

A LOOK BACK & LOOKING AHEAD

2021 IN REVIEW & PREDICTIONS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS IN 2022

As we kick off 2022, we're taking a look at some of the major highlights in trends, new developments, and bold frontiers in public relations that happened in 2021. For PR professionals, daily shifts in messaging and communications continued from 2020, reflecting an ever-shifting landscape and audience needs. Narratives surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion; crisis comms surrounding COVID protocols; and an overall refocus on more authentic content challenged brands and forced them to connect to their customer base in a way they historically had not. It opened doors for brands to reestablish who they were and what they stood for — ultimately creating a stronger foundation to look beyond the short term with the goal of achieving brand longevity.



2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

BIGGEST TRENDS

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: While DEI communications and initiatives soared in 2021, there was a notable shift to brands not just talking about it, but acting on it. From a rise in employee groups and diversity councils, to long-term plans to focus on diversity within workforces, companies that took action demonstrated the importance of authenticity.

Measurement: 2021 marked a shift in reporting from the land of awareness and nice-to-have metrics, to mission-critical business KPI needs that extended to creative campaigns and, in many cases, even drove them. PR is finally having its moment in validating earned media results and impact.

BIGGEST SURPRISES

DEI Snafus: Though there was an uptick in DEI comms, brands are still making avoidable blunders that are damaging to their reputation both in the short and long term.

Mental Health: With work-from-home mandates and continued global issues, there was a new demand for acknowledging mental health and wellness. It's finally getting the attention that it needs, and social platforms are being held more accountable for how their content affects consumers.

2022 TREND PREDICTIONS

CONTINUING TRENDS

Cyber-Security Comms: Crisis PR experts will be busier than ever with cyber-related disasters. These are unfortunately becoming so common they will infiltrate other aspects of PR programs designed to assure customers even before a disaster happens, and in the event of one, to repair the company's reputation.

Beyond Earned Media: Earned media will be harder than ever to earn. It will be incumbent on PR pros to think far beyond media relations and adopt a more integrated PESO approach. To tap into earned, podcast usage and other content will continue to increase, presenting more authentic and targeted earned opportunities.

SAY GOODBYE TO

Influencer Marketing: As it is today, it will fade. It's already losing credibility with many CMOs as consumers continue to demand authenticity and transparency. Instead, expect to see a rise of "authenticators" or genuine brand advocates that are singularly devoted to a brand and all its causes, including social justice, sustainability, fair employment, and more.

Artificial Intelligence: The days of personalization data will be extinct; there's too much mistrust among consumers, too much cybercrime, and not enough upside for consumers to risk it. Instead of personalization dictating what ads we see, artificial intelligence will identify emotions that will influence the ads we encounter.

Virtual Trade Shows: Zoom fatigue is hindering our ability to enjoy these, and the "virtual experience" often lacks anything memorable. That said, we believe there is value — when done safely — to engaging in the physical space and to get back to a place of engaging all senses of the human experience to create noteworthy moments.

ON THE HORIZON

Employer Branding: The Great Resignation has proven to be a great challenge, yet an even greater opportunity for marketers. We must market the employer as hard as we market their products/ services. This will require us to humanize employers and authenticate their values by working from the inside out. And in many instances, challenge the HR/C-suite to meet and exceed the expectations of their current workforce before we can market to new talent.

