowerment are strategic skills, such as defining the purpose and direction, the ability to identify differentiators and uniqueness, and selecting a path of further

development. Working with AI tools has also opened up space for the fundamental factor in our profession of building relationships with key stakeholders.

The thesis outlined above is consistent with the indications of the Microsoft Work Trend Index, which among the desired competencies of knowledge workers using AI mentioned analytical judgment (30%), emotional intelligence (27%), creative evaluation (24%), intellectual curiosity (23%), detecting and dealing with bias (22%), and the ability to write commands and delegate AI tasks (21%).

A further McKinsey analysis shows that the demand for social and emotional skills could increase by 11% in Europe by 2030. Underlying this growth is greater demand for roles requiring interpersonal empathy and leadership skills. It leads us to the question: aren't these skills the very qualifications desired in the PR profession? The trick, then, is not to race with machines, but to effectively harness them and use their power to increase one's own productivity and effectiveness. This requires remodelling the current model of training and development of PR experts. We must not miss this moment!



ŁUKASZ MALCZEWSKI is co-founder and CEO of dfusion agency based in Warsaw, Poland. Łukasz is responsible for the strategy development and supervision of customer service. dfusion was created to provide public relations services for companies with an innovative approach, especially from the IT/tech, financial, industrial and e-commerce sectors.

PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

PR education in Hungary is characterised by university degrees and professional short-term courses that focus on specific skills and personal development. Currently PR is offered only at BA level, but Budapest Business University, the flagship of PR education in Hungary with CIPR recognised courses both in English and Hungarian, is planning to launch a one-year MSc Strategic Communication degree programme in cooperation with Stirling University in 2025. Several universities did offer professional one-year specialised courses, such as Crisis Communication, Internal Communication or Communicating CSR but these initiatives were short-lived. Instead, more focussed and shorter training courses are springing up, offered by experienced senior PR professionals who are attached to professional training companies. The demand for tailor-made, company-specific PR training is also on the rise, particularly in the case of SMEs.

Thanks to the efforts of the Hungarian PR Association, the cooperation between PR practice and academia is getting stronger. It is only recently that entire conferences were devoted to PR education with the twofold aim of making the profession more attractive for the younger generations, as well as narrowing the gap between the rapidly

changing practice and university education. Although PR practitioners are keen on being guest speakers at universities, taking entire modules or working as part-time lecturers across universities could result in a much closer relationship between practice and academia. Besides social media, digital and writing skills, Hungarian PR graduates are also expected to have a very good command of English without which it is hard to land a good PR position. There have been some initiatives regarding mentorship programmes but there is still a long way to go if mentoring is to be used to its full potential.

Hungarian PR curricula are centred around campaign planning and management with a strong focus on social and traditional media. Using real clients and issues in student projects for campaign planning is widespread, which may have also contributed to the success of Hungarian PR students at international PR competitions. Crisis Communication, CSR and ethics often feature as separate modules on various university courses, which also include a compulsory short-term internship. Public relations (text)books are few and far between in the Hungarian language compared to other countries in the region.



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GEN Z

The legend of Gen Z

INTRODUCTION

There is hardly a subject where during discussions the topic of Gen Z, the generation born between 1995 and 2009, doesn't appear in the first three minutes. The debate is either on how difficult they are with their behaviour or how hopeless it is to understand them.

Why do we spend so much time, energy and effort on Gen Z? Why is this generation worth this much attention? Why not boomers or Gen X or Y? These earlier ones are currently the largest group of potential spenders and of the workforce, so why is Gen Z, only now entering adulthood, the most interesting generation?

In my opinion, it is because we, all the earlier generations mentioned above, find it hard to connect with newcomers. Never have we seen a bigger gap between generations than now, between Gen Z, with Alpha joining in, and their predecessors. As Krisztián Steigerwald, a Hungarian generation researcher points out in his book *Battle of the Generations – How to understand each other?*, for every generation there is the 'normal'—whatever we experience in the first 2-3 years of our lives, that becomes 'normal' for us. Everything that was before, we know from stories, but cannot really relate to as we have never lived through that. Every-

thing that comes after, we learn, but we compare everything to our 'normal'. For example, members of Gen X will always think that making phone calls to speak with distant relatives is a natural thing to do, whereas for boomers even the existence of the telephone is a learned experience. Still, the smartphones of today are an amazing innovation for Gen X! We know and value the convenience it provides. For my Gen Z children, and for Gen Alpha in particular, it is simply 'normal' to have the whole internet, applications of all kinds, shopping, banking, and a high-quality camera all in one hand.

Gen Z is the first generation that has been born into the digital world. We, their parents, teachers, colleagues and leaders have all learned—or are learning—the digital life. There is no example of how to be a digital parent. All such knowledge is being collected in real time.

Every generation is learning how to navigate the era of full digitalisation. Only it is more familiar to Gen Z than to the others...

In this section of the Focus Report we gathered several opinions of how to deal and work with members of Gen Z. Strategic communication needs a full understanding for it to be able to reach and affect this least forthcoming and most critical generation.

ORSOLYA STEFANIE LUDVIG, with over 30 years of professional experience, is currently Director of Marketing and Communication at Libri-Bookline, the largest book publishing and retail chain in Hungary. She also teaches and mentors as Head of the Centre for Communication at Mathias Corvinus Collegium. Previously she has worked for several big multinationals, but also successfully ran her own consultancy business for 12 years. For the past decade, she has represented communication on the boards of companies such as Siemens, Mercedes-Benz Manufacturing Hungary and Heineken. She has given numerous presentations on responsible communication, sustainability and employer branding, and has also been active in supporting women leaders. She has been a member of the board at the Hungarian PR Association since 2022, as well as at the Hungarian Marketing Association since 2024. She is an active mentor in both professional and general business areas. Mother of 3, sports and literature enthusiast.



GEN Z OR WHY ARE 'TODAY'S YOUTH' ALWAYS THE WORST?



COMPLAINTS ABOUT 'TODAY'S YOUTH' ARE NOTHING NEW.

In the 4th century BC, Socrates reproached the young people of his time for being undereducated, lazy and fond of pleasures. His disciple, Plato, worried that 'younger people consider themselves the equals of the older ones and act against them in word and deed', and Plato's disciple Aristotle wrote in despair that when he saw youth, he doubted the future of civilisation.

EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS OWN 'NORMAL'

'Labelling' a generation is the first error of thought from which subsequent generations derive. Because it is not the next generations that are born this way or that, they are born in a

specific social, political, economic or cultural environment, different from previous generations. We live in a VUCA world where knowledge acquired at university becomes obsolete on average every four years, and innovations live shorter than the process of their commercialisation. Gen Z is therefore 'more different' than the generations of their employers.

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN LEADERSHIP

What should a manager know about the Gen Z approach to work? That it occupies a completely different place in their lives than that of boomers or even Millennials, to whom work gives status and meaning. Gen Z believes that it is not hard work that is the source of wealth, but capital (as sad as it sounds), so they want to

work, but they don't want to live to work. They want to have good relationships at work and not just be a pawn. They want to be listened to, to know the whole context of their tasks and to see the meaning of their work, not just a slice of it. It's as if they've read 'Economic Possibilities of our Grandchildren' by J.M. Keynes (who in 1930 predicted that in 100 years' time we'd be so rich we'd only have to work 15 hours a week). Or David Greaber's Bullshit Jobs (2013), which argues that meaningless work can even be socially damaging because it causes stress. And sitting for hours at a computer is more harmful than smoking cigarettes.

BE A NICE PERSON!

Having grown up in a different 'normal', Gen Z enters the labour market on their own terms. This generation doesn't understand hierarchy, a prescriptive work style and uncritically following the orders of alpha bosses. Gordon Gekko doesn't work for them; he is more of a meme. Gen Z is consigning this kind of leadership to oblivion. Only many managers haven't noticed it yet. The sooner they change their style, the better for them and their companies. As Stephen Schwarzman, CEO of Blackstone, says: 'If you don't know how to manage people, at least be a nice person.' So: Be a nice person!



EWA ŁABNO-FALĘCKA, Ph.D., Corporate Communications & External Affairs, Mercedes-Benz Manufacturing Poland. Ewa is a Germanist and a linguist, and she holds a Ph.D. from the Eberhard Charles University, Tübingen (Germany). Between 1993-1999 she worked in the Polish diplomatic service, and since 1999 with the Mercedes-Benz Group in Poland in different positions, currently as director of corporate communication and external affairs. Since 2015, she has been the coordinator of Mercedes-Benz investments in Poland. Winner of many industry & branch awards, including the Golden Arrow, PRotony, Marketing Director of the Year (twice), nominated for the European Excellence Award (twice) and 'Businesswoman of the Year' in 2017. She is the co-founder and president of several NGO's: Partnership for Road Safety Association (2006-2010), Society of Friends of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2008-2012) and Foundation of Education for Industry Development. She is a member of a. o. Superbrands Poland Council, the Perspektywy Foundation (MBA Ranking), Coventry University Council/Wrocław and the European Council on Foreign Relations/Warsaw, as well as being an art collector (Polish Art post-1945) Merits: 'Meritorious for Transport of the Republic of Poland' (Ministry of Infrastructure), 'Meritorious for the Economy of Poland' (Ministry for Development and Technology), Cross of Merit on the Ribbon of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR GEN Z?

This title would not typically be conceived in a normal world, or if read in 25-30 years' time it might be met with the same slightly shy smile that the 'housewives' training' from the 1950s evokes today. Really? Was that a topic back then?

Sadly, humanity is much more interested in categorising people and putting them into well-established boxes, rather than realising that we are in the middle of a swirling vortex of cultural and civilisational interactions, which is nudging us toward the future. (Just think of our calculation of time: antiquity—but antique compared to what? Before Christ and after Christ? And what was happening in the Far East at the same time?)

What is Gen Z? One popular definition is that Gen Z is special because they were born into the internet age. But what makes them more worthy of attention than their predecessors, Generation Y, Generation X, or the baby boomers? Note that in Hungary, where these lines are being written, baby boomers are often referred to as the 'Great Generation'. However, 'boomer' is more commonly used as a pejorative term by young people to describe those who are unable to adapt, are staggering out of the world of work and achievement, and are resistant to change. A boomer is someone who no longer understands anything, but still won't shut up, while the term 'Great Generation' refers to those who, after World War II, had the first opportunity to change the world.

But who are Gen Z? They are the ones who surprise us every day with their uniqueness—the way they learn, their skills and attitude. They are the

ones whom we make a sport out of not-understanding, who don't want to meet our expectations—not because they are rebellious, but because they are out of touch with our values. An average Gen Zer knows that things can't go on as they are. 'For you, it's easy,' says a twenty-two-year-old colleague of mine with complete honesty. 'You had the regime change in 1989, whereafter you had a front-row seat to the West. You made your business; those who came after you, and the less talented, went into politics. You left my father and mother with nothing but the illusion of consumption, a mortgage on the house/car, and the promise of an annual beach holiday. I don't want to and can't live like them—I just want to have a good time.'

And no one can blame Gen Z for that, as it is mostly our responsibility for how their world has turned out. Culturally homogeneous, normal, perhaps a little too rational, full of love, desire, conformity and expectations—given the communication tools we handed them at the age of three to keep them occupied are still working... (long live 5G!)



ENDRE MENTES is a communications specialist, cultural organiser, co-founder and PR partner at the 20-year-old ACG Agency. Over the past two decades, ACG has grown to become the region's leading integrated brand communications agency. They currently organise PR-driven campaigns in 14 countries. Their key clients include VELUX, Vodafone, Heineken Hungária, Samsung, Hankook, Cinema City, IKEA and Zwack Unicum Nyrt, among others. He is a regular contributor to publications and a producer of television series and films. Additionally, he serves as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Szeretem Magyarországot Club, an association of business people and personalities dedicated to socially responsible initiatives.

UNLOCKING GEN Z POTENTIAL FOR A BETTER WORKPLACE

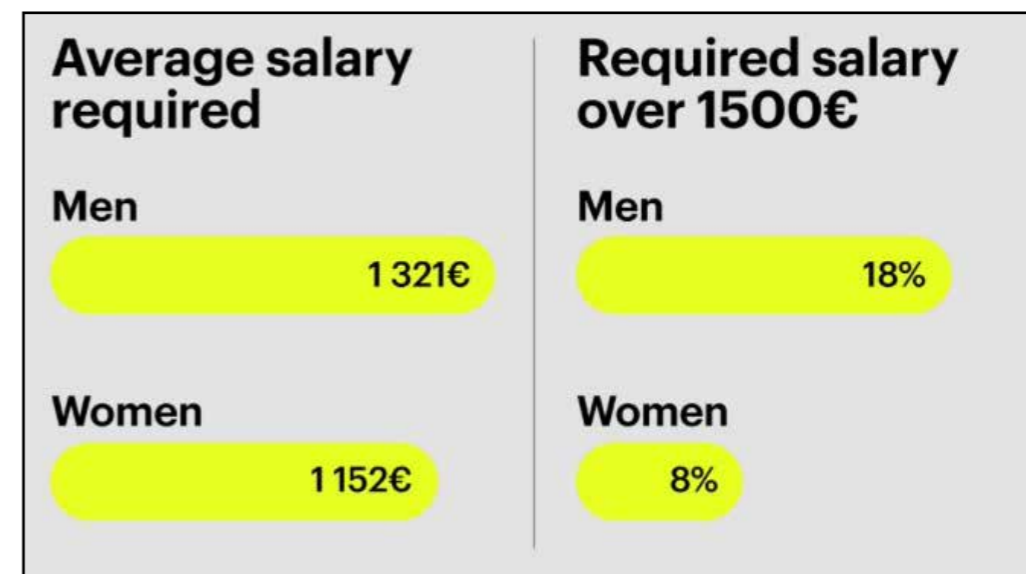
By 2030, Generation Z is projected to make up approximately 30% of the European workforce. This shift highlights the importance for employers to adapt to the values and expectations of this tech-savvy, socially conscious generation. Recognising this evolving landscape, we mapped and understood the motivations, perceptions and priorities of young people aged 18-25, comparing these insights with HR professionals' perspectives. The Seesame Employer Branding team, with MNFORCE and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, conducted two surveys: a quantitative survey of 18-25-year-olds and an online survey of 60 HR managers. This article presents key findings, highlighting contrasts and similarities between the groups.

SELF-ASSURED AND READY: YOUNG SLOVAKS' CONFIDENCE IN THE JOB MARKET

Young Slovaks are confident and unafraid of their position in the labour market. About 68% of 18-25-year-olds believe they are attractive to the labour market or interesting to the labour market. However, many find their entry into desired jobs complicated by inadequate school preparation, with more than half feeling unprepared by the education system.

FINANCIAL PERKS VS. PERSONAL WELL-BEING: WHAT GEN Z VALUES IN THE WORKPLACE

Gen Z values travel, premium products and experiences, prioritising salary and financial benefits when choosing a job. Work-life balance is crucial for nearly half of 18-25-year-olds. Only 51% rate their mental health as good, and 40% feel stressed frequently. Over 80% don't plan to stay in their first job longer than five years due to the desire to gain new experiences.



CLEAR DEMANDS: GEN Z'S EMPHASIS ON EMPLOYER ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Gen Z takes a clear stance on climate change and social issues, expecting high standards from themselves and their surroundings. 55% of young Slovaks expect employers to express positions on social issues, and about two-thirds prioritise good social and environmental reputations. 72% of HR managers agree that job seekers increasingly demand strong company reputations. With the growing importance of ESG, this offers companies an opportunity to communicate their sustainability achievements and goals effectively.

EMBRACING CHANGE: CREATING WORKPLACES THAT ATTRACT GEN Z

Gen Z is confident, choosy, with clear ideas about their quality of life. Gen Z is attracted by company culture based on trust, mutual respect and diversity. They prefer to work on specific projects that reflect their competencies, favouring project work and sprints over marathons, with impactful results and honest feedback that will support their learning. Adapting our business models to these needs will help engage and satisfy Gen Z, fostering their full potential.

Employers value:	Gen Z guarantees:
Ability to learn new things	✓
Pro-client orientation	✗
Problem-solving skills	✓
Flexibility	✓
Teamwork	✓

MICHAELA BENEDIGOVA is the managing director and founder of Seesame, a PR and communication agency dedicated to strategic brand communication and building employer reputations. With over 25 years of experience in reputation management and corporate communications, Michaela mentors corporate clients, NGOs, and public sector representatives. Michaela is also active in research and academia, co-founding the Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies (KInIT) and serving on several boards of trustees. Seesame's Employer Branding team has a long-standing commitment to strategic brand communication and building employer reputations. Using data, proprietary research and focus group interviews, we help brands set up effective communications to attract and retain quality talent. Together with company leaders, managers and HR departments, we set up internal communication, internal processes and improvements so that there is both a win-win experience. As the next generation comes along, the requirements for how we set up our business models are changing.



"WHO WILL CARRY LOVE?" - Generation Z and high culture

Who will carry culture? This question, based on the title of a poem by Hungarian poet László Nagy, is a recurring symbol in the discourse on the transmission of Hungarian culture. The question often arises: how can we pass on to the younger generation the passion and thirst for knowledge without which cultural institutions cannot function and their productions cannot be sold? This is especially relevant given that youth research conducted at regular intervals in Hungary shows that fewer and fewer young people aged 15 to 29 visit the classical venues of high culture: according to the 2020 survey, 89% have never been to an opera, 86% have never attended a classical music concert, 65% have never visited a museum and 62% have never been to the theatre. Increasingly, young people feel that these institutions have nothing to tell them and that the cultural capital they could gain from elite cultural venues would not influence positively their future prospects. Therefore, it is not only difficult to reach young people, but they must also be convinced of the benefits of these programmes.

Of course, this cannot be generalised. It is dangerous to think of Generation Z as homogenous in the context of cultural PR and marketing. Their education, social and financial status, and place of residence not only determine whether young people have access to the productions of cultural institutions offline or online but also whether they are even interested in engaging with them. It is also a question of how receptive and open they are, how they spend their free time, and how willing they are to look up from their digital devices, leave the confines of their homes, discover new things and pay attention to them.

There is no universal recipe. Museums, theatres and concert halls offer unique experiences, so they must develop individual marketing strategies. Institutions considered bastions of culture cannot rely on their previous practice based on permanence and respect. They must continuously research and experiment to develop projects that consider the trends that can collectively attract and actively engage young people from diverse backgrounds, require minimal logistics from participants, offer an immediate experience that is useful, entertain, are enjoyable in company, and provide credible and reliable information that peers also speak well of. Because, in order to 'carry love', they must first ignite it.

László Nagy: Who Will Carry Love?

*If my existence has finally run out,
who will adore the cricket's violin?
Who will breathe fire on frosty branches?
Who will stretch across the rainbow?
Who will embrace the rocky hips,
turning them into a meadow with soft graves, weeping?
Who will caress the hair and arteries sprouting in the wall?
And who will raise a cathedral
from curses for the shattered beliefs?
If my existence has finally run out,
who will scare away the vulture?
And who will carry Love
in their teeth to the other shore!*

Translated by Duncan Phin

DR MARIANNA BERÉNYI is a Móra Ferenc Prize-winning Hungarian museologist, museum communication specialist, journalist and editor. She wrote her PhD thesis on ethnography, studying the online spaces of museums. She is the head of the communication department of the Museum of Ethnography, the editor-in-chief of *magyarmuzeumok.hu* (Hungarian Museums Online), an editor of the journal *MúzeumCafé*, author of numerous articles and professional studies. She is a member of the Board of ICOM Hungary and of The Pulszky Society of the Hungarian Museum Association



IN THE WORLD OF GEN Z:

Is the classic PR approach sufficient in communication with young adults?

In order to prepare effective communication with Gen Z, it is necessary to start by knowing the environment in which they live. Young adults, born between 1995 and 2012, during the era of the greatest recent technological leap, grew up 'with screens in their hands'. They are the first generation who does not know about the split between the analogue and digital worlds. What's more, the most important experience of their lives is the pandemic and its consequences: the high level of fear, social isolation, learning and working remotely—which has tied them even more closely to the virtual world. For them, this is a natural environment in which to build relations and create opinions.

Brands willing to effectively communicate with this target group should bear in mind several key elements.

NEW MEDIA

Why are traditional media, such as printed articles or even online portals, not working to reach this group? For Gen Z, the main source of information is social media content, preferably in the form of video or, for example, video podcasts. They prefer a real image of a random person's life to an ideal, retouched world, so popular among older, aspirational groups.

MAGDALENA PAWŁOWSKA is an account manager for Consumer Goods Practice, and an expert with nine years' experience in the PR industry, who specialises in brand and communication, and is a strategic advisor the consumer goods sector. At 24/7Communication, she leads the team working for clients such as The Coca-Cola Company, Coca-Cola HBC and E.Wedel. She gained her experience working for branch leaders of such brands as Żywiec Zdrój, Maspex and Lidl.



AI

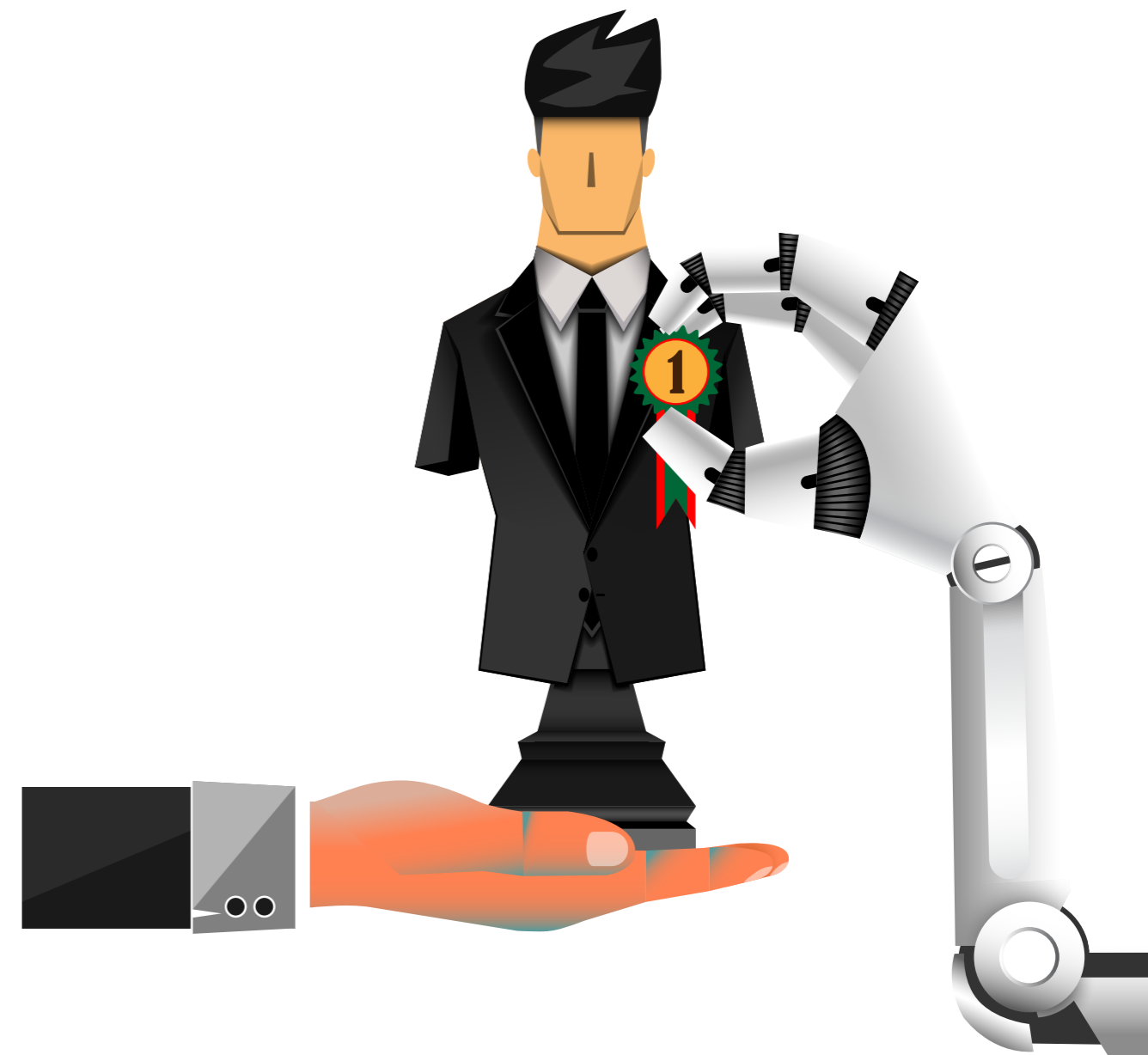
In times of dynamic development, driven by technology and changing youth preferences, it is also worth using the latest technological advances, including artificial intelligence. Design almost every part of a communication campaign and undertake unconventional projects based on immersive experiences, with an additional form of interaction with young consumers.

AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Young people don't like 'bullxxx', and in the age of the internet it is increasingly difficult to hide insincerity. Whether it is a brand or corporate communication, it should contain messages that are backed up by actions, supported by hard data or figures. To build credibility among Gen Z, brands need to walk the talk.

Nowadays, brands are facing entirely new challenges. First and foremost, our reality is based on new technologies in which companies must find their own way, but also incorporate their advances into daily operations. On the other hand, consumers' expectations are constantly changing. They seek engaging and personalised interactions that continue to provide them with new and unique experiences in a creative way.

Navigating this world requires, above all, an agile and open, but also innovative approach. Brands, more than ever before, need to learn how to anticipate upcoming trends, and embed new media and technologies into their marketing strategies, while not forgetting to act based on authenticity and transparency.



FUTURE OF PR

*Let's roll up our sleeves,
the bright future of
PR needs to be worked for*

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of revolutionary change. Technological, social, environmental... A time that will significantly transform not only our industry, but everything. There are a lot of concerns.

AI, which is inevitably embraced by all responsible PR professionals and which most of us, thankfully, according to current research, consider more of an opportunity than a threat. The media, our long-standing partners—after all, media relations has been, and perhaps still is, the flagship of PR—but increasing economic pressures and declining readership are driving publishers to greater sensationalism and the intertwining of newsrooms with business departments. This makes it increasingly difficult to get free editorial space and forces us to think about how to deliver our message across different communication channels, paid included. The erosion of trust in experts, politicians, but also the media and communications industry, hand in hand with the growing influence of propaganda and disinformation, puts us in a role where reputation management and trust building are key values. Because without trust there is no relationship. Evidence-based marketing and an approach that builds strategies not on impressions but on data is making its way into PR, and the ability to gather and work with data will become increasingly important. As will the ability to respond with surgical precision across different communication channels. Advancing globalisation is forcing us to look broadly around us, take in pop culture overlaps, and increase our language skills. On top of all of this, we have a new generation growing up that the previous ones hardly understand at all. They are

not only hard to reach, because they consume different communication channels and in different ways, but also hard to employ.

So, there are several challenges facing us in PR that will form the shape of our industry in the near future. But this also shows that the role of PR is becoming stronger and stronger, that the 'earned first' approach and the ability to work with reputation and trust over the long term has an unquestionable and irreplaceable role in the communications of all brands and organisations, including those of the public administration.

The following pages will provide guidance on how to meet these challenges and what we, as PR professionals, will have to change in our daily work and practices in order to survive.

I personally believe the future of PR is bright. But we still have a lot of work to do.



ROSTISLAV STARY is an experienced PR professional with a strong focus on integrated communication. At Konektor, a leading Czech PR and marketing agency, he contributes to strategic communications and PR, delivering impactful results to a wide range of clients. Beyond his agency work, Rostislav is actively involved in education within the industry, serving as a key figure in both the Association of Public Relations and the Association of Communication Agencies, where he oversees educational initiatives.

ALPHA GENERATION: ARE WE PREPARED?

WGSN, the world's leading consumer trend forecaster, predicts that the Alpha generation, born after 2011, will reach a global population of 2.5 billion by 2025, with the highest spending power in history. Yet, only a small percentage of companies currently include this group in their communications strategies.

Generation Alpha is the first to grow up entirely in the age of smartphones and social media. They become consumers quickly, with some having favourite brands by the age of three. Their values influence their parents' consumer choices as well. Simultaneously, this generation faces crises such as pandemics and global warming, making them deeply concerned about the planet, their health and safety. As highlighted in the GWI report, they are socially sensitive and value diversity, equality and inclusivity.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH GENERATION ALPHA?

This generation receives content in a very different manner. They are inundated with an abundance of information, often feeling overwhelmed by it. Their distracted attention must be captured and held. Unsurprisingly, the most popular content they consume is short videos, around 15 seconds long.

The platforms that will dominate communication with young users in the near future are TikTok (favoured by 20% of 13-15 year-olds) and YouTube. GWI's research shows that more than half of those surveyed are willing to buy a product recommended by their favourite online creator. Influencers are also cited as the most trustworthy on the Twitch platform.

As a generation sensitive to inauthenticity, Alpha expects brands to be honest and socially engaged. We need to learn how to provide them with creative, valuable and personalised content while also adapting to rapidly changing trends and new technologies. To enhance the credibility of our message and engage our audience, we need to give them a voice, allowing them to co-create content as active participants by posting and sharing on social media. Traditional media will become an increasingly unattractive communication channel for us, but this does not mean that media relations will be entirely forgotten. PR skills related to the 'earned approach', such as sourcing issues and opportunities for brands in different contexts, will be more valuable than ever.

AGNIESZKA MARSZAŁ, Junior Account Manager at Grayling Poland has over 7 years of experience in consumer communications. She has expertise in media relations, communication strategy development, event management, and influencer marketing. Agnieszka has worked with a diverse portfolio of brands, including TikTok, Primark, Badoo, BMW, and others. Passionate about new technology, she stays up to date with the latest trends, particularly those related to Generation Alpha.



IN WHAT WE TRUST?

Trust in multinational companies, advertising professionals and the media has never been at a lower level globally than in recent years. According to the Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Monitor, only politicians are less trustworthy than advertising executives and journalists, but business leaders are also among the worst performers. Several factors contributed to eroding trust in these groups: the use of clickbait news to generate sales, fake news, and the economic and pandemic crisis. Either way, as PR is involved with all these areas, there is a strategic role for communicators in (re)building reputation. That requires much broader strategic thinking, relationship capital management and issue management

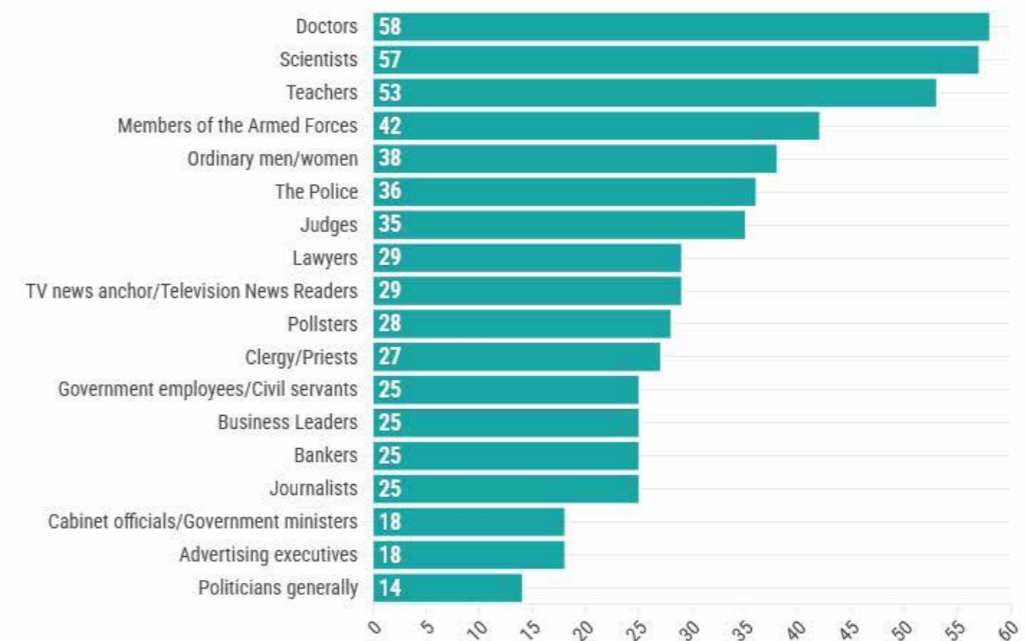
skills in the future. These are typical areas that require human skills, knowledge and experience, not to mention the time factor.

AI should also be used in these intangible human areas, allowing professionals to obtain a much faster and more accurate picture of current situations or the latest trends in media. AI can track content in real time, so brands can be instantly informed of news and opinions that refer to them. Data analytics algorithms help identify trends and audience reactions, enabling PR professionals to respond quickly to changes.

Sentiment analysis is also gaining ground among PR experts, as it provides a more accurate picture of real-time brand perceptions, helps measure emotions and attitudes about a specific campaign or event, and enables immediate, laser-focused responses—in social media, or through press or influencer channels. While sentiment analysis can also be speeded up to improve the accuracy of a company's response in a crisis,

Trustworthiness of Professions

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very trustworthy and 5 is very untrustworthy
■ % Saying trustworthy (1-2)



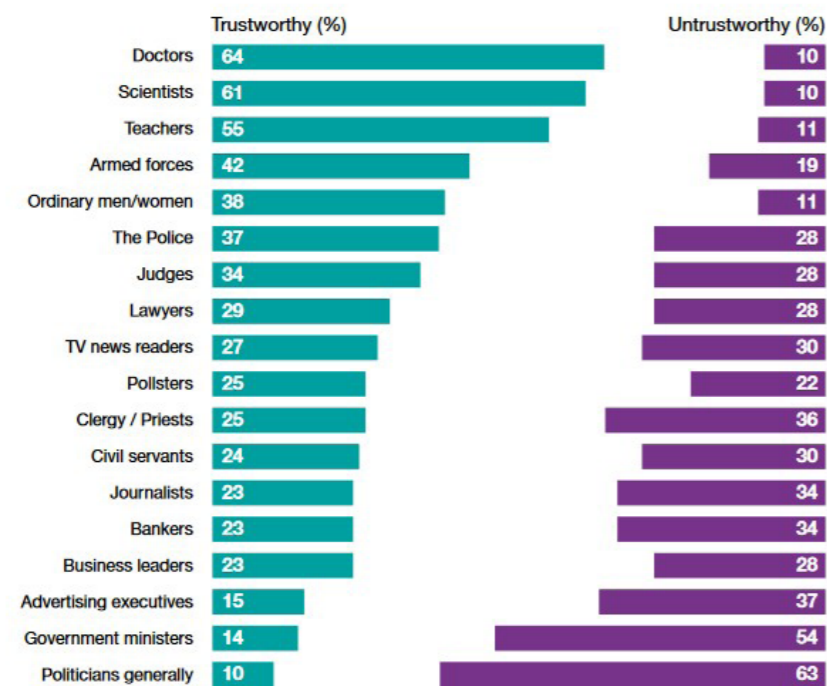
Source: Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index 2023 • Base: 22,816 participants across 31 countries, interviewed online 26 May - 9 June 2023

it does not speed up the decision-making and approval processes though...

In the future, brands' shared value proposition approaches will only be acceptable if they are 100% credible and demonstrate really doable plans, otherwise they will diminish further the low trust of big companies.

PR experts won't be able to polish the rotten apple, but using technical innovations to get closer to consumers' perceptions and needs, to which they can respond immediately, can help a lot in reputation building. And after all, this is one of the basic functions of PR.

Global trustworthiness ranking 2021



Q: Please look at this list of different types of people. In general, do you think each is trustworthy or untrustworthy in your country?
 Source: Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Monitor 2021 – 19,570 participants across 28 countries, interviewed online 23 April – 7 May 2021

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR SUCCESS

The PR industry is rapidly evolving, and professionals must adapt to new competencies and skills to navigate this dynamic landscape. The emerging trends and the challenges that are shaping the future of the industry are also making us rethink what it takes to be successful in this field.

The information overload we are exposed to today is making the competition for user attention extremely hard. The rapid pace of technological change requires quick adaptation and knowledge of new platforms. In the era of fake news, misinformation and AI deepfakes, **being vigilant and maintaining credibility, as well as trust** are crucial to protect clients. With the emergence of new platforms and technologies, staying up to date with data privacy regulations and practicing ethical communication **requires extra attention and awareness.**

In the next few years, some competencies will become essential for PR managers. We are living in a global village in which we are all connected via our screens, cultural trends and memes spread like wildfire and reach all corners of the world. In the past, PR was about local content and press relations, but these changes in the media landscape and user behaviours

require **rapid responses, innovative thinking and a global perspective.** Fifteen years ago, exceptional writing skills were a must, but today the **mastery of social media, video production and multimedia content creation** are just as important. **Creative thinking and storytelling** have always been key, yet the ability to use data, track KPIs and being able to measure digital campaign effectiveness requires **analytical skills, as well.** The landscape is changing rapidly and so are the tools that are required to manage communicating in it.

The next generation of PR managers are creative communicators, with analytical minds, who are adaptable and resilient team players. Proficiency in multiple languages and mastering effective crisis management strategies are more than advantageous. The future of PR demands continuous learning so aspiring PR professionals can excel in this dynamic and exciting industry.



ANDREA NAGY is the PR managing partner of Positive Adamsky, one of the biggest Hungarian full-service advertising agencies. She studied PR at King's College London after graduating from ELTE, Budapest. During her 17-year career, she has worked as a PR professional in agency, corporate and NGO sectors. Her areas of expertise include pharma, FMCG, creative brand strategies and public affairs. She has a strong focus on shared value proposition frameworks, and has conducted research on consumer attitudes in this area. She's been a member of several PR professional juries and included in the TOP50 PR professionals list.



EMESE SIPKA is the Head of Content at Republic Group Advertising Agency, where she played a key role in making the content division the agency's fastest-growing business unit. With over 11 years of experience, she is an expert in social media content strategy, corporate and brand PR, PA, crisis communications and influencer marketing. She was Managing Director at PS Creative Agency, developing integrated communication strategies. Her skills include strategic planning, content creation and team leadership as well.

EARNED FIRST DOES NOT MEAN EARNED ONLY

One cannot buy reputation or trust, but can effectively support organically driven content with paid media amplification to get the most out of communication intentions.

There is seemingly an increasing trend to prefer a paid-only communication approach as the media are still less willing to present our topics organically, and this can create the impression that PR agencies and professionals are losing their power. However, the exact opposite is true.

One of the real items of proof is the 'core' of renowned advertising or PR prize-winning campaigns. While during the last several years there were mainly 'purpose-driven' projects under the Cannes Lions spotlight, now those complex campaigns are scoring the best that promote diverse topics and are fully led by PR principles that set the tone for the whole marketing effort.

And it all starts with the ability to utilise the classic PR mindset in a smart way. Creative and analytic contexts will always drive impactful PR, but large-scale success is no longer 'for free'. We have to catch stakeholders' attention with a smart approach that combines creativity, analytical methods and knowledge of respective media types.

The media market in CEE has changed rapidly. Editorial staff are still getting smaller, influencers are becoming new media streams with a significant impact, news outlets are turning towards entertainment and lifestyle content tends to be more informative. Social media platforms of traditional media brands are performing multiple times better, while consumer attention is increasingly being distracted.

The key to success is a combination of creative and contextual content along with strategic media planning. In the PR approach of the new era, we need to move away from advertising but at the same time get closer to the media. The proper way to scale your message is to kick it off with organic core PR value (which is totally a must for the campaign to succeed), then share it with a wider group of relevant media. Then, continue with influencer or opinion leaders' endorsements toward customers engagement activities, and then finally, it is the right time to boost the effect with creative paid content projects that aim to reach most of the target group.

Thriving in the PR industry effectively and understanding what we can achieve from communication means being mindful that the 'earned first' PR approach does not mean 'earned only'.

VÁCLAV RAMBOUSEK is an experienced communication professional. He graduated at Tomas Bata's University (Marketing and PR). During his career he has worked for several renowned PR agencies and he is deeply oriented to both corporate and product / commercial communication. He has much experience with brands from retail, FMCG, B2C technologies, utilities, pharmacy, entertainment or public sector industries. Currently he leads the PR team at Ogilvy Czech where he focuses on strategic client consulting, internal team development, new business strategy and connecting local market with the regional Ogilvy PR European structure.



COMMUNICATION AGENCIES AS AI DIALOGUE DESIGNERS

According to a November 2023 survey of Slovak PR agencies, 90% of respondents see AI as an opportunity. This finding correlates with a similar result from Provoke's global survey - 86%. However, there are differences in the perception regarding AI's threat to jobs. In Slovakia, and possibly in the whole CEE region, we are not concerned about this problem at all; globally, a third of agencies perceive a threat from AI. In particular, the most frequently declared risks in this context include the ability to keep up with current developments and the ability to develop their business in such a way that the AI risk is manageable.

Overall, agencies are showing a growing interest in AI, with many already recognising the potential of AI in improving efficiency and innovation in their work, particularly in **media monitoring, audio transcription and text summarisation**.

The survey also explored attitudes towards ethical dilemmas associated with the use of AI. These include declaring the use of these tools to clients and audiences, the protection of personal and client data, and the potential for AI to be misused for manipulative purposes. These are the key concerns that are being discussed within the professional community.

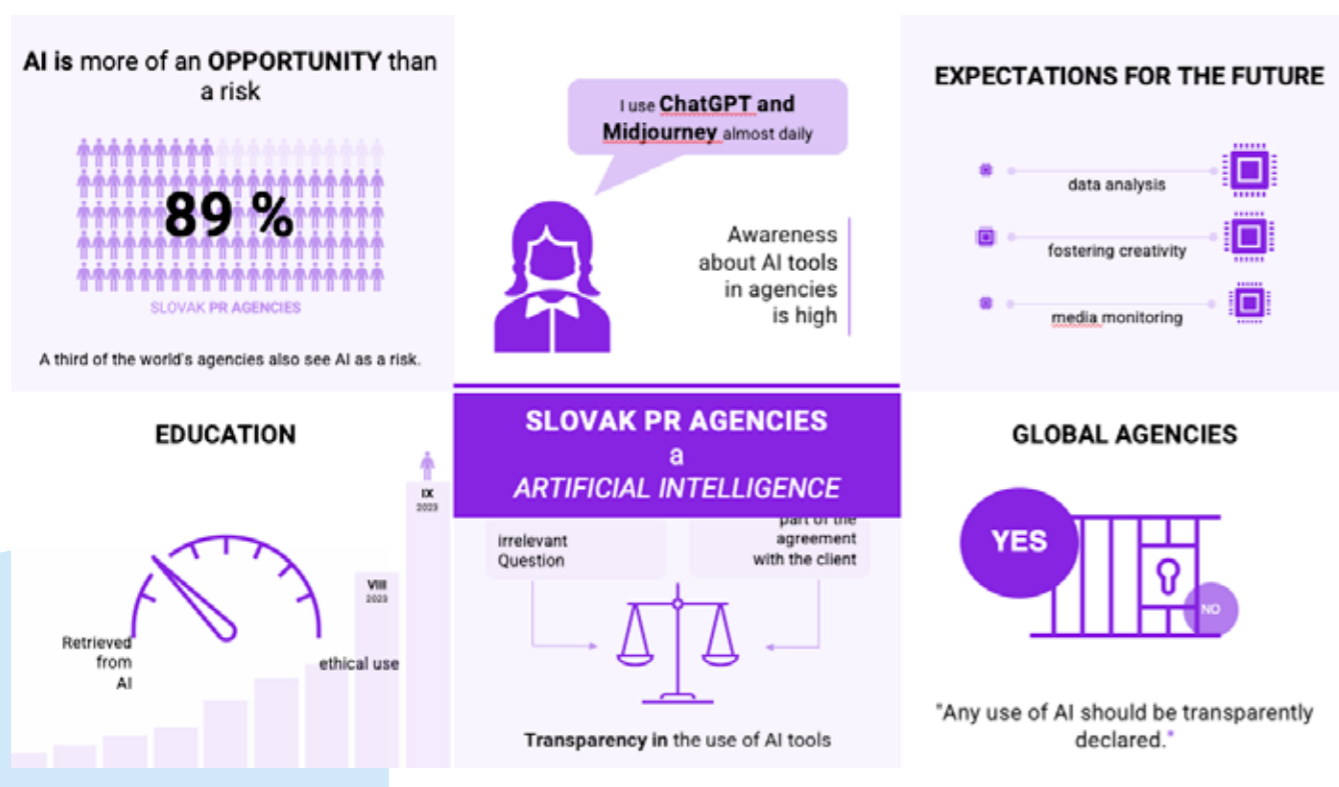
At the same time, there is a prediction that by 2026 all high-quality training text data for AI will be exhausted, which will slow down its development. This means agencies can get some more time to adapt.

It's interesting to see how agencies today are actively seeking AI positive applications in business environments. Several leaders in the communications industry, along with academics, are exploring the idea of a 'Design for Dialogue'. The framework is all about changing workflows, where generative AI can automate many activities and augment human capabilities. Design for Dialogue means creating conversational interfaces for all types of processes, products and services.

The introduction of the internet, mobile computing and cloud platforms to communication agencies has shown us that the total value of disruptive technologies lies not just in integrating them into existing business processes but sometimes in changing these processes completely. While generative AI can be even more transformative than these innovations, it similarly requires a re-design of the way work gets done to maximise its potential. This means accepting AI as a standard part of the workflow and treating it as a new colleague who still has much to learn, but does it quickly.



STEFAN VADOZ is the senior partner at Neopublic Czech Republic & Slovakia, with over 25 years of experience in the communication industry. He is a huge fan of a new technologies. He helped establish the private radio broadcast sector in Slovakia, and has worked extensively in advertising and PR. Stefan specialises in corporate communication, crisis communication and public affairs. In 2019, Slovak Strategy magazine ranked him among the TOP 50 most influential people in communication. He actively collaborates with clients to develop communication strategies across Central and Eastern Europe.



MEET OUR PARTNERS

MOL Group is an international, integrated oil, gas, petrochemicals and consumer retail company, headquartered in Budapest, Hungary. It is active in over 30 countries with a dynamic international workforce of 25,000 people and a track record of more than 100 years. MOL Group operates three refineries and two petrochemical plants under integrated supply chain-management in Hungary, Slovakia and Croatia, and owns a network of almost 2400 service stations across 10 countries in Central & South-Eastern Europe. MOL's exploration and production activities are supported by more than 85 years' experience in the field of hydrocarbons and 30 years in the injection of CO². At the moment, there are production activities in 8 countries and exploration assets in 10 countries. MOL is committed to transforming its traditional fossil-fuel-based operations into a low-carbon, sustainable business model and aspires to become net carbon neutral by 2050 while shaping the low-carbon circular economy in Central and Eastern Europe. <https://molgroup.info/hu>

Positive Adamsky is a top-ranking, independent, full-service marketing and PR agency group based in Budapest. With over 23 years' experience, 110+ professionals and 130+ awards, the agency manages local and international accounts in Europe through its member agencies: integrated, digital & social, PR & healthcare marketing. www.positiveadamsky.hu

Ferenc Liszt International Airport is the gateway to Hungary. Budapest Airport (BUD) operates responsibly, safely, sustainably, as a good neighbour and a stable workplace. BUD has held the title of Best Airport in Eastern Europe for 11 consecutive years and has had a 4-star rating since 2023. www.bud.hu

Konektor is a leading agency in Czechia and Slovakia, renowned for its integrated communication services. The agency excels in delivering creative, strategic solutions in all areas of PR, including social media, influencer marketing, digital and brand strategy. With a team of seasoned experts, Konektor consistently achieves real results for its clients. As a long-term Eurocom Worldwide member, Konektor extends its reach to support clients on a global scale. www.knkr.cz

Noguchi is a leading strategic communications consultancy in Budapest, Hungary. Established in 1997, they provide award-winning services to major Hungarian companies and high-profile multinationals across the whole communications spectrum. They are incessantly curious, always looking to learn more about clients, their industries and emerging trends. www.noguchi.hu

Grayling is a global leader in strategic communications, with over 30 offices worldwide and a unique network of 10 wholly owned offices across CEE. We specialise in corporate affairs, public affairs and brand communications, working with some of the world's biggest companies, brands, and organisations. www.grayling.com

1st CLASS AGENCY is a full-service PR agency focused on strategic communication consulting and reputation management. The agency has been operating in the Slovak market for 17 years and is a member of the Slovak Association of PR. Key clients: Kaufland, Mars, McDonald's, Philip Morris, DB Schenker and local brands Kofola, Lunter, Rajo and Partners Group SK. www.1stclass.sk

SEC Newgate is a growing global strategic communications and advocacy group. They are one of the three fastest growing PR firms in Europe (TOP3 FAST MOVERS Provoke Media, 2023) and the world's second largest PR agency, and headquartered in Europe. SEC Newgate was named the Public Affairs Agency of the Year in 2023. www.secnewgate.com

Budapest based **Próbakő Communication**, founded in 2003, is formed by PR, social media, digital communications and content marketing experts. The multiple award winning company's mission is to build brands with engaging stories for both local and international clients. www.probako.hu

PRAM Consulting, founded by Patrik Schober in 2001, delivers new impetus for organisations in the Czech Republic. The company brings new activities to local and international organisa-

tions to help them become leaders in their field. The ability to lead an organisation or entire market in one word: leadability. And, delivering leadability for our clients is central to everything we do. www.pram.cz

Sarota PR is a PR and digital marketing agency that connects business, technology and media. Our experienced, quality-oriented team develops and executes tailored communication strategies that deliver results. Specialising in B2B and B2C public relations, digital marketing, event management and consulting, we excel in both local and global projects. www.sarota.pl

The Worldcom Public Relations Group is the world's leading partnership of independently owned public relations firms, with 115 offices employing some 2,000 staff in 105 cities across six continents. In total, Worldcom partners reported combined revenue of USD 350 million last year from a base of 4,000 clients. www.worldcomgroup.com

ACG is an integrated communications agency, established in 2004. With over 140 specialists, our agency manages more than 60 brands across 23 countries. PRo Ltd is the PR division of ACG. They specialise in strategic communication, media relations, crisis communication, CSR programmes and event management. They have created extensive campaigns in 14 European countries and China. www.acg.agency



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