

The five must-have skills for the PR pro of the future

 By [Andre Fourie](#)

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It's clear that marketing and brand professionals who don't evolve won't last. Darwin's laws are in hyperspeed. You have to move fast to adapt - dragging your feet is a one-way ticket to irrelevance.

There's also the question of whether you should pursue a specialist or generalist career path. Not too long ago it felt that we were facing the extinction of the generalist, but it seems that we've taken a step back again. Now it looks like there's room for both specialist and generalist skills.

An important part of my day-to-day work duties is to build a team that is able to match the challenges we as an agency will face, not just now but in the future.

The qualities and skills I look for include:

Excellent storytelling skills

It doesn't matter if you are a digital specialist, client service exec, strategist or media pitching king/queen, you need to have the ability to tell a compelling story. Yes, not everyone can be a great writer. We will always rely on a talented few to generate the heftier pieces of content, such as thought leadership articles. But by golly you need the ability to draw people in - whether they're journalists, clients or audience segments - through cleverly constructed stories that are memorable and on-message.

Creativity

When The Holmes Report released its 'Creativity in PR' report, it highlighted an alarming fact: clients want their PR agency to be more creative, but very few actually experience any considerable degree of creativity from their PR partners. We have always needed a measure of creativity to develop compelling pitches, repackage content for different media, solve tricky client service issues, and create interesting events.



Image via Pxabay

Now that the competition for the attention of customers is so great, we need to place a much greater emphasis on creativity. We are already seeing larger agencies employ 'PR Creative Directors'; smaller agencies will have to build creative capacity

in-house if they want to remain competitive.

Specialisation

The last few years saw a strong focus on specialist skills within PR. PR agencies experienced massive changes in the way they conducted campaigns, largely thanks to the new breed of digital-first PR tools available today. Having specialists on board enabled agencies to adapt to new ways of working, especially in light of the fact that the traditional agency model is fast disappearing.

The PR professional of the future will have depth of knowledge and experience in specific PR disciplines, and will likely work across broad client bases to provide strategic input on campaigns.

Generalisation

The focus on specialisation doesn't mean the generalist is obsolete. While it's very nice to have specialist skills, it makes it very difficult to plan ahead and allocate resources effectively when you have staff with such specific skills. Generalists also have the advantage of bringing a big-picture view to client and campaign issues. While specialists are increasingly in vogue, PR practitioners that have taken a more generalist approach to their career development should not be discouraged.

Entrepreneurship

Market volatility and increasing competition for clients means more and more pressure on agencies to work smartly with their staff. It's attractive to fill the office with superstar specialists and great generalists. However, the loss of even one client can force agencies to retrench staff, which really knocks morale. One way around this is to employ freelancers who can join the agency on a freelance basis to drive specific campaigns or solve key issues.

PR professionals need to learn basic business skills to ensure they can capitalise on exciting freelance projects. This also has the knock-on effect of giving PR pros a better understanding of the perilous world of entrepreneurship, which can only benefit their clients in the long run.

ABOUT ANDRE FOURIE

Andre Fourie has worked in the field of public relations and strategic communications for the past ten years, managing the strategy formulation and campaign implementation for clients in the ICT, leisure, government, political, academic and business sectors. He is the founder of South Africa's first on-demand strategic communications consulting firm, Fury Strategic.

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