

The role of PR in shaping a future-fit industry

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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In his closing remarks at the end of the National Prisa Conference on Thursday, Daniel Munslow, CPRP and conference chairman said public relations (PR) has to start shaping the agenda to ensure a future-fit industry. These are some of his takeaways from the talks and discussion over the two days at the Indaba Hotel in Fourways, Johannesburg...



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During the conference, it was widely acknowledged that PR is and remains the cornerstone of strategic communication, and organisations are beginning to look past the traditional 'cost centre' to see the worth of what the profession can do for their businesses, he says. Rather, they're starting to regard PR as a strategic enabler, especially when it comes to crisis communication and overall reputation management.

"The objectives have been clearly met in shaping a future-fit view of the profession," says Munslow. "It's definitely the right time to elevate the role of strategic communication in business, and that is something that we have to do to ensure that we receive and it receives the gravitas it and we deserve as leaders of reputation."

Following a recent conversation he had with a CEO, he acknowledges that many executives still struggle to see the value communication brings to the C-suite. He believes much needs to be done to litigate this view and that PR ought to be proactive in doing so. "We cannot wait for others to do it for us. True, there have been too many examples of late that have set the profession back – just think about the way recent crises locally have been handled. This is a reflection of us as an industry, and it plays into the parochial view of what PR is. We have to curb this as individuals and as a profession, and that's the role that lies ahead of us."

Taking this further, he says PR practitioners need to be the ones that set the agenda when it comes to preparing a crisis scenario. “We need to remember that how we handle crisis communication is a reflection of our profession and our ability to take on the role of strategic advisors... We have to change the role, we’ve got to stop them coming to us and we have got to start going to them,” he reiterates.

As for new, even old technologies, such as holographic design, not yet pursued locally, PR ought to be the ones communicating these to the executives and how to leverage them when it comes to integrated campaigns, for example. Again, “we need to step up to the table, not wait for an executive to come and say, ‘I found this brilliant idea during a business trip overseas’, but to say, ‘I heard it first from my communicators’. We don’t want the business to come to us, we want to go to the business.”

The rate of change in the industry is intense. He says that if you haven’t reviewed your crisis communication strategy within the last three months, it’s already out of date. But there are also wonderful opportunities, exciting opportunities, he adds.

Globally we are seeing a shift in the role communication plays. As a member of the 2017 global advisory board for the Holmes Report, Munslow reported a few of the key trends that provide evidence of the dynamics and the changes that are taking place in the industry.

He reports that 87% of PR executives globally believe the term PR won’t accurately describe the profession in 5 years’ time, and that almost half of the PR professionals included in the study project that PR will become more aligned with marketing. 77% of respondents said PR could increase its value in an organisation simply by demonstrating how PR achieves business objectives. Explaining this, he asks, “If you’re in a bank, did you improve primary banking client ratios, if you’re on an airline, did your PR directly contribute to occupancy, was the cost-benefit ratio of your campaign favourable or negative? Those are the kind of metrics we’re looking at. Not AVE (Advertising Value Equivalent) anymore, AVE is a nice number, but it’s a predictor of output, not outcome. How do we shift that thinking?”

These will fundamentally change the existing models and how PR will do business going forward.

In wrapping up the 2017 conference, Munslow says, “we cannot sit back and wait for business to ask us to live up to these trends, we have to start shaping the agenda.” He calls for a collaborative approach in taking on this responsibility, and with enthusiasm, paving the way to an exciting future that is agile enough to adapt to these developing trends and to ensure a future-fit industry.

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