



Predictions for 2018 from Worldcom Public Relations Group Partners

Every year Worldcom PR Group draws on the knowledge of its 2000 consultants to predict the environment that will face its clients in the year ahead. Inevitably, as a global partnership, many of these predictions have an international flavor. If you want to get a picture of what the communications landscape may look like in your own country, we have teams in over 115 cities around the world ready to talk to you.

We have pleasure to present our predictions for 2018, and our top 10 Communications Recommendations – in a companion document. We hope they help increase the certainty of your success in the year ahead.

Brexit

International companies will find it harder to create a 'one company' culture as the fallout from Brexit challenges how businesses are run. Those who create effective collaboration across teams and borders now will have a distinct competitive advantage.

Geo-political uncertainty

Geo-political uncertainty is creating a 'New Abnormal'. The trading stability created by globalization will be undermined by a rise in protectionism and political rifts. Each of these changes will bring huge communications challenges to organizations, both locally and internationally.

Macro scale political changes, such as Brexit, will encourage people to take much more interest in local elections. What happens in the elections in Colombia, Germany, Hungary, and South Korea will have clear ripple effects both globally and locally.



Social media regulation

There will be a movement to regulate social media advertising/paid posts as a result of the continuing storm about external influence in the U.S. elections. The debate over regulation or self-regulation will continue to erode trust in social platforms.



Fake news and the erosion of trust

Consumers will become ever more challenged about what they can trust in the media now that the 'fake news' genie is out of the bottle. This is a clear threat to media companies. But it will also create a significant targeting challenge for brands who will need to reassess which channels will be most effective at reaching their target demographics. Skepticism and lack of trust in large, established institutions -- including major news media, government entities, large corporations,

and long-standing brands -- will continue to grow. This will encourage people to seek out alternatives -- with a bias toward those that fit their preconceived views of the world. This will make stakeholder retention and loyalty among customers, investors, employees and other advocates even more challenging.

The breakdown in trust in traditional media will see a rise in alternative sources of information. This will create many new challenges for organizations. This fragmentation in media will create a new range of relationships to be developed. It will also mean brands will need to assess the quality and accuracy of information provided by these new media outlets and channels and decide if it is valuable to be associated with them.

Tweet storms

The comments made by global leaders on Twitter (and other social channels) will create tweet storms for businesses as stakeholders react to what they see and hear. This will create unexpected 'fallout' for some organizations. The implications for business success and failure could be significant unless professionally managed.

Organizations can limit potential damage by ensuring their employees fully understand the organization's Purpose and can explain this to their various audiences.





Reputation and Crisis Management

The Harvey Weinstein scandal – including Time Magazine's choice for Person of the Year, means that the behavior of every leader (male and female) will be scrutinized. There will be high expectations of ethical leadership. Organizations will need to be ready to respond effectively to all claims that are made.

THE
SILENCE
BREAKERS

THE VOICES
THAT LAUNCHED
A MOVEMENT

Innovating from within

There will be a rise in 'innovating from within' as organizations who have developed effective employee engagement programs begin to unlock the intellectual power of their workforce. Simple improvements identified by employees will deliver significant business value.

Economic Uncertainty

Global players will need flexible policies to be able to manage the wide variety of predicted growth rates - from 1% in Japan, 4% in Bulgaria and at least 10% in Peru.

The cost of money and its impact on consumer and employee habits

The generation who grew up in a period of low interest rates will be surprised by progressive rises in the cost of money. The brands who help consumers manage these challenges will prosper. Brands and consumers will look for new ways to create a valid and trusted relationship.

Increasing consumer uncertainty created by rises in interest rates will trigger a shift from buying 'things' to paying for experiences. Disruptive brands will appear and ride this trend in 'experienterism'.

The cost of money will create loyalty challenges for organizations as people try to find better paying jobs. This will move employee engagement further up the management agenda as organizations focus on giving people reasons to be loyal.



Giving employees a greater sense of purpose

2018 will see CEOs and other senior leaders focus on creating a greater sense of Purpose to inspire their people and provide a framework for better decision-making. As a result, CEOs will become a Chief Connectivity Officer, as they help people connect the dots between their day-to-day work and the goals of the organization. Employers will need to balance external uncertainty - Political unrest, Brexit, inflation rises, global warming, etc – with greater internal certainty. Business leaders will have to work hard to ensure employees understand and are aligned with the organization's Purpose - the 'why' of what they are doing - to increase certainty.

The 'culture of purpose' will go hand-in-hand with CSR initiatives. Employees will think about the social impact their everyday work has/will have. Leaders will need to connect CSR activity with the Purpose of the organization to reap the benefits and to help attract top talent.

An employee engagement 'success gap' will open up between organizations that persist with a command and control management style and those that lead through involvement.

Building relationships

Organizations will continue to build an omni-channel approach to satisfying customer expectations. This will drive increasing collaboration between the communications team and customer support staff to ensure that customers receive the best possible experience and that any issues that surface in social media are handled effectively.

The 'relations' part of Public Relations will take on increasing significance as brands switch to unlocking lifetime value from consumers rather than just generating short-lived income.

Some organizations will try and reverse the dominance of text based communication (Email, IM, Slack, Skype etc) by actively encouraging employees to use more spoken and face-to-face communication.

Continued increase in Digitalization

Digitalization is unstoppable - AI, VR, AR and chatbots will be more significant. Disruptive organizations will use this technology to get ahead. Organizations will need to explain this in their Purpose, so it is not seen as a threat by employees.



GDPR time bomb

The GDPR time bomb is ready to explode. Legislators will make examples of big brands who flout the rules. But they are also likely to go after 'softer' targets who may not have the legal muscle to protect themselves.

Data Protection Regulations – like GDPR - will drastically change marketing and communications and the way customer data is used. Those who adopt new approaches sooner, if they have not already, will fare better once the stricter new regulations come into force.

Integrated approach to content

Organizations will continue to develop an integrated approach to content – i.e. content that delivers value for sales, marketing, brand loyalty etc.

The PESO model (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned) will become more predominant than ever. It will be important for brands and their PR teams to look beyond free publicity to deliver value from content through all appropriate channels.

2018 is the year when Influencer Marketing in the B2B sector will really start to get integrated in the media mix.

**We are grateful to the following Partners for their contributions.
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If you would like to discuss these predictions or recommendations, please contact our Managing Director – Todd Lynch @ toddlynch@worldcomgroup.com