

PRWeek

Opinion

OP-ED

Influence, not control, has become the key to success



Maril MacDonald

Seismic changes, driven by astonishingly rapid technological breakthroughs, have reshaped many of the underlying premises that define societies. While we accept that intractable forces like globalization and digitalization have altered the communications climate, the question is: have we sufficiently evolved as an industry to meet this challenge?

To thrive as a profession and realize our value-added proposition, we need to embrace swiftly a new set of roles and responsibilities. Until now, we have seen ourselves as primarily existing in two capacities. First, we craft the messages. Second, we create and manage opportunities to disseminate these messages. These two roles will no longer suffice.

Our ability to control the contours and channels of key messages has been largely unraveled. Our response cannot center on just trying harder to be better at what we're currently doing.

In our new role, success will stem from influence rather than control. While in the past we have emphasized the preeminence of "staying on message," in the future our top priority will be building communities by enabling conversations and facilitating relationships.

These communities are being developed at multiple points of contact throughout our organizations. Thus, we must focus on leveraging communications to transform employees into stronger leaders and brand ambassadors. We are positioned to help in two ways.

First, we can provide context. Employees must understand corporate decisions through the lens of larger strategies and a narrative at work. These narratives are animated by personal relationships, not top-down talking points. Where we have relied on a few senior executives to cascade messages to many staffers, we now need robust stories that can be told by many. It's our job to ensure that these dialogues take place.

Second, we can use measurement to identify the communications behaviors that drive engagement at our companies and cultivate broad-based strategies to build and enable these competencies.

True: We may be at different points in this evolution. However, as futurist William Gibson quipped, "The future is here: it's just unevenly distributed." ●

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