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USC Annenberg  
*Center for Public Relations*

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2018



# Fred Cook

## Introduction

Welcome to the 2018 Relevance Report, which is designed to give those studying and working in public relations a preview of what the coming year will mean for our industry, our society and our careers.

All of the contributors to this project are associated with the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California. They are a diverse group of leaders in their agencies, industries and academic fields, who represent equally diverse points of view on the future of communications. Their pieces are brief and insightful and cover a broad range of topics from the rising of bots to the raising of pot.

The mission of the USC Center for Public Relations is to shape the future of the communications industry. Last year when we compiled the 2017 Report, no one imagined the dramatic changes our profession would experience during the next 12 months.

Who could have predicted an assault on journalism, the onslaught of fake news, or Nazis marching through our city streets. What does 2018 portend? Will politics be as dramatic? Will technology be as disruptive? Will the PR be as dynamic? Will your job be as challenging? If you want to hear what our experts say – read on!

We hope the 2018 Relevance Report will be a valuable tool for those who want to remain relevant in one of the fastest-changing global professions. Many thanks to our contributors for sharing their perspectives, to our staff for managing the process, and to our sponsors for making our work possible.

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## Our World, Re-Wired

Willow Bay

As a college professor and mother, I spend a significant amount of time immersed in a world of young people who are consumed by their digital devices. But they are not alone.

Try to remember the last face-to-face conversation with your parent, child, partner or spouse that did not involve the distraction of a smartphone. Many of us might be thinking for a while.

Wireless communication has spread faster than any other technology in modern history, and fueled the creation of new mass media, the “frictionless sharing” of online social networks connecting billions in just a few years. These changes are affecting the way we engage, not only with the world around us, but also with the people who are closest to us.

A new generation of parents faces unprecedented challenges in managing digital media in their own lives and in the lives of their children. As Nicholas Carr writes in *The Wall Street Journal*, the cellphone is “an attention magnet unlike any we have had to grapple with before.”

Our world has been re-wired. And no one left us a user's manual.

This summer, as part of our participation in USC's Global Conference in Tokyo which examined the accelerating impact of technology on our lives, USC Annenberg hoped to ignite a global conversation on the impact of digital devices on family life. We released our report, *The New Normal: Parents, Teens and Digital Devices in Japan*. Our partner, Common Sense Media, regularly conducts research on children's media use in the United States. By sharing and comparing our data, we wanted to facilitate a cross-cultural exploration.

How much time are parents and teens spending with media each day? Do we feel “addicted” to our devices? Is media use causing family stress and arguments? Are kids feeling neglected due to their parents' media use? These were the kinds of questions we set out to explore with our collaboration.

What did we discover? To put it simply, media and technology are at the center of life for Japanese families. Nearly everyone — 90 percent of parents and teens — owns a smartphone. They spend hours a day on them — with the average daily mobile device use for teens of 4.5 hours and for parents 3 hours — consuming content, using social media and playing games.

## “The use of digital devices has become a source of concern, conflict and worry for parents and teens alike”

When we compared the results to U.S. data we discovered that our always-on media environment is presenting as many challenges for Japanese families as it is for families here.

Our results suggest the use of digital devices has become a source of concern, conflict and worry for parents and teens alike.

More than half of parents in both the U.S. and Japan think their teens spend too much time on their mobile devices. More than half of American teens think the same about their parents, though far fewer Japanese teens share that view.

In the U.S., 1 in 3 families have an argument about digital devices every day. In Japan, almost 1 in 4 parents feel their family relationships have been hurt by devices.

As the presence of digital devices re-shapes family life across the globe, we need further research to help parents and teens manage technology in thoughtful and productive ways. Clearly this is just the beginning of what we hope will be more conversations, around the globe and across the family dinner table.

To read the full USC Annenberg report, please visit [annenberg.usc.edu/digitaldevices](http://annenberg.usc.edu/digitaldevices)

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*Willow Bay is the dean of the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and holder of the Walter H. Annenberg Chair in Communication at the University of Southern California.*



# Facebook's New Rules

Tyler C. Stevens

## In the Beginning

When Facebook launched in 2004 it quickly became the go-to destination for people to connect with their friends (even if they had yet to meet them in person). Armed with a college email address or a highly sought after invite, it wasn't long before most of the people you knew had a Facebook profile. Three years later, brands were invited to the party with the launch of Facebook Pages. For the first time, interacting with consumers was as simple as replying to a comment. Brands flocked to the platform, threw the work at their interns, and hoped for the best.

## The First Renaissance

Within a few years, brands realized the opportunity on Facebook was too big to be an afterthought and a new industry was born. Real budget was allocated for social and more sophisticated strategies for Facebook followed. Brands went to great lengths to ensure their profile pictures, cover photos and general post aesthetics perfectly represented the values, hopes and dreams of their target audiences. And guess what? It worked. The investment resulted in substantial followings on the platform. Many brands found themselves with free access to millions of followers and it finally felt like all that hard work paid off. But then, everything changed.

## The Big Changes

With over 2 billion monthly active users and nearly 5 billion pieces of content shared daily, Facebook has become an extremely crowded platform. With so much content competing for the same eyeballs, Facebook made a decision to curate the posts it serves to users in its News Feed. The resulting algorithm change dramatically favors posts from family and friends, severely reducing brand pages' organic reach on the platform. A 2017 report from Hubspot claims that a brand's average post will organically reach less than 1 percent of the audience they worked so hard to build. AdAge has even gone as far as to report that brands "should assume a day will come where the organic reach is zero."

Along with algorithmic changes, Facebook has been very vocal about the increased priority the platform will continue to place on video. In a 2017 earnings call, Zuckerberg stated that "over the next few years, the much bigger driver of the business and determinant of how we do is going to be video." This sentiment, along with Facebook's recent investment in original shows from top

## “ Brand posts are fighting for the same real estate as premium content ”

Hollywood studios, makes it clear that it won't be long until brand posts are fighting for the same real estate as premium content similar in quality to what was once only found on television.

### **The New Reality**

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Does that mean brands should stop investing in Facebook? Absolutely not. Facebook is still one of the most important tools brands can leverage when communicating with the public. Brands just need to shift their expectations and tactics for the platform. Instead of viewing reach on Facebook as a free resource, brands should think of it similarly to a traditional medium like television. A brand expecting to reach everyone who has liked their page on Facebook for free is like a clothing brand expecting to get a free commercial during a hit TV show because someone in the room is wearing a pair of their jeans. It's time to face the reality that Facebook is now a pay-to-play platform.

### **The Good News**

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Thankfully, Facebook's paid media targeting tools are some of the best in the business. Even with a modest budget, brands can use paid media to reach their desired audiences in ways that are more controlled and effective than an organic post ever could. Targeted paid reach allows brands to specify exactly the type of person they want to see their post. The specifications can include demographics, geographies, interests and even behavior. On top of that, a paid post will extend beyond just those who like a brand's page to also include relevant audiences anywhere on Facebook.

Bottom line: The addition of paid media budget and resources should be a top priority for any brand serious about reaching their audience on Facebook.

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*Tyler C. Stevens has spent his career exploring ways to use digital media technologies (like YouTube and social platforms) to connect artists and storytellers with audiences across the globe. Currently the Creative Director at Shareability, Tyler is a USC graduate and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## The Upside of Fake News?

Gabriel Kahn

Fake news – or more precisely, the weaponizing of news for partisan gain or pure profit – has polluted our public discourse and eroded our faith in media.

Might there be a silver lining, albeit a small one, to emerge from this mess? Consider this: Earlier this year, JPMorgan Chase, one of the biggest ad spenders in the financial services industry, was pasting its message on more than 400,000 sites across the web. Today, it sends ads to only about 5,000 sites it has pre-approved. The reason was that its brand was winding up next to all manner of fake, or at best questionable news stories, and it couldn't guarantee that a Chase pre-roll would not lead into an offensive video on YouTube.

The upshot: More ad dollars are heading to quality publishers who invest in creating real content rather than the media equivalent of junk food. In fact, concern has spread among numerous brands that the great promise of internet advertising is leading to an out-of-control mess. If this flight to quality proves to be substantial, it could help news organizations claw back some of the revenue they have lost in recent years.

"The fear is real," says Oliver Smith, an executive at Unruly, a digital marketing consultancy. "It's fair to say that among buyers, at least anecdotally, there is a greater desire to go into direct relationships with publishers, rather than rely on the marketplace." Smith cautions that the change is still modest, but that the industry is taking note.

It's important to understand what created this situation in the first place. Over the past decade, a growing amount of spending has gone into what is known as "programmatic advertising." This is done through a dizzying array of software that creates a real-time marketplace. Click on a link and a slew of info about you, your purchasing choices, location, etc. are put out for bid to any advertiser. By the time your webpage loads, you are being served an ad from a company that has bid to reach consumers just like you.

**“ Quality publishers offer a secure and safe space for brands to advertise ”**

The promise is that this brings great efficiency to the market. Hit the elderly potential wealth management prospect when she is visiting a dubious site promising a cure for sciatica rather than paying big bucks for an ad on *The Houston Chronicle*.

The theory is that this will give more reach at lower dollars. But in practice, the one thing it has done is spread a limited pool of ad dollars out across millions of sites, many of them bogus. And despite promises from these programmatic platforms to limit the kind of sites that they serve ads to, experience has shown that there is no way of truly knowing where they will spew these ads.

Suddenly, quality publishers – such as reputable news sites – realize they have something to offer: a secure and safe space for brands to advertise without the contextual risk of winding up next to a piece of embarrassing content.

There is still no telling whether this migration will persist, but a number of key players are recognizing the value in quality.

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*Gabriel Kahn is a Professor of Professional Practice of Journalism at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Gabriel Kahn worked as a newspaper correspondent for two decades, including 10 years at The Wall Street Journal.*





## The Rise of Multicultural Content Creators

Anais Medina Diaz

As a first-generation millennial growing up between two cultures, Mexican and American, narratives representative of my reality were difficult to find. Seeing how some cultures were prioritized and celebrated while others were shamed and stereotyped created a sense of exclusion because I couldn't be proud of my multicultural upbringing. Media continues to define millennials and younger audiences, and it is necessary for all cultures to be represented fairly and genuinely. After decades of demanding for diversity and inclusion, the entertainment industry is finally developing content that embodies and represents a variety of perspectives and races. However, the slow-paced improvement for an impatient generation sets the stage for a new wave of content creators ready to produce and share content that portrays their narratives accurately and authentically.

“ The slow-paced improvement for an impatient generation sets the stage for a new wave of content creators ”

Seeing diversity in mainstream media is certainly a step forward. But while we enjoy watching Sofia Vergara play the ditzzy Columbian on ABC's "Modern Family" or Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal portray an eccentric orchestra director in Amazon's "Mozart in the Jungle," there is still a disconnect between these characters and reality. Vergara's character is funny but represents a negative stereotype. On the contrary, Garcia Bernal's character is unique but the show's storyline falls short of connecting with Latino perspectives. These characters and storylines are either irrelevant or insulting to a generation of young multicultural audiences looking for their narratives to be validated in media they've consumed throughout their lives.

## Buzzfeed for Latinos

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Scrolling through my Facebook feed, I saw a picture of the infamous blue Royal Dansk shortbread cookie tin that haunted my childhood with a caption reading, "The reason I have trust issues." Immediately, flashbacks of the countless times I fell victim to my *abuelita's* repurposed cookie tin that no longer housed delicious cookies but sewing materials rushed to mind. I thought to myself, "How did the creator of this meme know the tricks my grandma played on me?" But as I continued browsing through memes, videos and blog posts, I found that *mitú* was like the diary I never wrote. Not only were there others who fell victim to their grandmother's extraordinary repurposing skills, but an entire online community of Latino millennials formed by finding a media outlet that spoke to their experiences growing up within two cultures. Within days, my social media networks were filled with shared *mitú* posts.

*Mitú*, a Latino digital network working out of Los Angeles, Mexico City and Colombia, found success in a largely ignored demographic: younger Latinos. *Mitú* is setting the path for other digital networks to tailor content to millennials who are striving to be recognized for more than traditional marketing demographics. Additionally, the network provides an outlet for Latino content creators to share the type of media they want to see and address issues affecting their communities, domestically and abroad.

## Latinos Are Just a Fraction

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More than half of the minority population in the U.S. is a millennial or younger, with numbers expected to grow. However, the media industry continues to treat this large media-consuming demographic as a niche field, leaving Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and other multicultural millennials who grew up within two cultures with limited relatable content.

The availability of social media platforms and content creation tools empowers these audiences to create the content they want to see and share, allowing for a new wave of digital media and influencers to prosper. At a time when younger generations shift from identifying with traditional demographics, such as gender and sexuality, and look towards more culturally relevant content, multicultural media networks will shape how younger audiences establish themselves in our society.

Furthermore, what we can learn from *mitú* and other multicultural content creators, such as Angry Asian Man and Cassius, is that millennial audiences of color are searching to connect with a unique tone of voice – and cultural identity is a deciding factor.

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*Anais Medina Diaz is a second-year graduate student in the Master of Strategic Public Relations program at the University of Southern California.*



## Invasion of the PR-Bots

Robert Kozinets

There's no doubt that the rise of social media has been important to public relations. We know that consumers like having an open forum for public conversation between regular people and that they generally trust those conversations more than advertising and other commercial conversations. However, with the rise of social media, we have seen an incredible — and largely invisible — rise of something else: public relations related bots that pretend to be regular people. Because they were programmed to try to influence public opinion, just like good public relations practitioners, we like to call them PR-bots.

Bots are a software application that run automated tasks over the internet designed to mimic the behavior of human beings. Bots can be programmed, for instance, to run searches on websites. Bot-like algorithms have been around since the earliest days of computers. One of the most popular versions of bots is a chatbot, an algorithm designed to be able to hold a human-like conversation. Although historically there have been a number of bots designed to amuse and delight people, such as the automated psychotherapist ELIZA, bots have recently become serious business. And also a serious nuisance.

How important are bots to you and your business? Bots are so new that facts about their presence and influence in public communication is still only filtering in. A recent industry study estimated that 52 percent of all web traffic is composed of bots. The same study found that 56 percent of those bots could be considered harmful — such as bots designed to attack and bring down websites. And another recent study conducted by our colleagues at USC estimated that up to 15 percent of all Twitter accounts are actually bots, rather than real people. That means that nearly 48 million Twitter accounts could be bots. What's even scarier is that bots never rest. Although they might only represent 15 percent of profiles, they may account for a disproportionately large amount of Twitter's traffic. And by all accounts, their activity is growing.

In 2014, a penny stock social media tech company with no revenue, one employee and a valuation of about \$2 million, conducted a little experiment to raise their stock price using the power of PR-bots. The company, named Cynk, used bots to tweet out positive information. Automated programs picked up on the positive word-of-mouth and then drove its value up to \$5 billion — a 25,000 percent increase. Discovering such subterfuge is a real challenge because verifying the identity of account holders can be extremely difficult.

As the 2016 U.S. election showed, bots now play a serious and ongoing role in American politics. *Newsweek* reported a recent audit of the 45th president's Twitter account found that 49 percent of his Twitter followers, over 15 million "people," are actually not people at all: They are bots.

## “ Nearly 48 million Twitter accounts could be bots ”

The political PR-bot invasion isn't limited to America either. A recent Oxford study found that bots accounted for 45 percent of all Twitter account activity in Russia and the Ukraine. In Poland, a small number of accounts control about 20 percent of all political discussions. China has used a combination of bots and people to perform social media attacks on Taiwan's president. Bots have been used to rally the public and attack public figures in Brazil and Venezuela. In total, Oxford's researchers found 29 countries where PR-bots were used for political propaganda purposes.

My USC public relations department colleague Aimei Yang and I are investigating how PR-bots affect public discourse about brands. We are examining what impact PR-bots have on consumer conversations. We wonder if PR-bots can actually become influencers, introduce new elements or change the discussion. With increasing research, we will grow our understanding about these important new players on the social media scene: bots who can inform and misinform, persuade and argue, influence and cajole, and forever change the face of public conversation.

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*Robert Kozinets is an expert in cultural consumer insights, digital Marketing Strategy, ethnography, social brand engagement and social media analysis. Rob is the Jayne and Hans Hufschmid Chair of Strategic Public Relations at USC Annenberg.*



## The Radicalization of Rhetoric

Kirk Stewart

To get noticed in today's insanely crowded and hyper-competitive media environment, politicians, athletes, celebrities and even some brands are saying and doing increasingly more outrageous and irresponsible things. And sadly, for many, it appears to be working.

From Donald Trump commenting on Mexican immigrants, the appearance of one of his female challengers or questioning the heroism of a Vietnam veteran (to name just a few), to the claims LaVar Ball has made about his son's basketball ability (he's better than Steph Curry, yeah right!) or claiming he could beat Michael Jordan one-on-one, to Kathy Griffin's disturbing decapitation of the president, our rhetoric and associated behavior has reached a dangerous breaking point. And we thought the Kardashians's were an aberration!

So why is this happening and who's to blame?

We can thank social media for a lot of this. Aside from the multitude of platforms on which anyone can express their opinion on anything and anybody, social media has created a perceived safe distance between the author and the audience. As a result, users appear to be more willing to say or do something on social media they wouldn't say or do to someone's face or in their presence. This artificial detachment has removed all filters and, in many cases, common sense and sensibilities. Add to that an increasing number of irresponsible, unsympathetic and downright angry content creators who are more concerned about trending than truth and we end up where we are.

“ Social media has created a  
perceived safe distance between  
the author and the audience ”

Perhaps the biggest culprits are the traditional media who continue to give space and time to this nonsense. Their coverage of "what's trending" on social media fuels even more preposterous words and actions in cyberspace. While reporting about this outlandish conduct drives their own readership and viewership, the media should bear some responsibility for coverage that encourages even more absurd behavior online.

The even bigger question is where does this all end and what's the impact on our profession?

Unless content creators and the media come to their senses quickly and take stock of the environment they've created and are perpetuating, we'll end up with an overwhelming amount of designed-to-shock talk and behavior that is increasingly untruthful and polarizing. Our channels for factual and reliable information that help us make informed decisions as a society are dwindling.

The issue for our profession is how do we responsibly build companies, brands and reputations yet still get noticed amid all this craziness? There clearly is a premium on our creativity to craft narratives that resonate and move people's minds, hearts and behavior. The temptation will always be there to push the envelope and the bounds of good taste in an effort to break through. But we must resist. We can accomplish the same goal by being smarter, more insightful, more interesting and more human, all while being more responsible and respectful of the intelligence of our intended audiences.

So to all capricious social platform users, talking heads and the media that give them voice, Knock It Off! The radicalization of our rhetoric has to stop. Intelligent, rational and civil discourse depends on it.

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*Kirk Stewart is the Founder and CEO of KTStewart, a firm focused on enhancing value for 21st century organizations through integrate corporate communications campaigns. He is a USC graduate and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## Fake News Isn't New

Glenn Osaki

When Donald Trump exclaimed “You are fake news!” to CNN’s Jim Acosta during his first press conference as president-elect, the popularity of the phrase erupted. But it is ironic that “fake news” is only now an issue in the U.S.: It has existed quite openly in many Asian countries for decades under the name of “propaganda.”

In China, the government department responsible is 中共中央宣传部, which is commonly translated as the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China. In countries like Russia and Vietnam, these propaganda departments are equally open in admitting their role is to sway public and international opinion in favor of their policies. This can include censorship of dissenting opinions or suppression of entire communications platforms to actively cultivate views that favor the government.

When governments tighten their grip over the press, less independent investigative journalism occurs, which dissolves trust among the public. During the Sewol ferry disaster in South Korea, mainstream conservative media outlets parroted government announcements that victims were rescued, which ultimately turned out to be false. Due to these false reports the phrase “가짜뉴스” (trash journalist)” was coined to show the public’s anger and distrust of the media.

China’s Propaganda Department first started using the term “fake news” in 2013 in an aggressive effort to crack down on rumors and thinly sourced reports that were contributing to social instability. Hundreds of people were jailed in China for online rumors they created that were visited by over 5,000 internet users or reposted more than 500 times.

### Role Reversal

Journalist Will Ford, writing in Huffington Post, notes that there’s a common misperception in the U.S. that because China has an authoritarian government, its citizens are all brainwashed. But instead Chinese consumers grow up learning to trust independent internet content over official state sources, about which they are skeptical.

Ford quotes Orion Lewis, a Middlebury College professor who studies China’s brand of authoritarian media, as saying, “There’s a pretty long literature that [suggests] citizens are pretty savvy about seeing and understanding the existence of propaganda and reading between the lines, particularly if you know it exists.”

It can be said that social media is causing China to be more like the U.S., and vice versa. The Chinese are skeptical of state-run outlets and have become more free-thinking. Consumers turn to social media to find unfiltered news, even if the source may be questionable, because they don't trust the tightly controlled media.

Meanwhile in the U.S., where a free press has long thrived, consumers seem unwilling to recognize bias or unable to separate fact from fiction, making them more susceptible to "fake news" on their social media feeds than their Chinese counterparts.

## Finding Solutions

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Now that we know propaganda and "fake news" exist, what can we do about it?

New regulations in China have pushed the social media owners to regulate and validate content published on their platforms. In June, WeChat launched several mini-programs to verify the posts through partnerships with authorized organizations, including police stations, state-owned press, doctors, scientific organizations and other credible sources. Other countries have left solutions to entrepreneurs and social communities to avoid perceived conflicts over freedom of expression and speech. For example, in India, to help stop the wide spread of false information, entrepreneurs have created fact-checking websites to which consumers can send articles for a team of researchers to verify or discredit. Similarly, Google and Facebook have launched fact-checking functions through partnerships with third-party websites.

In addition to expecting users to be more discerning and active in reporting "fake news," technological innovation is needed to help prevent its spread. Both Facebook and Google indicate they are looking at ways to improve and optimize algorithms that recognize false information, an effort to curtail the mass publication of "fake news" online.

For our part, PR practitioners must create qualified content that is credible, useful and matches people's interests. We must engage users through legitimate platforms to generate organic shares and increased WOM (word-of-mouth). And we must be sensitive about the emerging new media to make quick adjustments in media strategy.

News organizations must restore their own credibility by finding new ways to listen and engage with their audiences, rather than just telling people what to think. By using technology, the news media can create a fuller portrait of the world and help consumers figure things out independently. They can teach people the skills necessary to access, analyze and evaluate media content. And they must above all produce quality content consumers need, want and trust.

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*A 30-year company veteran, Glenn Osaki is the President of Publicis Groupe's flagship strategic communication and engagement consultancy, MSL in Asia. Glenn graduated from USC and is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*





## Setting the Table for Sharable Content

Katani Ostine-Franklin

### The Bread and Butter...

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Confession: I'm a foodie. No, I don't cook often – almost never to be honest – but my committed following of food-based online and social pages classifies me as a self-proclaimed food connoisseur. Yes, I'm one of those people who flood your timeline with my favorite food finds of the day and yes, I am also the future of online video content for businesses across sectors.

### What's Cooking with Content?

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Video is “in.” The rise of Facebook and YouTube as giants in the content and advertising world has many companies running to sharable video content, resulting in a drastic shift in the digital media realm. Online, food is our friend. On Facebook alone, food-related content performs 2x better than its closest rival in terms of average interactions (likes, reactions, comments, and shares). Engagement with BuzzFeed's Tasty, a recipe based video series, outperforms every major news publisher including but not limited to NowThis, Fox News, CNN and BBC News. Earning billions of views and shares, there's no surprise that food video will be an incredible tool to boost awareness for brands and bring attention to digital campaigns.

### Why We're Eating It Up...

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You tell me. There's one thing that the majority of people have in common, and that is the joy of food and eating. Chances are you've scrolled on Facebook and watched food-related content in the past 12 hours. There's just something about the satisfaction of watching an entire, delicious meal created from scratch right in front of your eyes... With just the click of a button you can not only view the full recipe on the company's website (which is the goal of social content, correct?), but you can also share the video with followers and friends (hello, effortless word of mouth promotion). What more could one want? Food videos are like the caviar of content and present a way for consumers to connect with a brand, even if they have nothing else in common.

### Who is the Consumer?

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While almost half of all adults watch food-related videos on Facebook and YouTube, millennials undoubtedly account for the majority of views. More than any other generation in history,

## “ Food-related content performs 2x better than its closest rival in terms of average interactions ”

millennials are investing in food and dining, resulting in a 280 percent growth in food channel subscriptions. Both men and women between the ages of 18 and 34 are looking to food-related content to improve their cooking skills, discover new recipes, and enjoy online food personalities. Creating food content is a sure-fire way to establish an emotional connection with millions.

### The Key Ingredients...

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More and more companies are finding ways to capitalize on the food-driven content boom. From *Cosmopolitan* to *The New York Times*, numerous businesses have embraced the rise of the foodie – integrating food video to kick start campaigns and accompany informative articles. But there's no secret menu to creating great culinary content. Here are the five must-haves for creating an engaging food video:

1. Inspire the Viewer – Food inherently unites people. We all have to eat, and most of us love doing it. Creating inspiring food content that creates an emotional reaction among viewers often results in thousands of views and shares.
  2. Emphasize the Visuals – Producing vivid video quality and finding the most effective angle for culinary content is key. It must be both appealing and engaging to watch.
  3. Find a Text Equilibrium – Include enough text to explain necessary ingredients, restaurant names or locations. Otherwise, keep text to a minimum.
  4. Perfect the Timing – Evidence shows that prime video length is between 60-90 seconds. Just long enough to be thorough while keeping the average person's attention.
  5. Encourage Sharing – Do I need to explain? Shareable video content speaks for itself. Literally.
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*Katani Ostine-Franklin is a second-year graduate student in the Master of Strategic Public Relations program at the University of Southern California.*



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## In Twitter We Trust?

Matthew Harrington

Over the past 18 months, the interplay between communications and government has taken on a heightened importance. A rapidly evolving communications landscape is altering how countries both govern and connect with their constituents around the world, with far-reaching effects for corporate communicators.

Direct-to-citizen platforms like Twitter have fuelled populist ire, from the Philippines to France to the U.S., where the President circumvents traditional media and government channels to command the attention of millions directly. These platforms, in turn, have given rise to personal “media echo chambers,” through which people validate their existing beliefs and shut out opposing points of view and, the opportunity for informed debate.

The collapse of traditional media is driving much of this change. Consider that in just the last four years the number of newsroom employees has declined 10 percent per year to a point where, according to the Pew Research Center, there are now fewer than 33,000 employees in the sector. At the same time, newsrooms, corporate communications departments and agencies are evolving to accommodate consumers’ evolving consumption habits on an ever-growing range of digital platforms and devices.

Forty-two percent of American adults get their news through Facebook several times a day, compared to 20 percent who rely on traditional news sources, according to Morning Consult. Yet they don’t always believe the news they see there. A Reuters Institute report found that only one-quarter of people believe social media does a good job of separating fact from fiction.

Perhaps most troubling is the widespread collapse in trust, in both media and government, at the core of these revolutions. The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer shows that media is now distrusted in 80 percent of the 28 countries we surveyed, while government is the least-trusted institution across the globe. Only 41 percent of people worldwide trust government to do what is right — it is no longer considered to be an effective force for change.

However, it’s not all doom and gloom. Business is one of the last institutions with a measure of trust from stakeholders, giving it both the permission to engage and the opportunity to fill the leadership void left by government. The Edelman Trust Barometer also confirms that even as the general population’s trust in business is down, their expectations for what business should contribute to the greater good have increased. Three out of four general population respondents agree that a company can take actions that both increase profits and improve the social and economic conditions of the community where it operates.

## “Forty-two percent of American adults get their news through Facebook”

This expectation for business leadership means that the role of communications has never been more relevant. This plays out in numerous ways.

We've seen particular change in the ways that corporations interact with society, how they engage and communicate on a civic level. PayPal canceled its plans to open a new global operations center in Charlotte, North Carolina, after the state passed the “bathroom bill,” which banned the creation of anti-discrimination policies based on gender identity. Starbucks plans to hire 25,000 immigrants in response to President Trump's immigration ban, while GE actively hires U.S. military veterans who face challenges transitioning from active duty to civilian life. More than 60 Fortune 500 companies — including Apple, Google, Microsoft and Unilever — signed a letter urging President Trump to confirm the Paris climate agreement, demonstrating a new corporate commitment to taking action on some of the most vital issues of the day.

These kind of initiatives are opportunities for every business to take its communications to new levels by filling the government leadership gap. In a time of widespread distrust, companies should consider addressing the societal concerns that matter to their stakeholders, whether it's by working to improve long-term economic and social conditions of communities; creating public forums for debate of policies; or by talking directly and honestly about the benefits — and addressing the downsides — that business can bring through industry and innovation.

To be sure, business communicators have their work cut out for them, as today's communications tools are double-edged swords. As Tom Friedman wrote in his book *Thank You for Being Late*: “Social media is great for collective sharing, but not always so great for collective building. Good for collective destruction, but maybe not so good for collective construction.”

Business is in prime position to build, taking up the mantle where government left off. Communicators must advise business leaders and demonstrate an organization's progress against specific goals, deploying both owned and social media channels to educate, encourage dialogue, and give people solutions to their fears — and reasons for hope.

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*Matthew Harrington is Global Chief Operating Officer at Edelman. Matthew is also an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## Predicting the Unpredictable

Matt Furman

Since civilization began, the ruler of a tribe, community or country often had someone on whom they would rely to enhance their reputation. Those people were good at crafting words or imagery and skilled at anticipating how stories or deeds would be viewed. In modern times, these roles are often occupied by professional communicators, people who understand cause and effect, and advise accordingly. This role has genuine value and appears in increasing demand.

It's not a given, however, that demand for these skills will continue to grow. In fact, considering two recent events, we may be beginning to see the value of this role weaken and demand for it recede.

On July 4, 2017, National Public Radio celebrated the Declaration of Independence, just as it has for 30 years. This time, however, they tweeted the document, bringing Jefferson's immortal words to a modern audience. What happened next was extraordinary. NPR – an acclaimed and sober institution – was accused by some of inciting rebellion. It was clear that people making this charge were not familiar with the actual Declaration and were, instead, assuming these were NPR's words, not those of our Founding Fathers. An extremely patriotic act was met with allegations of treason. This, I believe, could not have been anticipated.

Likewise, when Alison Chandra tweeted on June 23, 2017, about the \$230,000 hospital bill she received for her 3-year old son's lifesaving care, no one could have anticipated how quickly the tide would change from sympathy, to apathy, to anger and, finally, outright venom and hate. She was offered a .22 caliber bullet, either for her or her son, and was told to let her child die because it would be "cheaper" to have another baby. An outcry like this is unimaginable and, as a result, no one could have guided Ms. Chandra on how to avoid or mitigate what happened.

In both cases, of course, the hatefulness reflected a very small minority. However, for NPR and Ms. Chandra, the hate became the story. I'm sure the staff at NPR was bewildered and a bit amused by what happened and, in the end, their website and Twitter feed probably received more traffic. Likewise, Ms. Chandra's underlying message about the cost of health care was more widely distributed because of the hate-filled response, perhaps mitigating the unfortunate behavior.

But both cases represent our new reality: No one can tell you what's going to happen when you engage with the world. The potential chilling effect of this phenomenon is real, as is the risk to the value any communicator offers. We will continue our role of anticipating, guiding and counseling,

but should do so knowing our ability to see around the proverbial corner has been diminished.

“ **Our new reality: no one can tell you  
what's going to happen when you  
engage with the world** ”

We find ourselves saying with greater frequency that we are living in a new world but, until recently, that world was reasonably predictable. That's no longer the case. As predictability fades, it may be that the best advice we can offer is to no longer try to anticipate (let alone shape) what's going to happen but, instead, to pick a course that feels genuine and stick to it no matter what people say.

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## Actions Speak Louder Than Words

James T. Olson

As communicators, the words we choose for ourselves and craft for our organizations and clients are profoundly important. They can unite us or divide us. Engage us or enrage us. Heal us or hurt us. Let there be no mistake – our words matter. But, as the guardians of reputation and the torchbearers of trust for the leaders and organizations we advise and represent, now more than ever it is important that we relentlessly ensure that we mean what we say and say what we mean (as the saying goes).

“ Let there be no mistake – our words matter ”

Increasingly, every corporation bears a heavy responsibility to ensure that not only what they say – but more importantly what they do – backs up those words. People are increasingly asking business to play a leading role in not only delivering value for shareholders, but also taking purposeful action to help make the world a better place. In fact, the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer found that 75 percent believe a company can take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic and social conditions in the community in which it operates. Global social responsibility is no longer an option. It is a business imperative.

At United Airlines, we are heeding this call to action.

As I write this, our CEO Oscar Munoz is just returning from a trip to Houston. As one of our largest hubs and a city that over 11,000 of our employees call home, this is not an uncommon journey for Oscar. But this trip was different than the many visits he's made since joining United as CEO two years ago.

This trip was about being with our employees and their families who had been devastated by Hurricane Harvey. It was a last minute, unannounced trip. No press release or entourage. Oscar simply wanted to be with his fellow employees and not just see Harvey's impact for himself – but actually feel it. The magnitude of Harvey's wrath stirred his heart, but at the same time, his heartache was nurtured by emotional scenes and stories of our employees coming together in heroic ways to help each other and their communities.

Like many concerned leaders, Oscar has been sending heartfelt messages of concern and support for our employees, their families and everyone in Houston who had been touched by this ferocious storm. But Oscar also recognized something very important – that as genuine and caring as his written messages were, his actions and those of our company would ring much louder than his words.

That's precisely why over the past week, in addition to visiting Houston, Oscar and United have turned our commitment into meaningful action. As an airline, we are uniquely prepared – through our planes and sophisticated logistical capabilities – to use our wings for good when tragedy strikes.

In the immediate days that followed Harvey's landfall, we turned our commercial airline into a humanitarian operation to deliver aid and relief to victims. We flew nearly 40 relief flights that carried almost 300,000 pounds of vital necessities, including food, water, medical supplies, pillows and blankets. We turned one of our hangars at the Houston airport into an operations base for FEMA. And we facilitated more than \$4 million in customer, employee and company contributions to relief efforts, including a commitment from Oscar to personally match every dollar donated by his fellow employees – up to \$1 million – to our United We Care emergency relief fund.

Sadly, as I put the pen down on this essay, we are already preparing for yet another vicious storm – Hurricane Irma – as she races across the Caribbean towards the Florida coast. Alongside many other concerned corporations, we will once again show that actions speak louder than words.

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## Technology is Changing How We Engage Audiences

Adrienne Cadena

New technology is emerging at lightning speed. As industry and consumers become accustomed to these advancements, it's beginning to impact the way brands are doing business and communicating to their customers. In 2018, there will be innovative ways in which companies are capitalizing on technology to create meaningful experiences. Experiences being the operative word. Technology should not be used just for the sake of incorporating the latest shiny object into a campaign. The goal is to create the most memorable experience that fully reflects a brand and its message, using technology as a vehicle for the overall consumer journey. That is when true success will emerge and engagement will yield the greatest results.

“ Technology should not be used just  
for the sake of incorporating the latest  
shiny object into a campaign ”

The following technologies are already playing a role in today's marketplace, but they will become staples within the industry over the next few years, bringing added value to customer experience every step of the way.

**1. Vending Machines** – The unit known for dispensing food and drink is now becoming an interactive mechanism used in business and marketing as a tool that distributes product or prizes for relevant action. These actions could be in the form of social media engagement or some other type of buzz building activity that is sharable and extends online. Many brands are deciding to use these unmanned stations to scale human interaction and bring creativity to the forefront. Take the Snapchat Spectacles launch where they dropped their own version called a Snapbot in several cities and created demand for an item only sold through this machine. Other companies like Uniqlo just announced that they will start selling their apparel through vending machines – in lieu of their previously planned store expansion, as a way for the global brand to expand with low overhead and greater consumer convenience. Look for more of these types of vending machine focused campaigns in 2018.

**2. Wearables** –These items are not necessarily new even to the casual consumer; but it's only recently that wearables have earned a prime spot within live events or brand activations. In 2015, there were 39.5 million wearable users in the U.S. That number is expected to more than double to 81.7 million by 2018. While we cannot yet count on every person attending an event with a wearable piece, brands can begin to utilize wearables to facilitate opt-in and pre-registration, allowing a customized conversation to start sooner, while simultaneously collecting data and segmenting the audience. A recent execution exemplifying this strategy was Gatorade's Fuel Lab at SXSW where attendees could make their own custom Gatorade, delivered to them in a locker with their name on it, based on how they engaged with wearables throughout the activation space. This type of engagement provides deeper, personalized experiences that are truly groundbreaking, while narrowing in on the DNA of a brand.

**3. Facial Recognition** – Law enforcement, surveillance and counterterrorism have been utilizing the advances made in facial recognition technologies for some years; however, it is now catching on in a much larger way. For example, Delta is launching a new, self-service bag drop powered by facial recognition technology, the first of its kind at U.S. airports. The airline estimates that self-service bag drops can process customers' bags up to twice as fast as humans can. In addition, the traditional beauty brand, Lancôme, recently utilized facial recognition technology to capture makeup and style preferences, contact information and social media handles. Throughout the activation, they capitalized on this data collection to deliver a virtual makeup try-on experience along with personalized product recommendations and customized digital content. Attendees could also share their brand experience on social media thanks to the information captured at registration. This type of technology not only creates a meaningful experience for the consumer, but shows that an established brand can evolve in a way that keeps them relevant and happens to create success for the company.

With the marriage of creativity and technology, enlargement opportunities are endless. It will be fascinating to see how brands and agencies push the boundaries using technologies like vending machines, wearables and facial recognition, while realizing there is still much more on the horizon.

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## C-Suite Corporations to Take a Stand Against Bigotry

Julia A. Wilson

When I wrote my first essay in the 2017 Relevance Report, I discussed issues of race and fear of demographic shifts. I also predicted these issues would continue to shape the direction of America's political, social and ethical foundation – while greatly impacting the public relations industry. Our country's conversation in 2017 has been consumed with these issues. The racially charged political environment and the seismic events that took place in August 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia, propelled America's leading CEOs to put multicultural America first by taking a principled stand against racism and bigotry, and by resigning from President Trump's business advisory board.

That historic move by many of our nation's top corporate executives at Merck, Intel, Wal-Mart, Apple, Disney, Under Armour, Starbucks, Salesforce, Google, Facebook, Uber and AT&T has led to a broader conversation and a newly focused way of doing business. These executives' bold and potentially risky responses in the face of our country's racial issues, have redefined our roles as public relations professionals.

For years, PR professionals have struggled with a plethora of changing public attitudes toward business, social issues and news in our country. This struggle has involved separating facts from fiction and has often required us to disassociate our personal, political and social beliefs from influencing our representation of clients. We've had to sort through a daily deluge of alternatively spun national and global information from media outlets and spokespeople laden with opposing views and political objectives. We've found ourselves walking a very fine line trying to distinguish between "news" and "views," while balancing social responsibility and representing our clients' best interests and bottom lines.

But one thing has been made very clear: Corporations are not going to sit idly by while America becomes dangerously assaulted by racial division and fake news. America's CEOs have spoken loudly, clearly and with one voice on behalf of their diverse customers, employees, investors, shareholders and other stakeholders. "Our country's strength stems from its diversity," said Kenneth Frazer, CEO of Merck. "You must define your core purpose for being," former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz added. "We stand in the interest of something greater than just making money."

Further muddying the discourse about what constitutes "real news," is the emergence of an assortment of self-appointed, non-journalistic "influencers" who share their opinions with an undiscerning public. The daily media mix now includes anyone with a computer, internet access and the will to voice unverified and unedited "alternative facts" throughout the world.

## “Corporations are not going to sit idly by while America becomes dangerously assaulted by racial division and fake news”

These independent “fake-news” journalists are in direct competition with major news outlets. Questionable information greatly impacts the quality of news we receive, key messages we develop, and the perceptions of our clients and their audiences. The receptivity of those key messages is often driven, or impeded by the political climate of the day, and by the voices of our political leaders.

PR professionals' new responsibility is to become a vigilant “Diplomatic Corps.” To monitor our national leaders' decisions on public policies and programs that affect our companies, clients and our shareholders. We must project a clear objective voice in the face of social unrest and controversy. We must not turn a blind eye to social injustice, the perversion of truth, or any relentless attack on our Constitutional rights and governmental institutions designed to serve all Americans. We must work across political divides to help find solutions if we are to resolve the critical issues facing our great nation. Our new role includes:

- Counseling our clients to address the needs and concerns of a multicultural America.
- Identifying government policy gaps and seeking out foundations, organizations and government agencies willing to invest and uplift communities in need.
- Seeking and encouraging public-private partnerships to provide educational and employment opportunities in underserved communities to fill voids vacated by government programs, so that the poor and under-privileged are not left behind.
- Serving as news interpreters and decipherers of real and fake news.
- Creating messages that are humanized, socially responsible and competitively appealing.
- Acknowledging and giving credit to deserving corporations, who purposefully carry the mantle of social responsibility.

In 2017, Corporate America surprised us all. Some of the world's most successful brands reminded us through their words and actions of the importance of sharing a common commitment to human decency, inclusiveness and richness of our diverse nation. As a “Diplomatic Corps” of PR professionals, it is our responsibility to support our corporate clients in putting America's people first. In so doing, we will make our nation, and our valued global relationships, as great as they can be. And *that's* the real news.

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## To Be Involved or Not To Be Involved

Bridget Winstead

Michael Jordan once said, "Republicans buy shoes, too," and that statement could not be more relevant than it is today. In an environment that is becoming more and more politically divided, it was only a matter of time before the polarization plague infected big corporations. Brands are increasingly finding themselves in a catch-22 situation. The WE Worldwide's Brand in Motion study, reminds us that companies do not have control over an ever-changing environment and that results in challenges for a brand striving to remain relevant. Is joining the political discussion a way for brands to stay relevant? Depends on the brand.

*Should brands align with one side of the political aisle versus another or tap out of the conversation?*

The verdict is still out on whether companies should remain silent or pick a side on not only political, but also social disputes. Big brands are faced with a tough decision that could cost them their reputation and even worse, their customers. Traditionally, the CEO's personal ideology has reflected the company's core values. It is not a new trend for companies to lean toward one side of the aisle or another; but in the recent hyper-polarized environment, a company's political preference can be put in the limelight. For example, in the world of streetwear, which usually leans to the left, customers believe it is important for brands to disclose exactly where they fall on the political spectrum. According to Bobby Hundreds, a streetwear industry expert:

*"The most effective brands channel the people behind the label and their perspective. If you're quiet in this climate, you appear disingenuous or sycophantic. Thirsty. And I guarantee that it will backfire. Whether today or in the future, your silence will speak volumes to the marketplace."*

**“ When companies claim to be guided  
by core values, but remain silent on a  
political issue that poses a threat to said  
values, the silence backfires ”**

### *Speak up or stay silent?*

Like Bobby Hundred said, when companies claim to be guided by core values, but remain silent on a political issue that poses a threat to said values, the silence backfires. In a study conducted by Drexel University and Clemson University, the results found that "purchasing behavior was significantly affected if the company went against prior expectations." As Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz wrote in an internal memo to employees, "let me assure you that we will stay true to our values," where he defended his decision to hire 10,000 refugees after President Trump issued his immigration ban. Starbucks received both praise and resentment for this decision. Should brands like Starbucks ignore the criticism and support what its executives believe is a good cause? Is some praise worth the resentment? That is ultimately up to Starbucks' executives. With that being said, there is a fine line between a company with core values that have been rooted in the brand since the beginning and a company expressing emotional sentiment towards a political issue as it presents itself. If brands act on their values, that would only strengthen an already loyal consumer base because the company stuck to its values and was not hypocritical.

### *So what does political action look like from a brand?*

Brands became more politically active in the wake of President Trump's immigration ban. Companies like Amazon, Google and Airbnb spoke out against the ban or took action to help impacted immigrants. Lyft donated money to the ACLU and Twitter's CEO publicly expressed his disapproval of Trump's actions. These acts of defiance were mostly well-received, but some brands were confronted with anger: #BoycottStarbucks started trending on Twitter after Starbucks pledge to hire 10,000 immigrants following the President's announcement of the immigration ban. This is just one example of how a brand's outspoken political opinion encountered disapproval and tainted the brand's reputation for some customers. On the other side of the aisle, companies who have expressed their support for President Trump's policies have also received disapproval from customers. New Balance endorsed the newly elected president with sneakers which resulted in some customers burning the company's shoes in protest and sharing the videos on social media. No matter which side of the political aisle a brand chooses, there is a chance for serious reputational consequences, potentially even more so if they do not choose at all. It is up to the brand's executives to decide which risks are worth taking and make sure their decision reflects the company's core values.

As the rift between political ideologies in this country continues to grow, why should the type of toothpaste we buy politicize us as consumers? There are no right answers to these questions. It is up to a brand's leaders to weigh the pros and cons of staying silent in a political debate or agreeing with one side over another. It has become increasingly more difficult for brands to stay neutral due to the growing complexity of our globalized world. Brands actively engaged in politics is the new normal and will only polarize society further. Soon, if not already, consumers will be politically profiling others by the type of coffee they drink, shoes they wear or rideshare service they use. In a time where civil discourse and acceptance is vital for an effective democracy, a brand's participation in politics will only ostracize the public even more. Unfortunately, that involvement is inevitable.

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*Bridget Winstead is a second-year graduate student in the Master of Strategic Public Relations program at the University of Southern California. She is also a Graduate Research Associate for the Center for Public Relations.*









## PR and AI: Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself

Corey duBrowa

Public relations has always been a combination of art and science. Historically, PR was seen as more of a highly-evolved art: a combination of experience, instinct and analog interactions and relationship equity, along with a side order of social science. In today's digital age, PR is leaning more toward science, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and big data to quantify, analyze, understand and to some extent, even predict behaviors and trends.

Algorithms are determining the optimal times and channels for engaging with media or other targets, and are generally putting the “public” back in public relations by considering a broader range of stakeholders than traditional earned media when building brands and protecting reputations. So much information today is publicly available and our tools are becoming sophisticated enough to understand how to parse the immense pools of data that exist and meaningfully relate them to the brands and issues with which we are professionally engaged.

In fact, in its 2017 Salesforce State of Marketing report, Salesforce surveyed more than 3,500 marketers worldwide who are in the midst of this seismic shift and found that:

- About 50 percent of marketing leaders are already using AI, with more than a quarter planning to pilot projects in the next two years.
- Internally, marketers see AI as a means of creating more efficiency in their operations —59 percent say it will increase productivity. In terms of customer-facing benefits, most view AI as a way to get more from their data and personalize their marketing without burdening their teams — 61 percent say it will help them with the “hyper-personalization” of content.

- More than half of consumers have said they are likely to switch brands if a company doesn't make an effort to personalize its communications to them (this number jumps to 65 percent for B2B buyers)

Simply put: companies of all industries and sizes are navigating a fundamental change in the way they do business, and PR plays a crucial role. As public relations professionals, it is incumbent upon us to continue working within our organizations across disparate functions, such as marketing, government affairs, sales and customer service to embrace the capabilities that AI offers and to ensure that communication is even more impactful, consistent and speaks with “one voice” to customers. AI is already becoming fundamental to this task and will only become more sophisticated and effective in this effort in the months and years to come.

All of this said, AI isn't a magic elixir for PR greatness. AI is not good at making emotional connections or building the kind of person-to-person relationships capable of turning a train wreck of a story into a minor abrasion. Machines lack the empathy, spontaneity and creativity that is at the core of the human species. Storytelling, the root of the PR profession, is about weaving narratives that connect humans to each other through meaning and purpose rather than a logical recitation of facts and features. This hasn't changed in any material way since Arthur W. Page first established the principles of modern corporate public relations nearly 100 years ago, and remains true regardless of the various technologies that have disrupted our profession ever since.

McKinsey & Co. research found that the most difficult activities to automate are those involving the management and development of people or requiring expertise in decision-making, planning and creative work. The future of PR is people supplementing what machines do so well, blurring the lines between art and science in ever more creative ways. I look forward to the day in the distant future when I can tell my AI-powered digital assistant to draft a PR plan for a new product launch, though I don't think I would fully trust this agent to win the hearts and minds of customers. So, for all those concerned that the AI revolution somehow portends a massive loss of knowledge-worker jobs or the end of the PR profession as we know it, fear not – storytelling is a fundamentally analog role, one best performed by humans, with data as only one of the many inputs that develop the narratives we use to shape opinion and reinforce belief.

## “ The future of PR is people and machines working closer together ”

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## Communications is Driving the Car Business

Michael Stewart

The automotive industry is facing a major revolution. Ride sharing, autonomous vehicles, alternative powertrains and other new technology entrants will disrupt a business model that has remained mostly the same for 100 years, and contributes more than \$900 billion to the U.S. economy.

But that future won't be a reality in 2018. What's impacting the success of automakers in the immediate future is communications.

### Communications Technologies

People today are spending more than four hours a day on their smartphones – talking, messaging and using social media. And that is particularly true for millennials, who are becoming car owners at record numbers.

Customers today expect to continue this hyper-connectivity inside their vehicle including the ability to communicate with their friends and family across a variety of technology applications. Nearly half of consumers — 48 percent — prioritize in-vehicle technology over brand or body style according to a recent Autotrader study. And the technology they are referencing is nearly all related to communications.

“ Nearly half of consumers — 48 percent — prioritize in-vehicle technology over brand or body style ”

When a consumer buys a car today they demand the ability to seamlessly integrate their communications device with the car. That's why companies that have been quick to incorporate technologies like Apple CarPlay and Android Auto have seen the most success.

These applications allow a consumer to safely use the functionality of their smart phone directly on the car's built-in display. It enables voice commands, calling and reading and writing text messages, among many other features. Safely communicating while driving has become one of the top reasons consumers select a certain car; much more than driving dynamics, horsepower or other leading features of the past.

This integration also applies to in-home technologies. Devices like Google Home and Amazon Alexa can now remotely control features of your car. Owners want the convenience of locking, unlocking and remote starting their vehicles from the comfort of their couch, kitchen or bedroom using voice commands.

## Changing Retail Communications

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New ways of communicating with customers have also become crucial as the shopping process continues to evolve. Today, car shoppers have on average 24 different touch points with a manufacturer before purchase – 19 of them are digital. But prior to making a decision they are visiting less than two dealerships on average.

Digitally communicating with in-market shoppers and providing personalized messages is the expectation. At Hyundai, we tailor content and messaging depending on where customers are in the purchasing process. For example, a shopper that's at the comparison stage will be directed to pages showing our strengths versus the competitors, but someone that's looking at a specific model will see inventory at their local dealer. Once they decide to buy, we provide a complete set of digital tools to streamline the process and make the dealership experience shorter and more enjoyable.

In 20 years, we might not be driving our own cars, but in 2018 the companies that stand out will be the ones driving communications to the forefront of their technology offerings and shopping experience.

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## Rise of the Machines

Burghardt Tenderich, Ph.D.

The premise of Arnold Schwarzenegger's cult movie series "Terminator" is that the American military built a central control system based on artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. Inevitably, as the system grew smarter, its creators were unable to understand it and could only hope it would behave as desired once fully activated. That's where things went off the rails.

What once sounded like off-the-wall science fiction now has an eerie sense of impending reality. In July 2017, an AI research team at Facebook allegedly shut down a research project when the system began to develop a private language. Social and mainstream media jumped on it and quickly created a sensational news cycle of mostly fake news — or at least grossly exaggerated.

While such disturbing scenarios might pose a threat one day, the more immediate threat brought on by AI, robots and other forms of workforce automation is this: a fundamental disruption of our labor markets — real or perceived — and the need for businesses and governments to get ahead of the resulting onslaught of sensational news coverage and other extreme responses. As Tesla CEO Elon Musk told the National Governors Association at a meeting in July, "Robots will do everything better than us... (and) AI is a fundamental existential risk for human civilization." A few days later he proclaimed that artificial intelligence presents "vastly more risk than North Korea."

The risk being that if robots can perform many tasks better than humans — or eventually ALL tasks, as Musk asserts — millions of jobs will be eliminated with catastrophic consequences for the global work force. According to Oxford economist Carl Frey and machine learning expert Michael Osborne, 47 percent of all jobs in the United States could be eliminated by roughly 2030.

On the other hand, many experts disagree with such a gloomy forecast and instead point to the job-creating properties of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (the digital revolution): It takes many humans to create robots and other forms of workforce automation. In addition, humans will likely work alongside robots, rather than being fully replaced. And most importantly: New business models will emerge, creating value in many ways we cannot yet even imagine.

Remember that even during the original Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, many predicted automation such as the assembly line would kill manufacturing jobs. In fact, while there have been many cases of displacements and hardships to vulnerable parts of the workforce, it is beyond dispute that the paradigm shift brought on by the steam engine resulted in unprecedented economic growth and job creation.

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New business models will emerge,  
creating value in many ways we cannot yet  
even imagine

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Herein lies the problem, while no one can predict the future, many try. Media, bloggers and politicians will amplify the bits and pieces of information they believe in, or that best serve their purposes. The likely result will be new waves of fear, uncertainty and doubt — not unlike what we've seen since the last presidential election cycle, where demagogues were able to create the perception that undocumented farm workers from south of the border will gobble up all the manufacturing jobs in the Rust Belt.

The burden and the opportunity to align perception with facts will again fall to communicators in media, government and business. To be responsible, they should follow a few simple guidelines:

- **Make Sense of Science** — enable key constituencies to form their own opinions by turning complex and hard-to-understand scientific studies into more accessible information without compromising academic rigor.
- **Rely on Trustworthy Sources** — in the day and age of economically-challenged mainstream media and flourishing free-wheeling social media, not all sources are created equal. Communicators need to apply critical thinking and do basic research to identify and promote legitimate sources and avoid spreading fake news.
- **Be Empathetic** — there will be winners, and there will be losers. Feel free to celebrate the winners, but don't ignore or disrespect the losers. Learn to understand them by trying to imagine what they go through. This was one of the big lessons learned from the news cycle surrounding the most recent presidential election: Liberal elite communicators tended to label any and all Trump supporters as 'idiots' without understanding that many who cast Republican votes this time around had been struggling for decades to provide for their families. They were in search of something new and different that would change their circumstances.

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*Burghardt Tenderich is a Professor of Professional Practice and the Associate Director of the USC Center for Public Relations. He's author of "Transmedia Branding," USC Annenberg Press, together with Jerried Williams.*





## Beyond Bitcoin

Katrina Swarthout

We've all heard a lot of chatter about Bitcoin and its growing popularity among financial communities around the world. The widely unregulated cryptocurrency is seen by many as an economic game changer with the power to provide millions of people access to the financial market. But what is likely to be the true game changer is the underlying technology, blockchain.

Bitcoin may have been the first use of blockchain, but it is only a small glimpse at what this technology can do. The Harvard Business Review believes that this technology will have a larger impact on business over the next decade than the current tech fads – big data and artificial intelligence (AI).

At the most basic level, blockchain is a decentralized and distributed ledger that records all types of transactions, not just financial. What's so integral to the technologies value is the way the blockchain works. The World Economic Forum noted that "Like the internet, the blockchain is an open, global infrastructure upon which other technologies and applications can be built. And like the internet, it allows people to bypass traditional intermediaries in their dealings with each other, thereby lowering or even eliminating transaction costs."

It is important to acknowledge that as the Harvard Business Review puts it, this is not a "disruptive" technology that will quickly change traditional business models. Blockchain is a foundational technology with the power to reshape institutions globally. But fundamentally changing the way societies, governments, economies and organizations operate isn't going to happen overnight. So, while the potential impact for this technology will be widespread, it won't all be happening in 2018. It will take years for full and distributed adoption. But that doesn't mean businesses should hold off on preparing for the future.

**“Blockchain is a foundational technology with the power to reshape institutions globally”**

Many leading enterprises have begun to plan for the technology and some have already started incorporating blockchain into their operations. For example, in late August 2017, IBM announced a partnership with major food companies, including Dole, Golden State Foods, Kroger, McCormick and Company, Nestlé, Tyson Foods, Unilever and Walmart to develop blockchain solutions for problems facing the global food supply chain, such as improving food safety by allowing food suppliers to trace contaminated products in seconds.

Financial institutions are investing big bucks into this technology due to its many potential FinTech usages, including the ability to verify money transfers easier and quicker: Synechron, an IT consulting and outsourcing firm, has started offering what it calls “Accelerators,” software that integrate blockchain into transactions such as mortgage lending and global payment systems.

One of blockchain's potential applications is fixing internet security. We've seen numerous announcements from corporations about customer data breaches over the past year, which is no surprise with over 4,500 data breaches reported since 2005. With much of our information living on the internet there is an increasing need for companies to find solutions to consumers increasing data privacy concerns, and blockchain may be just that. The technology's decentralized nature means that cybercriminals couldn't hack into just one database and access millions of records.

With the onset of any new foundational technology, like the Internet – like the internet (though I wasn't present for its adoption by the general public), – it is understandably hard to comprehend something so complex and life altering. But just as with the inception of the internet, as adoption grows so will the possible applications of blockchain, many of which we can't even imagine right now.

As communicators, we are responsible for telling the story of blockchain and shaping its narrative. Still much of the understanding of blockchain revolves around Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. With those storylines dominating the media often related to its potential nefarious usage, it won't be easy building trust and credibility for blockchain.

In 2018, we may not see sweeping changes to institutions, but that doesn't mean they aren't coming. Now is the time to educate ourselves and prepare for the potential shifts so when the time comes we are able to provide strategic counsel.

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*Katrina Swarthout is a second-year graduate student in the Master of Strategic Public Relations program at the University of Southern California. Katrina is also a Graduate Research Associate for the Center for Public Relations.*



## Privacy is Dead. What Now?

Alex Cohen

The communications world has, yet again, turned itself upside down. Usually, it's the result of a technological advancement or some other new form of digesting information; we're talking 'internet' or 'targeted content' kind of game changers here. This latest evolution is driven by something else entirely; the maelstrom-esque zeitgeist of modern day politics has changed how privacy, influence and identity itself interacts with our daily job functions.

Let's start with some baseline examples, and then get into how it affects you in your everyday function as a communicator:

- The White House has recently nullified S.J.Res. 34, the FCC's rule on privacy of customers of broadband and other telecommunications services.
- Verizon's most recent transparency report reveals an enormous spike in government requests for 'cell tower dumps,' in areas ranging from police investigations to, you guessed it, mass protests of all sorts.
- Dream-Host LLC, a web hosting company, has been ordered to comply with a government warrant seeking personal information from subscribers of one of its web sites: those involved in a presidential inauguration protest.

We could go on, but the takeaway is this: There is now a concentrated, successful effort by the American government (and of course internationally) to peel back the curtain of those using their voice in ways that not everyone likes. While it's an ongoing conversation, it is likely that through these techniques and many other methods, privacy and protest are no longer compatible with each other; and anonymity in the political sphere is essentially dead. Instead of calling for revolution, let's list out a few things that make these developments immediately relevant to your area of expertise:

- If all opinions and actions are now attributable directly to you, your media targets or your clients, make them count: Register your own name, everywhere. Increase your voice. Do not hide. The flip side of privacy falling by the wayside is the rise of the public citizen, a powerful force in any conversation.
- This is the endgame of influencer relations, a golden scenario of targeted coverage. Follow the long-tail of these developments, or even current examples of the so-called "Facebook echo chamber;" and you'll see that it is now possible to create materials and assets through your communications programs that have measurable impact on a micro-targeted level. If everyone is forced to wear their preferences in the public sphere, everyone is an influencer and follower alike at all times, and that makes them more easily accessible for you.

- Finally, these developments call for a rise in corporate responsibility beyond the scale of any current program. Never forget that there is technically no person walking around named Apttus, Target or Facebook. Corporations are made up of people and reflect the opinions and actions of those in charge. And the people in charge? Their first responsibility is to be influenced by their employees and react accordingly. The result of these employees being exposed on every level is the final removal of any excuse larger organizations have to not be involved in any kind of public discourse, political or otherwise.

## “ The flip side of privacy falling by the wayside is the rise of the public citizen ”

One final note, this is not a particularly easy scenario to digest. Let it sink in. But don't let that paralyze your actions; personally or professionally, the world has changed and we all need to adapt to stay ahead of what's next.

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*As Director of Corporate Marketing, Alex Cohen is responsible for communications strategy and global branding for Apttus, the category-defining Quote-to-Cash provider. Alex Cohen is an USC graduate and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



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## The Convergence of Marketing and Communications

Heather Rim

Since the inception of the corporate communications role, we communicators have been careful to draw a distinction between our work and that of marketers. While they spoke of customers, we addressed audiences. They extolled product benefits. We burnished corporate reputations. They supported operations. We served the C-suite.

But these distinctions make no sense in the digital age. The same technologies that have destroyed any meaningful difference between internal and external communications are now dissolving the lines between marketing and communications. Digital and social media are the bedrock of both functions. Messaging, regardless of its origin or intent, is readily accessible to everyone, with the power to both shape perception and build consumer interest. In short, these two roles now share the responsibility for effective customer engagement.

This convergence has important implications for our profession. It means we must become articulate spokespeople not just for our company's values, but for its value to customers. We must become conversant with the requirements for developing, nurturing and maintaining customer relationships, and build this knowledge into our planning. And we must learn to measure the impact of our work, for ourselves and our leadership, in the language that marketers have been using for decades – the language of growth.

It was 20 years ago that I first heard a leader say, *"HITS are How Idiots Track Success."* Thankfully, our profession has moved on to more meaningful measures of the value of strong communications, including social influence, share of voice and favorability. While our sophistication has improved, the one word that we too infrequently use is growth. And that is precisely the word that every CEO wants to hear.

Perhaps the idea of measuring communications success in explicit bottom-line terms makes you squirm. But in our resource-constrained, fiercely competitive business world, we really have no choice. In the months and years ahead, I am convinced that our profession's most successful and influential practitioners will be those with an intimate knowledge of their company's customers, and a demonstrated ability to use this knowledge to drive the customer life cycle, from awareness to engagement and purchase, to retention and advocacy.

There is a big upside to this explicit new measure emerging on our dashboards. As more communications leaders embrace the language of growth and focus their teams on the tools and strategies that drive it, we will see more of them rise to the top leadership positions in their companies. There is a reason that 25 percent of all CEOs have a marketing background,

according to a 2017 American Marketing Association study. The most progressive CMOs think like CEOs, understanding the mechanics and economics of their business, and always viewing decisions through the eyes of the customer they serve.

“ 25% of all CEOs have a marketing background ”

Truth is, we are all marketers now in this new digital age. We have the opportunity to make a serious impact on how – and how well – our organization attracts and retains its customers. It's time to learn the language of growth and take our place at the leadership table.

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*Heather Rim is Chief Marketing and Communications Officer for AECOM. She obtained her Master's degree in Communication Management from the Annenberg School. Heather also is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*





## Is it Time to Think Small?

Caroline Dettman

Marketers are making a huge mistake. Focused on reaching the masses with big data, they have forgotten to connect with an entire population of powerful consumers – small-town America.

While marketers think that small towns and rural populations are inconsequential, roughly 25 percent of the U.S. population lives outside of cities and suburbs. Their collective voices are influential – and can be stunning – as seen during the 2016 election.

The “populist movement,” as it is now being called, is fueled by people in small towns and rural areas who feel like their government didn’t truly represent them or, worse, ignored them. But it’s not just government doing the ignoring.

If brands want to be relevant, and embody the traits consumers want most, then surveying people in Indianapolis or Wichita – some of the largest “middle America” cities – isn’t enough.

In 2017, Golin embarked on an in-depth ethnographic study of Seymour, Indiana – famous for John Mellencamp’s autobiographical song “Small Town” – to better understand the decision makers who impacted the 2016 U.S. election. We did the same thing in Preston, U.K. – located more than 200 miles northwest of London – to understand who impacted Brexit.

Once you start talking with people in small towns, you quickly discover what they’re missing from brands – and more importantly, what brands are missing from small towns.

**1. Brand loyalty is established through emotional and personal connections.** Small-town brand loyalty is strong and can continue for generations. In Seymour, everyone – literally, everyone – buys the same brand of vehicle. They want relationships they can trust, even if it means having their local bankers on speed dial. Most brands aren’t doing enough to tap into that level of customer connection.

## “ Small-town brand loyalty is strong and can continue for generations ”

### **2. Distinguishing between political and purposeful is critical to a brand's success.**

Through our study, we learned that people like brands that are purpose-driven, but not politically motivated. While the people of small towns may have become more politically active, they don't want their brands to be political. They just want brands that understand and respect them as consumers.

**3. One small town is a valuable sample.** Marketers think going small has to be expensive, but it doesn't. The perceptions people expressed about brands in Seymour rang true all the way across the pond in Preston. It's the same approach as conducting a focus group in one large city to sample an urban population. If marketers can understand what drives people in one rural community, they can better target the rest of rural America.

In today's marketing world, where including diverse groups is more critical to a brand's success than ever, residents of small towns can't be left out. Which is why it's essential to partner small-town intelligence with the big data that brands have always relied upon. Along with striking differences, we found many commonalities between small town residents and big city dwellers. If we want the 25 percent of unheard Americans to invest in us, it's time we invest in them.

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*Caroline Dettman is Chief Creative and Community Officer for Golin, an integrated agency with PR, digital and content at its core. Caroline has 20 years of experience delivering creative campaigns for clients including Clif Bar, Humana, Unilever and Mattel, among many others. Golin is a sponsor of the Relevance Report.*



## Reports of PR's Death Are Greatly Exaggerated

Dr. Stuart Smith

At some point, everything is declared dead: TV, radio, advertising, digital, email marketing and, yes, even PR. But as Oscar Wilde once eloquently put it: "Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

PR is certainly not dead. But who practices it, how it is practiced, who buys it, why they buy it and how we organize ourselves to deliver it will — and must — change.

In USC Annenberg's School of Journalism and Communications Global Communications Report 2017, nearly 50% of both in-house and agency public relations professionals feel that they will become more closely aligned with marketing over the next five years. Nearly 30% feel that public relations will play an increasingly important role compared with marketing, while another 12 percent feel that PR will play a "dominant role," and only 5% believe PR will become a subset of marketing.

In the same survey, marketers have less optimistic views on the role of public relations. 61 percent see PR becoming more closely aligned with marketing, with another 20 percent of marketers predicting PR will become a subset of marketing's domain. Only 12 percent believe that PR will play an increasingly important role compared to marketing.

The survey brilliantly lays bare the widely varying and highly polarized views within the profession about the future role and importance of PR and how it will be manufactured.

I have always believed the role of public relations is to build brands through the power of earned media and influence (as opposed to paid media and paid influence) and I joined Ogilvy six years ago believing that it would be the best place to re-invent our craft for the new world of modern marketing (as described by our Chairman and CEO, John Seifert).

In those six years, the industry has changed dramatically. What the survey does not reveal however, is a big truth hiding in plain sight. PR, by many different measures has already "won" because what we do and how we do it has already infiltrated mainstream marketing. The proof or proxy for proof? A steady stream of colleagues returning from Cannes this year are saying the same thing: Every idea that won big had a PR idea at its heart.

My mantra has been and will remain: The new role of public relations is to create and optimize a brand platform or campaign idea for earned media and earned influence. This is both a strategic and a creative role. To grasp the opportunity however, the PR profession must wake up and see that the door they claimed to be shut has swung wide open. The world has changed, let's stop shouting at passing cars and get on with helping the craft we love become the magic ingredient that builds brands and drives demand.

“ **The new role of public relations is to create and optimize a brand platform or campaign idea for earned media and earned influence** ”

What is hindering the profession more than any of the above? First, if we want marketing to invest more in PR, then we need a better ROI model. Second, we need to develop a shared language and world view to promote collaboration. Third, we need more brand strategists and creatives who truly understand how the world of earned influence works. Finally, we need to tell the story of our craft to the new buyer: The CMO.

As PR professionals, it is time to acknowledge that the practice of PR has already broken out of our walled garden. As the quote goes: “If you truly love something, set it free.” It is time to unleash the full power of earned influence at scale... but to achieve this, the professional needs to adapt and look forwards not backwards.

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*Dr. Stuart Smith is the Global CEO Public Relations at Ogilvy. Stuart is also an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## Artificial Intelligence Makes Intelligent Marketers

Todd Defren

The marketing industry is agog at the potential ramifications of artificial intelligence (AI). At this stage, it's tough to know whether to be excited or fretful. Let's explore what CMOs are equipped to use AI for today, and sneak a peek at the future along the way.

The impact of AI on marketing will mostly be positive. Many of the tasks marketers perform are highly repetitive and require very little creativity, such as creating reports, deploying campaigns, even writing content. By using AI, we will be able to verify the best types of communications products to produce and the best ways to distribute them, rather than wasting time and resources relying on our gut instincts.

Let's say you're in charge of a \$100 million promotional budget. That's a lot of money. It's a big responsibility. So you have a team of 25 analysts cross-checking your strategy and results on-the-go against data streaming into web analytics, CRM and ERP systems. Then you learn that IBM's Watson Analytics service can – within seconds – identify patterns that take your 25 analysts weeks to accomplish. This is exactly how AI can help modern CMOs scale their work in more productive, profitable ways. Artificial intelligence moves us from “I'm drowning in data” to delivering immediate insights; from “hmm...we are down-trending in search results” to, “we are down-trending in search results because we've been neglecting these sets of emerging keywords.”

**“ AI can help modern CMOs scale their  
work in more productive, profitable ways ”**

When most marketers think of content marketing, they think, “What types of content will motivate brand loyalty and purchase intent among prospective and current customers?” At this point, most marketers look to their “key benefits” messaging and devise creative ways to broadcast those points. It's a hit or miss process; nailing it depends on the experience and good luck of the individual marketers driving the process. But is that always the right way to go? Flip the AI switch on your content marketing and the concept immediately becomes more nuanced.

Quick example? Using AI techniques, including predictive analytics, a nuclear waste management company was finally convinced its customers unequivocally used the word “dump” in their related searches, and that – though it was originally considered an unappealing turn of phrase by the in-house marketers – embracing the “dump” across their messaging platforms would boost their SEO results and create fresh business opportunities.

We can also use AI to test our results. We can teach machine learning software to recognize top performing content such as social media posts, images, etc. and build a corpus of knowledge about what things work best. Based on the resulting best practices library, we can then assess the new content we create to determine whether our fresh stuff is akin to “winning content” from past efforts, and adjust accordingly. (Maybe that’ll lengthen the typical 18-month CMO tenure. Rather than allow their new approaches to cause collateral damage to programs proven to work, AI can help newly-hired CMOs to identify better places to focus their efforts!)

The goal is to create a virtuous cycle in which the right content is being created at the right time for the right people in the right places, which powers ever-greater SEO value and revenue impact. AI-driven marketing represents the single biggest game changer we’ve seen, in that regard.

Got your attention?

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*Todd Defren is CEO of SHIFT Communications and is a recognized social media and public relations innovator. Todd is an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## The Future of Main Street

Dan Tarman

A year ago, I wrote about how technology is reshaping the future of commerce. Fast forward to 2017 and a convergence of dynamics are accelerating this secular shift.

We've seen hundreds of store closures among previously stalwart retail giants, acquisitions of iconic offline chains by ecommerce players, as well as massive, lumbering offline retailers desperately seeking a foothold in online commerce. This trend will not only continue, it will gain even greater pace over the coming months and years. Consumer spending and behavior are shifting rapidly as well.

These changes are having, and will have, profound implications for businesses across sectors and our workforce at-large. Amidst this transformation there is a tendency to cast blame on technology for job displacements and the end of "Main Street" as we know it.

There are real societal concerns that business leaders and policy makers must address to ensure that our future workforce has the skills and knowledge to succeed and thrive in the world that is coming. We should also understand how to create the conditions through which technology doesn't leave vast swaths of our population behind. Otherwise, we will create an even greater divide between economic winners and losers, ultimately harming everyone.

Yet all is not lost for Main Street. There is also a pathway through which technology is an enabler and a source of real empowerment.

Think of the countless small businesses and entrepreneurs who can exponentially scale their reach by plugging into a global commerce platform that exists solely for that purpose vs. platforms that may displace, disintermediate or compete against them.

Think of the small retailers in communities across the United States (and globally) who are struggling with sales but who can revive their businesses by unchaining themselves from a local geography and instead access millions of potential customers around the world.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning are examples of tech innovations that can be leveraged in service of those small businesses – helping match a retailer in Anywhere, USA, to a consumer anywhere looking to buy just the product that Small Retailer is selling.

If we provide those businesses with the tools to harness technology to work for them, the potential benefits are just as profound as the concerns about technology as a negative force.

This vision of the future of commerce is vibrant and human. It's also realistic and happening all around us.

Ultimately, consumer behavior will dictate which businesses win – and which ones lose – in such a world. It's not rocket science to understand that consumers want their needs met by the companies with whom they choose to do business. The challenge for communicators is to relentlessly demonstrate a sharp “why” that translates into a tangible value proposition for consumers.

**“ The challenge for communicators is to relentlessly demonstrate a sharp “why” that translates into a tangible value proposition for consumers ”**

We must engage consumers both rationally and emotionally through communications strategies that break through the noise of every other company competing for their mindshare. Both traditional and online retailers need to show how their offering meets the evolving expectations of consumers. The challenge for the former is perhaps more acute, as perceptions of their brands are likely more entrenched. The challenge for the latter is often more about building a relevant and differentiated value proposition in an increasingly crowded space.

The lines between offline and ecommerce are blurring to the point where we should be thinking in terms of commerce that spans both. Businesses that effectively harness technology, either directly or through platforms that exist to enable them, will be best positioned to win the hearts and minds of consumers. Communicators who effectively build narratives that bring these themes to life will help their companies create sustainable businesses for the future.

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*As eBay's Chief Communications Officer, Dan Tarman is responsible for managing, protecting and strengthening the Company's brand and reputation among key stakeholders. Dan is also an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*





## Gen Blend ... Blended, But Not Blending In

Deanne Yamamoto

Blended in every way, this diverse, digitally rooted generation that spans from kindergarten to college grad is changing the foundation of retail and marketing at lightning speed.

They are the first generation to grow up seeing interracial relationships, gay marriage and equality for all on mainstream media. Fifty percent identify as mixed race or as part of an ethnic group. And, because they've had smartphones since elementary school, watching world events in the palm of their hands or having anything delivered by simply asking Alexa is the norm.

This is Gen Blend, commonly known as Gen Z. Wielding \$44 billion in purchasing power, they will account for 40 percent of all consumers by 2020. But while this blended generation is the product of diverse ideals – new family and ethnic dynamics, unlimited access to information and no boundaries between their real lives and online lives – they aren't about blending in. Brands that toss the rule book aside will win their hearts, minds and e-wallets. Those that don't will be swiped away. Here is what should be considered about Gen Blend:

“ Brands that toss the rule book aside will  
win their hearts, minds and e-wallets ”

**Real people, for real.** Gen Blend judges with their eyes first. They don't want polish or perfection. Instead, they want people who look like and believe in the same things that they do. The story behind the story is key, which is why celebrities are dwarfed by the Instagram influencers and YouTubers who are their make-up artists, designers and personal chefs. Influencers are seen as trustworthy and relevant because have they expertise in the types of products they promote and engage with. In fact, 63 percent of this generation prefers to see real people, not celebrities in ads.

**Smartphones ARE life.** Always in hand, smartphones are omnipresent in their lives. Blending online and real-life experiences like no other generation, these demanding consumers want a quick, seamless, customized experience. They rely on Yelp or Amazon ratings and reviews and YouTube to expose what products do or don't do. Their pervasive attitude – if it isn't on social media, it doesn't exist – poses questions around Snap-worthiness. And, despite still visiting the mall, their online buying habits have wreaked havoc on impulse-purchase products. Basically, those who can't immediately deliver or who complicate their lives in any way become irrelevant.

**Mobile isn't just for phones.** Anytime, anywhere is their moniker. Ever-present technology has made Gen Blend the most mobile generation. But beyond cord cutting, it has impacted entertainment, food, malls and even parent drivers. Who knows what's next? Brands who lean into this new perspective will outpace those who don't. Recently, Nintendo Switch transformed its home console into a portable system that can be played anywhere. Food trucks have become an on-demand culinary staple and Postmates leveled the food delivery playing field. Uber has impacted teens not wanting to drive, while pop-up apparel shops make fashion accessible to all.

The world according to Gen Blend is changing at Internet speed. Brands that are inclusive, thoughtful and swift to act will be relevant, swipe right. Otherwise, swipe left.

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*Deanne Yamamoto's 25-year agency career has been focused on enhancing brand relevance, engaging consumers and driving cultural conversation. She is currently Managing Director of Golin LA. Deanne is a graduate of the Annenberg School and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



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## Everything Big Starts Small

Amy Von Walter

A few stats to start the conversation:

- There are fewer Fortune 500 CEOs who are women (4.1 percent) than who are named David (4.5 percent) or John (5.3 percent) – two single male names outnumber an entire gender. (NYTimes)
- Only 5 out of all Fortune 500 companies have African American CEOs. (CDC, Diversity Inc.)
- For every 10 percent increase in the rate of racial and ethnic diversity on Senior Executive teams, EBIT rises 0.8 percent. (McKinsey)
- Ethnically diverse companies are 35 percent more likely to outperform their respective national industry medians. (McKinsey)
- Gender diverse companies are 15 percent more likely to outperform their respective national industry medians. (McKinsey)

So how does one begin to tackle an issue of this size and scope? One Minnesota-based nonprofit has found a way...

In 2007, a Twin Cities ad exec recognized the significant racial disparity in his field and decided to do something. What began as a high school experiment grew into The Brand Lab, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing minority representation in advertising, marketing and communications through internships, mentoring, scholarships and advocacy work.

In 2015-16, Brand Lab volunteers visited dozens of urban schools and spoke with more than 700 students about careers in marketing and communications. It placed nearly 70 interns at 50 corporate and agency sites, giving the students both valuable experience and networking opportunities. These same interns' graduation rate was 99 percent, compared with a 68 percent graduation rate for other students of color.

Because the first Brand Lab students are just beginning to enter the workforce, we don't know the long-term impact of the program but the anecdotal evidence tell us that we are making progress. For perspective, in 2015, the rate of minorities in the advertising industry in the Twin Cities was a mere 6 percent.

Soon, the Brand Lab will expand its reach to Missouri and my hope is this will be the first of many more states to adopt their model. This example demonstrates progress is possible if we are proactive and intentional about adding more women and people of color to our ranks.

## “Progress is possible if we are proactive and intentional about adding more women and people of color to our ranks”

The opening scene of my favorite documentary, “The Starfish Throwers,” narrates the famous fable of an old man who encounters a young girl and thousands of starfish stranded on the beach. The old man asks why the girl is wasting her time tossing the starfish back into the ocean, asserting there were so many that she couldn’t make a difference. Defiant, she continues her work, inspiring the old man and others to join her effort, eventually clearing the beach.

The fable is a reminder that while I may feel overwhelmed by the disparities in the workplace, there are steps I can take to help contribute to the solution. I was fortunate to have many mentors – male and female – to support me along the way. While I may not have always appreciated it, I not only recognize the investment they made, I am committed to paying that forward. I hope that you will consider mentoring a young woman or person of color – and I expect you’ll find, just as I did, that it’s one of the most rewarding things you’ll ever do.

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*Amy Von Walter is Executive Vice President, Global Communications and Customer Satisfaction at Toys “R” Us, Inc., and serves as a member of the company’s Global Leadership Team. Amy is also an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## The Census is Far From 2020

Bill Imada

The impact each decennial Census has on our country can never be understated. With less than three years before the 2020 U.S. Census, our focus on securing a full and accurate count of all residents living in our country seems to have shifted due to a cacophony of other pressing concerns. So much of our work in public relations, marketing and advertising depends on the big data that is provided from a successful census, yet we as communicators have largely remained silent on pressing the White House and Congress to pay closer attention to ensuring that the Census has the full support and resources that it needs to ensure full participation.

Rising costs and a declining public response rates by mail are reshaping plans for how the 2020 U.S. Census will be rolled out. However, the bureau has been hindered by a weak and inadequate budget, a major leadership change at the top, and a planned move to secure greater public participation online.

While an online response campaign may save the federal government some hard costs, convincing a weary public to share personal data online may be harder to achieve in 2020 than anyone can imagine. Not a day goes by without seeing another news report about foreign hackers retrieving personal data from companies who should have the best online defense protocols. Or even worse are the news reports of foreign governments interfering in one of our most sacred rights as citizens – to participate in a fair and free electoral process. With heightened consumer concerns over privacy and personal security, the U.S. Census Bureau will need to devote even more time and resources to allay public concerns over the security of its online portal.

There are some bright spots for 2020. The next Census is expected to offer new opportunities to learn more about diverse populations that are changing the complexion of America. The Census Bureau tested a new approach to counting Hispanics in 2015. During that test, respondents were able to self-identify only as Hispanic and did not have to select a subsequent racial category such as African/black, Asian, white and/or American Indian/Alaska Native. As a result of this test, the number of people self-identifying as Hispanic rose dramatically. If a bureau recommendation is confirmed, Latinos will be able to self-identify first as Hispanics, and then check another box/boxes such as Colombian, Cuban, Dominican, Mexican/Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran and/or write in their cultural heritage.

In addition to the bureau's recommended changes for the Hispanic community, the 2020 Census may also include a self-identification category for individuals who are of Middle-Eastern or North-African heritage, which could alter population figures for non-Hispanic whites, African

Americans and Asians. In previous census counts, individuals who traced their heritage to the Middle East or North Africa had to choose from other racial/ethnic categories that were not always an easy fit.

But none of these important changes will matter if President Donald J. Trump, Congress and the U.S. Department of Commerce do not adequately fund the 2020 U.S. Census to ensure that there is a full and accurate count of all U.S. residents. Statements from the White House, members of the cabinet and from several members of Congress have had a chilling effect on the mood of our country. Statements from President Trump have cast suspicion on immigrants, undocumented residents, Muslims, transgender individuals and others, heightening fear and raising ethnic, racial and religious tensions throughout the country. The rising level of fear and tension will have an adverse impact on securing the full participation needed for the 2020 U.S. Census, as more immigrants, undocumented residents and Muslims will avoid participating in a government-sponsored program to collect their personal information that could be used against them in the future.

**“ The rising level of fear and tension will have an adverse impact on securing the full participation needed for the 2020 U.S. Census ”**

If the census is to succeed, the federal government will need to ratchet down its rhetoric about immigrants, undocumented residents and people who hail from majority-Muslim countries. At the same time, President Trump and federal officials will need to allocate the necessary funds to ensure and reassure all residents, regardless of their status, that their personal information is protected by law and will remain private and confidential. Trust is hard to rebuild once it is lost, and the public's trust is needed to secure an accurate count in 2020.

The public relations and communications industry must weigh in on this discussion to help restore public trust in institutions such as the U.S. Census Bureau. Without our involvement and active engagement, we'll lose the vital big data that adds texture to our work. We'll also miss our chance to advocate for a full and accurate count of every resident of the U.S., whose data we need to advance business, plan new communities, restructure and revitalize existing communities, fuel innovation and job growth, and keep our industry fresh and vibrant.

Hindsight is 20/20. However, none of us in the PR world can afford to remain silent until after 2020. With less than three years before the 2020 U.S. Census, the time to act is now.

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*Bill Imada is Founder, Chairman and Chief Connectivity Officer of IW Group, a minority- owned and operated advertising, marketing and communications agency, and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*





## The Favor Bank

Don Spetner

I was an executive recruiter for Korn/Ferry for many years. Most of my time was consumed with the task of helping clients identify and recruit top notch talent. And when I wasn't working on a search, I was working on acquiring new clients. But there's another, less productive task that I had to provide, and that all recruiters must provide. It's what the industry refers to as "courtesy interviews." These are phone calls or in-person meetings with candidates looking for jobs, even if they are wholly unqualified.

Recruiters conduct these courtesy interviews for one simple reason: because someone we care about has asked us to. The requestor might be a relative, a friend, a client, a colleague or even a person we met on an airplane. Most of the interviews aren't particularly productive, but they are nonetheless a crucial element of the larger ecosystem we operate in. We provide a kindness to someone in need, and the hope is that one day this kindness will be repaid.

In his 1987 novel "The Bonfire of the Vanities," Tom Wolfe introduced the concept of the "Favor Bank." The idea is that one should make "deposits" in to the favor bank, because inevitably it will be necessary to one day make a "withdrawal." It's an efficient and time-worn system. It's also one of the most effective engines for advancing a career.

In a world of social media and digital engagement, it is easy to overlook the remarkable efficacy of personal relationships. But behind every senior executive's ascension is a story of a mentor, friend, relative or even stranger who opened a door or put in a good word. The simple truth is relationships are almost as important as competence when it comes to climbing the corporate ladder.

**“ In a world of social media and digital engagement, it is easy to overlook the remarkable efficacy of personal relationships ”**

I learned this first hand when I applied for a college internship with Ruder and Finn more than 35 years ago. After I applied, my mother suggested I send a note to Bill Ruder; the chairman of the firm, because his daughter and my older sister were friends in college. I was appalled. I didn't want to bother Mr. Ruder; and I was sure that the only things the HR department cared about were my grades, my experience and my suitability as a prospective intern.

I got the internship, and was ultimately offered a fulltime job at the firm. Years later, my boss shared with me a note that Bill Ruder had sent to the HR department saying I was a good candidate, and asking them to keep him apprised of my candidacy. I'm not sure that's why they selected me, but I am sure that a note from the Chairman didn't hurt. More importantly, I was touched by his kindness and vowed that I would try to pass it forward whenever possible as I built my own career:

I soon began making regular deposits in to my own favor bank, and to this day I am amazed at how much these small acts of kindness have paid off. And continue to.

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*Don Spetner is a Senior Corporate Advisor for Weber Shandwick Worldwide. Don is also an advisory board member for the USC Center for Public Relations.*



## Emerald Skies Ahead

Lisa Curiel Parker

As the saying goes, “settlers get slaughtered, and pioneers prosper.” Like other grey markets, the cannabis industry is a Wild West that individuals and companies are entering at rapid speeds. Entrepreneurs, farmers, tech startups and fashion designers are figuring out how to get their hands in this multi-billion dollar business. The cannabis consumer market for medical and recreational use made \$4.4 billion in 2015 and is estimated to grow to around \$40 billion in five years and \$50 billion in 10, if federally legalized. When looking at other consumption-based industries, like alcohol and cigarettes, cannabis will eventually become a national contender in sales and public relations representation.

**“ Cannabis will eventually become  
a national contender in sales and  
public relations representation ”**

It is important, however, to understand that the cannabis industry must balance itself on a fine line when branding, marketing and advertising products. The industry is sprouting like a weed, it will be difficult to wrangle. Public relations agencies will need to dedicate time to understanding cannabis products, companies and personalities alike. Hiring and/or educating PR professionals affluent in local, state and federal cannabis legislation will be a requirement. Communications will not only need a strategic mindset, but an empathetic persona as well, to retain relationships with cannabis-based clients.

The way companies communicate is changing because their target audience is changing. Millennials are currently one of the strongest target markets of over 80 million, reflecting one quarter of the nation's population and outnumbering Baby Boomers by 5 million. But Gen Z will soon dominate the consumer market. Millennials and Gen Z consume information through online and social media channels. Within agencies, the need to tap into social media influencers for cannabis' public relations efforts are imperative. Looking at significant social media influencers who have a large following is important. Those with 100,000 to 300,000 followers are considered in a local tier and sometimes have the most influence over consumers with their purchasing power. Influencers with 500,000 to 900,000 are considered mid-tier and those with over 1 million are most significant but do not necessarily influence more purchasing.

Another reason social media is most eminent for cannabis marketing is due to stringent legal restrictions. Within California, according to Proposition 64, current laws dictate that advertisements cannot be appealing to children and that those viewing must verify their age of 21 or older. Advertisements must not be within 1,000 feet of a day care center or K-12 schools. In addition, advertisements cross borders of another state. Companies are also not allowed to advertise misleading representations of the effects of cannabis on health. These constraints will shape how marijuana-related companies communicate to the public without jeopardizing their business.

Over time, more states will legalize medical and recreational cannabis use and possession. This upcoming year will be a turning point for the industry. It is not a matter of **if** prohibition will end, but when. Mexico and Canada will soon fully legalize adult-use cannabis and it will only be a matter of time before the United States follows suit. For public relations professionals willing to learn and take on cannabis-based clients, this will create both growth and many risks along the way. Within this grey market industry, those with fearlessness and grit will not only survive but prosper with lots of green on the horizon.

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*Lisa Curiel Parker is a second-year graduate student in the Master of Strategic Public Relations program at the University of Southern California.*



## The Role of Communications in Building Communities

Bob Feldman

Our current hyper-partisan, polarized world has a range of implications on corporations, one of which is the challenge communicators and marketers face in building communities for their brands. It seems like everything these days is seen through a partisan lens, so companies must be especially careful.

Building meaningful communities that strengthen relationships between a brand and its customers provide people with a sense of belonging that is fundamental to developing long-term brand advocates. While the concept sounds easy, building communities in a time where the culture of this country is anything but cohesive requires mindful strategy to unite individuals, navigate crises and leverage diversity.

### Don't Divide, Unite

We live in an attention economy and communicators are challenged with making their brands stand out. Gone are the days when people make purchasing decisions solely on product utility; people are seeking out increasingly deeper connections with products, and they expect brands, like those in their own personal communities, to have a mission and set of values aligned with a greater purpose. How can companies accommodate people's need to relate to the products they invest in? Build strong communities. Align with your core mission and values. Be radically transparent and authentic.

**“ They expect brands, like those in their own personal communities, to have a mission and set of values aligned with a greater purpose ”**

Take Harley-Davidson, for example. It has one of the most loyal customer bases of any brand, and it's not just because their customers like the bikes. When someone invests in a Harley, they become part of a community united by their enthusiasm for the Harley “way of life.” Harley-Davidson knows the power of this community and has gone to great lengths to ensure it thrives by developing the Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.), an online, members-only community that communicates with and connects over a million Harley owners.

## When You Hit a Roadblock, Get Back to the Basics

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Earlier this year at the Arthur W. Page Society's annual conference I had the privilege of moderating a panel discussion with California's Barbara Boxer, U.S. senator from 1993-2017, and Ari Fleischer, George W. Bush's press secretary during and immediately following 9/11. Despite their political differences, they agreed on one thing: As Americans, there remains far more that unites us than divides us. When navigating uncharted territory, Boxer recommends going back to basics. She said, at their core, all Americans want the same things – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Much of what they said extends beyond politics and directly applies to the work all communicators do. Just as Americans hold the same basic expectations for their country, companies' core stakeholder groups have similar expectations and needs from those companies' brands. In times of chaos or crisis, brands must rely on their core values. Authenticity, even in this era of "fake news," remains essential.

## Leverage Diverse Communities to Grow

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2020, minority children will become a majority in the United States; by 2060, only 36 percent of people under the age of 18 will be single-race Caucasian. As a result of this shift in demographics, by 2040, minorities will be the voting majority in this country – this is the new face of America, and it must be embraced. The value of providing opportunity and giving a voice to diverse voices is no longer just the right thing to do, it is necessary for success.

For years, companies have touted their so-called progress toward becoming more diverse and inclusive. Some companies are making major strides, like Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Women initiative, but overall the progress has been too slow. Companies need to embrace diversity, fast. Communicators have the unique obligation to foster a constructive dialogue on the power of inclusivity, and this is best accomplished through building communities of diverse individuals who connect through common interest.

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## CSR in Your Backyard

Ron Reese

Homelessness remains a serious social issue in the United States, affecting more than a half-million Americans on any given night. Over a fifth of this number are estimated to be children. Nearly 40,000 are veterans. More than 35,000 were unaccompanied homeless youth, who are some of the most vulnerable overall, at high risk for physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy and dropping out of school.

These numbers are startling. Homelessness is a devastating social issue impacting a large number of people, but it remains relatively unpopular as a focus for CSR programs and efforts. This is despite the fact that research shows it's actually less costly to address on the front end — providing supportive housing to homeless individuals is less expensive than relying on solutions such as shelters, emergency rooms and psychiatric hospitals.

To be sure, part of the challenge is that it's an extremely difficult problem to try to solve, and touches on an array of other complex challenges — economic stability, mental illness, substance abuse, affordable housing. This list could go on and on, and can overwhelm even the most well-intentioned of organizations seeking to make a difference.

Another challenge is that while there is homelessness in nearly all parts of the United States, it affects cities and regions differently. You may see improvement in one city, while another loses ground due to local economic conditions or other changes. For example, in its Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development looks at changes at both the state and city level, and you can see very different outcomes. It's a hard problem to tackle in aggregate — making it relevant on the very local level, but less so nationally.

But it would be a mistake for those of us in the corporate world to be dissuaded by the root difficulty of homelessness or by its very local nature. Turning the tide against these numbers will require the innovation, expertise and funding that we can contribute. But we need to be willing to become hyper-focused on a specific community and structure a multi-tiered response.

A few years ago, Las Vegas Sands made a choice to focus on this issue in our headquarters city of Las Vegas, which is disproportionately impacted by homelessness with some of the worst rates in the nation. This issue has no easy answers, but we have learned a few things along the way.

**1. Never stop learning.** Data will only go so far – it's critical to talk to the organizations working in the trenches on this issue in your community to help develop better, more effective responses and understand the factors that impact your region.

**2. Be in it for the long haul.** It's not about a one-time contribution – sustained change requires a long-term commitment. This can be the hardest step because it will likely require the buy-in from a number of internal stakeholders – creating this kind of unified consensus and support calls for a thoughtful internal communications strategy in itself, and shouldn't be overlooked.

**3. Be prepared to have a diversified response.** Just like not putting all your eggs in one basket is sound business advice – addressing homelessness needs a layered approach. Las Vegas Sands tackles this issue in three ways: 1. Provide immediate relief; 2. Find solutions for homelessness in the Las Vegas region; and 3. Increase awareness and advocate for homelessness support.

**4. Look for connections.** Las Vegas Sands was able to connect our long-term support of international nonprofit Clean the World, which focuses on distributing hygiene supplies and education, with our work on homelessness in Las Vegas. This year we jointly introduced a first-ever mobile hygiene unit in Las Vegas to provide showers and other hygiene support to the homeless population.

We hope that addressing homelessness becomes a topic that is looked at more and more among those working in CSR. Our work on this issue has been a difficult journey at times, but one that we've never regretted starting.

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*Ron Reese is Senior Vice President, Global Communications and Corporate Affairs for Las Vegas Sands Corporation, and an advisory board member of the USC Center for Public Relations.*





## Inequality in Film: A Decade of Imbalance

Dr. Stacy L. Smith and  
Dr. Katherine Pieper

The advocacy surrounding inclusion in entertainment over the last several years has brought the issue to the forefront of news and created industry pressure. Despite the noise and intensity of protest, activism and awareness have generated little real or lasting change. Our research has shown that across 900 popular movies from the last decade – including the 100 top-grossing films of 2016 – exclusion is an entrenched industry practice in Hollywood. Perhaps this is because good intentions are no substitute for expertise when it comes to fixing long-standing problems. Or, because programs that support filmmakers have focused on developing skills – particularly for women and people of color – rather than influencing hiring practices.

To truly move the needle, new and strategic solutions must be adopted. In particular, entertainment companies must find ways to address their dismal hiring and casting records when it comes to females, people of color, and the LGBT and disability communities. Over the years, we have proposed multiple ideas for companies, content creators, industry executives and consumers. These tangible solutions rely on expert knowledge to offer innovative ways to increase inclusion in entertainment.

First, companies must **set target inclusion goals** and measure their progress toward attaining them. Clearly, the adage “what gets measured gets done” does not hold true – if the bevy of reports on inclusion are any example – and companies must set out to achieve inclusion, measuring their progress along the way. Setting clear benchmarks, defining inclusion, and being transparent demonstrates that companies value stories, casting, and storytellers that reflect the audience.

Companies can **create inclusive consideration lists** that represent the diversity in the talent pipeline when hiring directors or other behind-the-scenes roles. Our previous research shows that 28 percent of narrative short film directors at top festivals worldwide are female. Thus, companies seeking to hire a director should ensure that close to 30 percent of the candidates they consider are female.

Film schools and film festivals can also set benchmarks for inclusion in enrollment. Adding diverse perspectives can foster environments for learning and development that appeal to filmmakers from various backgrounds.

Addressing inequality means **combatting explicit and implicit biases**. One way to address the lack of diversity in casting small parts and background roles is for content creators to *just add five*. The average film (based on our research) has roughly 40 speaking characters. Most of these characters are inconsequential to the plot. If writers simply added five female speaking characters to every film, it would increase yearly the percentage of female characters on screen. This new percentage, when built upon each year, will lead to equality on screen in a mere three years..

Another remedy is for A-list talent to add an **equity clause** to their contract that specifies a more equitable process for auditioning and casting on-screen talent and interviewing and hiring for behind-the-camera jobs. The clause instantiates equality from a film's inception; creates a system of checks and balances to achieve it; and develops metrics to permit a review of its success.

Lastly, consumers can advocate for change. First, by **supporting content that breaks industry trends** – films featuring females, underrepresented groups, LGBT individuals and people with disabilities. Support means buying tickets or purchasing content. It means posting or sharing on social media about upcoming films with diverse casts or content creators. For philanthropists or organizations (i.e., Lunafest, Refinery29), it means supporting diverse artists early in their careers.

Further, **shareholders can influence companies** to create inclusive content. Individuals who own stock in entertainment companies can demand transparency, accountability, and ultimately, diversity in the products corporations create and sell. Proportional representation across a story or film slate should not be viewed as a threat to profits, particularly as most characters in movies say only one word. In fact, in one study with industry decision-makers, over half of participants stated that having a gender-balanced cast would not impact a film's bottom line.

Year to year, advocates and activists clamor for greater inclusion in popular movies. Yet, that demand has gone unfulfilled. Unfortunately, until content creators and companies adopt evidence-based solutions to exclusionary hiring and casting practices, it is unlikely that anything will change. By taking inclusion seriously and acting to address it, companies, consumers and creators can ensure that entertainment moves away from a vision of the past and toward content that resembles the audience of the present.

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