

Sphelele Mjadu - The rise of data-driven PR, a shift from intuition



By [Sphelele Mjadu](#)

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In the ever-evolving world of public relations, 2024 marks a significant shift in strategy and approach, as highlighted by the latest trends presented by Defined PR.



This year, the industry sees a transformation from traditional methods to more innovative and data-driven approaches, focusing on building trust, engaging through authentic influencers, interactive content, and integrating artificial intelligence (AI) in PR practices.

Data-Driven PR: Beyond Intuition

The first notable trend is the shift towards data-driven PR. Traditionally, PR strategies relied heavily on intuition and experience. However, with the advent of big data and advanced analytics, PR professionals are now equipped to make more informed decisions. By analysing data patterns, consumer behaviours, and media trends, PR strategies become not just reactive but predictive.

For instance, a South African telecom company recently used social media analytics to understand customer sentiments, leading to a highly successful targeted campaign. This shift signifies a more progressive and scientifically grounded approach in public relations.



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Building Trust: The Core of PR

Another crucial trend is the emphasis on trust. In a world of misinformation and scepticism, PR professionals are tasked with not only disseminating information but also building and maintaining trust. Transparency, honesty, and consistency are key in this regard. A case in point is a recent campaign by a leading South African bank, which focused on transparent communication regarding their cybersecurity measures, significantly enhancing customer trust.

Authentic Influencer Marketing: Redefining Influence

Gone are the days of mere celebrity endorsements. 2024 sees the rise of authentic influencer marketing. This approach involves partnering with influencers who have a genuine connection with their audience, ensuring that the endorsements are credible and relatable. An example of this is a local fashion brand collaborating with a popular South African lifestyle blogger, resulting in an authentic and effective marketing campaign. This trend challenges the traditional influencer sponsorship model and underscores the importance of authenticity in influence.

Interactive Content: Engaging More Deeply

Interactive content is also making its mark in 2024. Polls, quizzes, and live Q&A sessions are not just tools for engagement but also for gathering valuable consumer insights. This trend is about creating a two-way conversation, making PR more about dialogue than monologue. For instance, a recent health awareness campaign in South Africa utilised interactive quizzes on social media, leading to greater engagement and awareness.

The Rise of AI in PR

Lastly, the integration of AI in PR practices is a game-changer. AI technologies are being used to automate routine tasks, analyse large data sets, and even predict media trends. This not only makes PR processes more efficient but also more effective in targeting and messaging. A notable example is the use of AI-driven analytics by a South African tourism board to identify potential markets and customise their PR campaigns accordingly.

Debate and Implications

While these trends indicate a progressive shift in the PR industry, they also bring forth debates and challenges. For instance, the reliance on data and AI raises questions about privacy and the ethical use of information. Similarly, while authentic influencer marketing is celebrated for its genuineness, there is a thin line between authentic endorsements and covert advertising.

Furthermore, interactive content, while engaging, requires a delicate balance to avoid overwhelming the audience. These debates are crucial for the responsible evolution of PR practices.

It's not just about adopting new technologies or strategies; they represent a fundamental shift in the way public relations interacts with its audience. From a data-driven approach, focus on trust, authentic influencer marketing, interactive content, to the use of AI, these trends indicate a more sophisticated, ethical, and effective way of communication in PR.

As the industry adapts to these changes, it is essential to navigate these trends with a keen understanding of their implications and potential. The future of PR is here, and it promises to be more dynamic, interactive, and impactful than ever.

ABOUT SPHELELE MJADU

Mjadu is the founder and managing director of defined PR and has more than 15 years experience as a public relations strategist. She has a strong history of working in the consumer goods/ beauty industry, including Unilever and Estée Lauder. She is skilled in PR strategy development, influencer & digital marketing, event planning, event management, marketing, and internal communications.

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