



PR's Power Players Share their Vision

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The collected wit and wisdom of the 270 individuals in PRWeek's Global Power Book provide some significant indicators for the future of the industry.

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Combined predictions of Global Power Book respondents are well worth analyzing.

As we digest the contents of PRWeek's annual Power List, which was unveiled this week, it's worth revisiting our Global Power Book to uncover the thoughts of top PR pros from all around the world.

Produced in questionnaire format, the Global Power Book lifts the lid on issues ranging from fake news, the last 12 months, professional ambitions, the geopolitical climate, the gender pay gap, and favorite campaign, through to most influential PR pro and favorite film about the discipline.

One of the biggest bellwethers for the industry moving forward was the question about whether PR would exist as a separate profession in five years' time, or whether it will merge into marketing or UX.

Michele Anderson, group MD/influence and PR domain lead at Ogilvy, said: "The lines between marketing disciplines will continue to blur. Our clients will also be under pressure as corporate structures reorganize, forcing greater collaboration and a focus on all things digital.

"CMTOs will be the new rulers of marketing as they blend technology and creativity to reach audiences in new and exciting ways – PR will always exist as a separate profession but convergence will change our industry structure and our definition."



Fellow WPP executive Don Baer, CEO and worldwide chair at Burson-Marsteller, said: "No matter how much change we see in the world, there is no substitute for the professional judgement, insightful ideas with impact and creative content that, at our best, no other field can provide as well."

Whereas Weber Shandwick president Gail Heimann opined: "In five years' time we won't spend so much time thinking about PR, marketing, and various separate disciplines. We'll be thinking: 'How can I inspire, inform, motivate and engage people around something they care about? How can we address the most important issues and solve the biggest problems?'"

"The conversation will be: 'Who has the extraordinary, diverse thinkers who will develop the right vision and the best approaches for getting that done.'"

Others were more unequivocal about PR's impending convergence with marketing. "I've always seen public relations as an element of marketing, so it would be my hope that the disciplines merge, making integrated marketing easier," said Karen Strauss, global chief strategy and creative officer at Ketchum.

Lisa Caputo, EVP, chief marketing & communications officer at The Travelers Companies, agreed, maybe unsurprisingly given her job title: "PR is already being merged with, or into, marketing as is UX in many companies."

Well-known soothsayer Marian Salzman, CEO of Havas PR US, predicted that PR will go in another direction: "I see us merged with the media companies not with UX (too specialized) or marketing (too general). Earned media will have a savvy, sassy role in media agencies."

On the client side, Chevron's VP of public affairs Dave Samson had an interesting take: "The gravitational pull between marketing, communications and, increasingly, policy will continue over the coming years. They are all part of a stakeholder engagement/communications ecosystem. What function is the engine on the train will depend on the company and their business circumstances. What is clear is that smart companies will take full advantage of all these assets to drive more favorable business outcomes."

Cohn & Wolfe CEO Donna Imperato was typically forthright – "It will be merged into the marketing mix" – as was her former deputy Jim Joseph, now flown the coop to Citizen Relations: "Oh yes, it will merge – and it won't even take five years."

Elsewhere in WPP, newly minted US CEO at Hill+Knowlton Strategies Alex Jutkovitz took a typically contrarian view: "The reverse is true - marketing and user experience will come to resemble PR. What we do is tell stories. It doesn't much matter if we tell them in computer code, slogans, or in the strategies we devise or clarify for our clients."

Meanwhile, in typically Gallic fashion, Guillaume Herbet, CEO of MSLGroup, looked beyond the navel-gazing and said: "I really don't think it matters."

On a slightly less serious note, we asked the Global Power Book respondents who was the most influential PR pro in the world.

Everyone, or nearly everyone, was on message at Edelman Towers. "Richard Edelman," said global COO Matt Harrington and Barby Siegel, CEO of Daniel J. Edelman subsidiary Zeno. Even Richard Edelman said "Richard Edelman."

Global chair of creative strategy Jackie Cooper dodged that question, while Ben Boyd, president, practices, sectors, and offerings, noted the Edelman Trust Barometer indicated "A person like me," was most influential.

Outgoing Edelman APACMEA CEO David Brain chose Donald Trump... though he did agree with his former boss in that they both described the previous 12 months as being defined by "the rise of populism." One of Edelman's chief competitors for the "most influential title," White House press secretary Sean Spicer, simply summed up the past year in four words: "Busy busy busy busy."

Brain's ambition for the next 12 months? "To get some rest and move on to something new."

Over at Weber Shandwick, there seems to be something of a religious conversion going on, as CEO Andy Polansky, president Gail Heimann, chief reputation strategist Leslie Gaines-Ross, and North America president Sara Gavin all referenced the Pope in answer to the most influential question.

Over at WPP, Ogilvy EMEA CEO Michael Frohlich chose Martin Sorrell, while Hill+Knowlton Strategies' EMEA chairman and CEO Lars Erik Gronntun opted for Donna Imperato.

Ketchum president Barri Rafferty said rather forlornly: "I wish one quickly came to mind."

Looking forward, Global Power Bookers had various perspectives on what's in store over the next 12 months.

Former Starbucks comms lead Corey duBrowa, now plying his trade at Salesforce, emphasized: "The bank shot. You make a move, someone or something responds to that move, the most important move is what comes after that."

Havas' Salzman foresees: "Pay for play content and context. Amplification will be the new normal, that is, earn it and boost it."

And Cohn & Wolfe's Imperato anticipates: "Further growth of integrated communications and diminishing demand for traditional PR."

There are hundreds more of these insights contained within the Global Power Book 2017 and I heartily recommend close study of it if you are interested in the trends and opinions shaping the fast-changing communications sector.

But let's leave the last word to Ogilvy's Anderson: "Technology will change the way we express our craft, but our biggest assets remain: the value of a good story and how that story plays out for multiple audiences and channels.

"We understand the broader context and the real-time, 24/7 news cycle. We understand how important context is to a good idea, but we also understand the fragility of reputations. Our role will always be essential."