

Back to basics communications engagement

 By [Keri-Ann Stanton](#)

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"Be careful which space you choose to play in."

Q: Your 'game changer' trend in 2014?

A: Growing brand belief. Not spin-doctoring. Not launching then disappearing. Not campaigning then falling off the radar. The core of public RELATIONS is developing meaningful, relevant, sustainable relationships with media, influencers and consumers. Relationships that will see you through the bad times, as well as the good times.

Q: What do you hope to see less of going into a New Year?

A: Badly handled reputation management scenarios: from corporate investor relations level to consumer. Yes, the consumer has become more and more powerful, but equally, that does not mean that brands need to be at their mercy, especially when there is misinformation and plain bullying involved. What is needed is communication - quality communication.

Q: What do you hope to see more of in 2015?

A: Great content across the correct platforms that shows that brands and corporates themselves have realised and acknowledged that their consumers and influencers and stakeholders live in more than one place, and need more than one message.

Q: What advice do you have for your peers for the next year?

A: PR has asked for a seat at the table. Now prove your worth as communication specialists.

Q: What would you like to tell your clients?

A: The word 'campaign' does not belong in PR. Where is your stakeholder engagement plan? What is your communication vision for your company and brand? A campaign is just one tab on that plan.

Q: Your most significant industry trends for 2015?

A:

- *Writing* - we need a return to good, clear, concise writing. Sad that this is noted as a trend, but Twitter didn't help us, and the myriad of bad press releases haven't helped. Ironically, Instagram is showing us the way back to good storytelling via great copy accompanied by visuals.
- *Engagement* versus influence versus manipulation. It's called public RELATIONS for a reason - be careful which space you choose to play in.

- The return to the *stakeholder plan* - there cannot be one message across one medium, we know that. But there also cannot be just one message across a stakeholder plan, there are segments within segments: right down to employees who have been with a company for 20 years versus employees who have been there for only six months.
 - The *rise of EQ over IQ*: if you are in communications (at board level or at brand manager level) and you can't read a situation or pick up on the unsaid, IQ will not save you.
 - *Actions* are where it is at. It is no longer about what you say or how you say it, but about what you do. Leadership that sits behind a desk and is too terrified to engage with their fans (or their foes) are doing themselves out of so many learnings
 - *Time to think*. Clients, suppliers, peers who send emails followed up by a call, do no one a favour. We ALL need to become clearer about what is important versus what is urgent.
 - *Integration* no longer belongs just in an agency or agencies collaborating on a brand or a solution, it belongs in the company/corporate itself - integrating across corporate, product / services and employees.
 - We have seen the effects of the *new switching economy* - brand loyalty is nowhere and nothing any more, and that will only be exacerbated by the rise of the Millennials who have seen what recessions have done. The challenge is to try turn the tide, or how to play in a non-brand-loyal space.
 - "The *best stories* come from the people you are trying to reach..." we really do need to get back in touch with the man on the street.
 - More PR teams will add *designers and videographers* to their team: it is becoming necessary to be able to develop content on the go, reactively and proactively, just as one would issue an urgent media statement.
- In a nutshell, the industry does not need a saviour, a new platform, new tools - it simply needs to go *back to basics*.

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