



# What lies ahead

Faced with so many demands on their time, it can be hard for PR and marketing professionals to stay on top of all the things they must be doing, and the issues they should engage with.

To help, the Henley Group has identified five trends that all business-to-business (B2B) PR and marketing professionals must consider if their activity in 2024 is to yield results.

Many of these trends relate to the emergence of technologies that, while still in their infancy, may transform PR and marketing practice in the longer term.

Yet even in their current, underdeveloped forms they present challenges to marketers – not only in terms of how they use the technology, but also how its wider deployment by their organisations will change the relationships they have with customers.

Read on to understand the issues that will affect PR and marketing success in 2024, and find out why you need to align your marketing strategy accordingly.



## 1

### Data oils the mechanics of PR and marketing

It is often said that ‘data is the new oil’, given its value. Perhaps, but it is certainly true that data is increasingly used to lubricate B2B PR and marketing, as the information that underpins campaign activity has become easier to access and analyse. In 2024, data will gain an even more prominent role as more PR and marketing professionals discover its worth.

That’s because the value it provides, is indeed, considerable. Harnessing data allows marketers to better understand customer behaviours, preferences and market trends, and develop more targeted marketing and PR strategies. Content can be created to resonate more effectively with target audiences, and this content can be personalised to a degree unimaginable only a few years ago. This leads to better customer experiences and builds loyalty to a brand – an increasingly important consideration for B2B organisations.

Meanwhile, data gives PR professionals better visibility on what types of press story work, and with which types of media - allowing them to create tailored PR campaigns, and to measure their impact on brand awareness. Finally, PR professionals are increasingly employing tools to sift through masses of data such as media coverage, brand sentiment and social media activity to quickly identify issues or potential crises and provide rapid response and damage control around real, not perceived, threats.

Perhaps most importantly, analysing the data available to them also allows marketers to measure the success of campaigns more accurately. In 2024, no-one should lack access to engagement and conversion rates, or be unable to establish ROI on an individual campaign level.

# 2

## AI presents an unexpected communications challenge

It was hard to avoid mentions of generative AI in 2023, on the back of the wider availability of Open AI's text-based ChatGPT and the further development of imaging tools such as DALL-E and Midjourney. On the back of this, there was much debate over the likely impact of AI, and generative AI in particular, on professional occupations - PR and marketing included - with many pointing to the apparent ability of ChatGPT to create blogs and social media copy in seconds on the back of a simple prompt.

While automation does indeed offer benefits to time-pressed marketing teams, research at Henley suggests that generative AI is currently unable to offer a viable alternative to thoroughly researched, well-written copy that truly supports client messages.

For businesses to truly connect with their customers, they must know who they are talking to, what their audience wants to know, and where they can access that information. AI is fast, and can be convincing - but nothing compares to high quality communication that is authentic to a brand, and in tune with the challenges of its audience.

What's more, the very real fear of plagiarism as well as inaccuracy resulting from 'hallucinations' in text created by generative AI has rightly put most brands off its wider adoption. Once AI has been trained on more refined, client-specific data sets, the results might be interesting, but even then, AI should be seen as a co-pilot, not autopilot. It will be most useful when augmenting the PR and marketing function, not replacing it.

So while the jury is still out on the use of generative AI to support PR and marketing functions, professionals need to more urgently consider how AI is being used to support wider processes across their organisations instead. Whether AI is behind loan application decisions, manufacturing processes, supply chain management or customer acquisition, marketers and communications professionals need to be prepared for searching questions from customers about how 'their' data is used, and how AI is processing it. This line of questioning will only become more persistent in 2024.



# 3

## Maintaining a brand reputation is getting harder

Concerns about the invasive role of technology in the workplace, on the high street or on our smartphones were first aired by consumers, but are now encountered in the B2B environment. More than a 'box ticking' exercise, Procurement Managers are taking an interest in how prospective partners and existing suppliers employ AI, manage and store their data and use technology in a responsible way. At the same time, they want to know how their suppliers are pursuing sustainable growth, reducing emissions and giving back to society.

It's a tall order for most brands, and they are under increasing scrutiny to 'do the right thing' at a time when cold economic winds continue to bite, geopolitical pressures squeeze supply chains, and managers are under pressure to deliver in a tough business climate.

What's more, 2024 sees the introduction of greater environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting requirements for businesses across the EU, through the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). The legislation applies to all large companies, whether publicly listed or not, includes listed SMEs, and only excludes micro-enterprises. Nearly 50,000 companies will be subject to these reporting requirements and UK businesses will be affected if they have significant operations, operate a subsidiary or are listed in the EU, or even have partners or supply chains that are integrated with EU-based companies.

So, whether they are under closer scrutiny for their use of AI or how they handle customer data, or required to report their ESG achievements, brands can expect to find themselves under the spotlight in 2024. A clear communications strategy to manage this greater attention is therefore essential.

# 4

## Less is more for your overwhelmed audiences

The principle of 'less is more' is gaining currency in B2B PR and marketing practice due to the overwhelming amount of content to which customers and prospects are exposed.

Like consumers, B2B customers have limited attention spans. Bombarded by an overload of marketing content, it's now more true than ever that concise and impactful messages stand a better chance of capturing and retaining attention. Indeed, in a sea of content, quality will stand out. High-quality, thoughtful content that adds real value is more likely to be noticed and acted upon.

To break through the noise, marketers must ask themselves questions about what qualifies as the 'right' content. Does it address the customer's challenges? Must it be practical, or educational?

In 2024, it will pay to think harder about the format of content and how and where it will be published. Keeping it clear and concise will be essential, but so is the message being imparted if it is to cut through the noise.

One benefit of adopting a 'less is more' approach concerns the allocation of resources. At a time when budgets are being squeezed and headcounts reduced, creating less but more effective content is more resource-efficient and allows for more time and effort to be spent on research, strategy, and production quality, rather than constant output.



# 5

## The continuing shift to content that's easy to share

Once viewed as a homogenous mass, B2B audiences are increasingly diverse. As a result, how and where they access information is changing. Those who pick up a magazine expect to see longer form articles or interviews, but customers accessing their content via social media or blogs will likely have little time to read them - in the case of the latter, perhaps as little as a couple of minutes.

On this basis, video will continue to be a key tool for B2B marketers. Created as motion graphics they are ideal for use on social media such as LinkedIn, and work best when highlighting a particular customer application or use case, or address a single issue or theme. Supported by social media posts and blogs on the same subject, sales people are fond of these videos because they are easy to repost and share with contacts, and send to prospects to follow up on calls or events.

In many B2B sectors, eBooks are still effective forms of content, particularly if they address topical industry trends or present bespoke research. Increasingly, case studies are weaved into these eBooks to offer solutions to any challenges outlined.


We have seen greater interest among the trade and business media for PR content that talks to issues and provides guidance on industry trends. Whether guest blogs, short opinion pieces or, where the subject merits it, detailed technical articles, these provide a powerful counterweight to product news announcements.

On the basis that this higher-value PR and marketing content shares insightful opinions on topical issues, it serves to elevate a brand from its competition and establish real thought leadership.



To ensure your PR and marketing is working as hard as it can, contact the Henley Group on [hello@henley.co.uk](mailto:hello@henley.co.uk) or +44 1491 570 971

Market House  
33 Market Place  
Henley on Thames  
Oxon  
RG9 2AA  
UK  
  
Tel: 01491 570 970  
Fax: 01491 575 327  
Email: [hello@henley.co.uk](mailto:hello@henley.co.uk)  
Website: [www.henley.co.uk](http://www.henley.co.uk)

 @Henley\_Group

 The Henley Group International

Henley Group International, The Henley Group, HGI, Henley Advertising, Henley Special Events and Henley Public Relations are trading names of the Henley Group International Ltd. Registered in England number 5810119 VAT No. 945 6035 15 Registered Office: Market House, 33 Market Place, Henley on Thames, Oxon, RG9 2AA, UK  
© The Henley Group International Ltd 2024

Strategic  
Consulting

Corporate  
Communications

Public  
Relations

Content  
Marketing

Advertising

Special  
Events