

COLUMNS

## Top 5 themes to watch next year in public relations

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*Andrew King*

By **Andrew King**

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Coming off one of the most disruptive years in history, public relations practitioners will find a business environment that has been forever changed once they return to work on New Year's Day.

From the on-again-off-again nature of the COVID-19 recovery to the unrelenting advancements in technology, many new themes will emerge in the worlds of business-to-business and business-to-consumer PR and marketing communications. Here are five to consider as we turn the page on 2021 and say "hello" to 2022:

**Digital nomads.** With the spread of vaccines, the loosening of restrictions and a general eagerness to get back to something resembling "normal," 2022 will likely be the closest we get to the vaunted "before times," when most of the world was blissfully unaware of what living through a pandemic was like.

Still, while some aspects of life will largely return to normal, COVID-19 has left an indelible mark on everyday business, including where and how we work.

Top companies such as Microsoft, Google, PwC, Facebook and many others have all embraced a permanent remote work policy, opening the door for employees to live anywhere in the world without disrupting their daily routine.

The "digital nomad," once little more than a thought experiment for bleeding-edge firms, now seems poised to become the new normal.

While there are many things to be said for meeting in person, shaking hands and sharing meals when it comes to business development, most aspects of daily PR work can be and already are, in many cases handled remotely.

The gig economy has also risen to further prominence within the industry, providing an ideal outlet for service-related minutiae among firms and hastening digitization all the while.

Moving into 2022, PR agencies that embrace digital nomads when hiring will see their candidate pools explode into veritable oceans.

When location is removed as a requirement, agencies will be free to hire the best and brightest, prioritizing talent

above all else.

This approach is not suited for every job.

Incorporating digital nomads will require careful assessment of what positions will be best suited to remote work. But agencies that make thoughtful use of digital nomads when staffing up next year will be positioned to see capabilities reach new heights.

Artificial intelligence in PR. Jobs are becoming even more reliant on artificial intelligence to conduct business, and PR is no exception.

AI has impacted the PR profession in many ways with tech that can now automate repetitive PR tasks such as media monitoring, improve accuracy when drafting communications deliverables with software such as [Grammarly](#) and [HelloScribe](#), and help better assess sentiment among a brand's target audiences.

Although many PR professionals are not as versed in how AI is already impacting the field, many more will see how AI is improving how we deliver results for our clients daily in 2022 as these software solutions become more advanced and become more widely adopted by communications practitioners.

Another application of AI in PR is how it will continue to shape and improve the metaverse and how PR teams will leverage these new, virtual worlds when ideating new strategies for the brands they represent.

As the metaverse starts to become more mainstream, we will see brands use the metaverse for special virtual experiences to reach their most tech-savvy customers. Think virtual conferences where guests log on to the metaverse and attend events in the form of their avatars for life-like meet-and-greets, trade shows, concerts and private shopping events.

Brands [are already buying land in 3D virtual reality worlds](#), such as [Decentraland](#), and are constructing buildings and plazas where customers can shop and experience their brand in new ways.

With this new evolution of the Internet will come new channels for brands to connect with their audiences, and we will see this space grow as AI tech advances to affect how we experience the metaverse and more companies get on board.

Keeping it simple. With the world growing more complicated by the day, it is easy to lose the people who brands are trying to reach.

Attention spans and anxiety levels are being stretched, but the most basic and effective form of communication is also the most overlooked. That is why one of the most important trends in PR for 2022 will be to simplify a brand message.

As more people consume news in a personalized way, through digital online media, it is more important than ever to have a quick and concise message to explain what your company does and why it is beneficial to your target customer.

This simplified brand message will then be more easily shared across all the marketing programs, from PR to social to content and digital ads.

Often brands become long-winded about the value-add language and it is the wrong approach. PR agencies can help shorten the story and simplify what it is they do and why it matters.

Live events. The return of live events has been a long time coming. This past year was marked by fits and starts in this area with many professional organizations opting for virtual or hybrid approaches to their gatherings to protect everyone from COVID-19.

As we turn the page on the calendar, the pandemic seems to be under enough control between the vaccines, boosters and rapid-testing programs that not only is there light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel but we seem to be approaching it rather quickly.

In-person business events long a standard in the arsenal for marketing companies are one of the top trends that is poised to return in a big way.

From trade shows and industry conventions to award ceremonies and networking functions, there are many types of live events that marketers can use to get the word out about their clients and forge partnerships face to face.

Sponsorships and in-venue display promotions are other tools that can be leveraged with a captive audience.

Kicking off the year is the returning champion of trade shows: the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) Jan. 5-8 at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas.

Expect a flurry of opportunities to follow and continue through the year as businesses readapt to travel and recall the value of personal relationships.

PR with a purpose. In 2020 many brands were put under a magnifying glass for dated policies, lacking diversity and inclusion programs, and non-existent stances or involvement on national social issues.

In 2021, companies updated their policies, revamped their DE&I programs, took largely public stances on social injustices and promised to do better.

In 2022 brands will largely emphasize their mission-based efforts across their PR messaging.

From a branding perspective, companies will need to show accountability and prove they are acting on the changes they promised to make in 2021.

PR efforts will be largely focused from a corporate standpoint on consistent philanthropic involvement and staying socially aware and involved.

Conscious consumers will be listening to legacy brands to see if they are walking the talk and following through on do-better initiatives.

*Andrew King is director of public relations for [Bastion Elevate](#), a Costa Mesa, CA-based full-service marketing agency. Reach him at [andrew@bastionelevate.com](mailto:andrew@bastionelevate.com).*

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