

From bananas to glue... it's PR's time



By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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"There has never, in my mind been a clearer time for PR. In the *Wizard of Oz*, everyone and thing was controlled by a small man pulling the strings and our world was like that, but today is not the case anymore. Yes, people talk about chaos, but we should be celebrating the openness and transparency of our world. I prefer to live in a transparent world where I can see what is going on and therefore I can effect change."



This is according to Michael Frohlich, EMEA CEO Ogilvy PR, who recently visited South Africa. He spoke to Bizcommunity on all things public relations.

He says it is finally PR's time. "Since I started working in public relations (PR) I have felt that working in PR is like arriving at a gun fight with a banana. It's irrelevant and useless, but so odd that it gets noticed. Twenty years later I still have the banana in my pocket, but the world has changed and I don't need an automatic weapon and sharp shooters; my banana is the weapon of choice."

Integrated brand marketing and communications

For him PR in the communications landscape is the glue. We take the core story and narrative and make it robust ad bullet proof, he says. "For a while we forgot what we are doing... and it felt like we were losing on all fronts, all fighting for the same space, but PR has found its way through the chaos to the boardroom table."

Clients have a problem and need a solution, he adds, and PR's history has given PR practitioners the ability to understand the context of the world so we can provide them with robust solutions.

The three changes that have led to this. "Firstly that world is more integrated and integrated marketing is what we trained for and what our brains are wired for," he says.

Secondly the consumer landscape has changed and consumers defer to reference, which the breakdown of trust has only accelerated. “The result is that consumers only trust people like themselves. They also only listen and care about what matters to them and are not interested in things they do not care about. PR plays in this space because it understands the world and the context of what is happening,” he explains.

The third big change is that brands are mattering less and less. Research shows that lots of people just do not care about brands, with 70% not caring if a brand disappears. For brand owners this is not only scary, but it is a business problem. So how do you get brands to matter more? he asks. “You utilise PR because PR has always been more about being authentic.”

Content: the centre of your offering

PR has been creating stories forever”, he says. “We are, unlike any other agencies and disciplines, are all about content. All that has changed is that this content is now more visual and social.”

And he says it is a skill to create that at the agility and speed our world today requires. “But PR people understand how to respond; it is what we are trained to do. “It’s the stuff that we all do. PR content and social content lives in the centre of our agency. It is fast, effective and creative work; and it is very exciting. It allows us to do things with audiences we were previously not able to.”

Key insights and trends

A key trend is that PR is finally learning to talk the language necessary. When you are invited to the table, it means you are viewed in a strategic light so talk this language he emphasises. “It is a trend we are seeing more and more as well as more strategic planners coming to PR from more traditional media and agencies and this is brilliant to see. The language of planning is the only transferable one across agencies and disciplines.”

We are becoming more data driven he says. “While this is hard for PR people it is important as while very often PR people know what is going to fly, today we are dealing with so many more media channels. And the story is always in the numbers, whether it is a PR, corporate or consumer story, the story must always have robust facts. Better measurement of data is a trend as well.”

The next trend is agility. “Our people are more generalists and problem solvers. It is a broader space.” PR also understands it is social and digitally driven and people are seeing that he adds. “Many young people also do what has taken us centuries to master, without thinking about it because of social and digital.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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