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## PREDICTIONS

# From Increased Technology to More Humanity, 17 PR Leaders Look to 2018, Reflect on 2017

As **Aflac's** chief brand and communications officer Catherine Hernandez-Blades says: Nobody could have predicted the Trump Effect on our industry one year ago. Yet 17 courageous PR and marketing leaders are here to prognosticate about 2018 and reflect on 2017's lessons. Several needs run through this article, including the need for communicators to do better work as audiences become more sophisticated; the need for PR pros to keep up with technology; and the need for brands to reflect the moral attitudes of their audiences.



*Roger Bolton, President, Arthur W. Page Society*

**Prediction for 2018:** The role of the CCO will continue to increase in stature and value in response to the growing need to find common ground during a time of polarizing tribalism and strife. CCOs will help enterprises listen to stakeholders and communicate their commitment to working with people of good faith to build societal value. Within the C-suite, the importance of collaboration will continue to increase, putting a premium on the contribution of CCOs who know how to build alliances and align colleagues around common goals and values.

**Lesson from 2017:** From Sebastian Junger, author of *Tribes*, I learned tribalism was naturally selected in ancient hunter-gatherer times. The sense of belonging we get from sacrificing for our tribe is positive, but the need to demonize a common enemy is destructive. Our challenge is to enhance the former without triggering the latter.



*Andrew Bowins, Executive Director, Corporate Reputation and Digital Engagement, KPMG LLP*

**Prediction for 2018:** The communicator is dead, long live the communicator. 2018 will usher in a new era for the profession requiring pros to match savvy communications and reputation management skills with new skill sets that may be foreign to the traditionalists. Skillsets in coding, data and analytics, omni-channel management and paid branded content will need to become part of the toolkit. PR 101 still applies, but a digital retrofit is needed to drive the profession forward.

**Lesson from 2017:** Content is king but content without purpose is noise. 2017 was an era of content pollution; people tuned out and no longer trust what they're reading. Time to get back to the basics and create meaningful content that resonates with a defined audience and moves people to act. Less is more and third-party advocacy from earned media will rise to the top of the funnel.



*Ally Bunin, VP, Employee Engagement & Internal Communications, Brighton Health Plan Solutions*

**Prediction for 2018:** Internal Communications will be renamed Employee Communications because there's no longer a wall between internal and external messaging. Whatever gets distributed internally is fair game to be shared on social

*Continued on page 2*



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## UPCOMING EVENTS AND WEBINARS

**WEBINAR: HOW  
TO BUILD A PR  
MEASUREMENT  
CENTER**

**DECEMBER 21, 2017**  
 1:30-3:00 PM ET

**TOP WOMEN IN PR  
AWARDS LUNCHEON**  
**JANUARY 23, 2018**  
 NEW YORK CITY

**SPRING AWARDS  
LUNCHEON (HONORING  
THE CSR AND  
NONPROFIT AWARDS)**  
**MARCH 20, 2018**  
 NEW YORK CITY

Continued from page 1

# FTC Will Whack Major Influencer in '18

media or discussed broadly with anyone at any time. The firewall has burned down and there's no going back.

**Lesson from 2017:** In employee communications, content is not king, context is. You win when you blend them seamlessly.



*David Chamberlin, SVP & CCO,  
PNC Financial  
Services Group*

**Prediction for 2018:** Predicting is difficult but my hope is that CCOs and their teams will begin to dive more deeply into data and metrics that are available to them and leverage it to better serve their companies. Those metrics are a key part of the puzzle and can help better position them as businesspeople and also allow them to be more strategic communicators.

**Lesson from 2017:** Our jobs involve numerous stakeholders with very diverse opinions. You're never going to please everyone 100% of the time. **UCLA** coach John Wooden said, "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is who you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." If you focus on character, your reputation will take care of itself.



*Steve Cody, Co-Founder, CEO,  
Peppercomm*

**Prediction for 2018:** Owing to the plethora of daily societal crises, PR will assume an even more important role within the C-suite. Every organization is vulnerable to tweets, fake news and is expected by employees to take a firm, public stance on important issues. **Patagonia** and the **Utah National Parks** is a great example. CCOs *must* throw out their old crisis playbooks. They need to identify vulnerabilities and understand supply chain issues, develop approved messaging in advance and prepare to respond in a manner that reinforces corporate purpose. Many PR pros have yet to adopt best practices for avoiding image, sales and stock price implications.

**Lesson from 2017:** The industry lost sight of reality. The correction in 2018 will be less giddiness about digital and big data and more focus on solving business problems. It's not about AI,

AR or digital...it's about generating sales and helping improve a company's bottomline. Sometimes billboards are the best ROI for a product, according to a recent British survey.



*Paula Davis, SVP, Corporate Affairs  
& Communications/Chief of Staff to  
the CEO, HARMAN*

**Prediction for 2018:** We will see communicators becoming BFFs with their HR counterparts to engage future candidates earlier in their education, careers and searches and to more effectively connect with and tell the story of a company's purpose, people and culture. It's a buyer's market, especially in tech. Skilled workers face limitless opportunities. PR will need to play a more substantial and leading role in helping companies recruit and retain top talent.

**Lesson from 2017:** Communicators are benefitting from a consistent reinforcement of their organization's values, culture and leadership. Consistency and transparency in policies and protocols also help reduce controversies that can rise from divergent perspectives. Rather than being the single voice or gatekeeper, effective communications pros are empowering and equipping a variety of thought leaders and leveraging a mix of rich, easy-to-digest digital communications to engage key audiences and earn trust and equity.



*Allison Fitzpatrick, Partner, Davis &  
Gilbert, LLP*

**Prediction for 2018:** In September, the **FTC** sent warning letters to 21 influencers, including Sophia Vergara, Lindsey Lohan and Naomi Campbell, alleging they failed to disclose material connections in their sponsored **Instagram** posts. In 2018, the FTC will bring a formal enforcement action against a major celebrity for violating the *FTC Endorsement Guides*—whether it is brought against one of the influencers mentioned above or a Kardashian. The FTC has been moving in this direction for some time. 2018 will be the year it formally charges a well-known celebrity influencer for violating the Endorsement Guides.

**Lesson from 2017:** Being transparent about your paid sponsorships is not only the right thing

to do, but it will keep you out of legal hot water, whether you are an influencer, a marketer, a publisher or a social media platform. When making disclosures, avoid relying on a platform's built-in tools, as the FTC has advised most of these tools provide inadequate disclosures.



*Erin Fior, Senior Director of Digital Communications, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, National Office*

**Prediction for 2018:** With so much content being created, organizations will shift creative budgets to ideation, editing and promotion, doubling down on investment in user-generated content and influencer marketing opportunities.

**Lesson from 2017:** Audience segmentation and content personalization is ever more critical to driving action and increasing engagement in a crowded and competitive landscape.



*Dave Guarino, VP, Global Head of External Communications, S&P Global*

**Prediction for 2018:** We're going to see a greater emphasis placed by communicators on preparation for and response to cyber security issues and intrusions. At the corporate communications level, we're also going to see greater internal coordination between communicators and government affairs teams given the media's increasing focus on political issues.

**Lesson from 2017:** Technology didn't slow down. Communicators needed to make a commitment to growing their technology acumen to stay ahead of competitors, predict trends and news stories and more effectively engage with key stakeholders and clients.



*Catherine Hernandez-Blades  
Chief Brand and Communications Officer, Aflac*

**Prediction for 2018:** At this time last year, it would have been impossible to predict the "Trump Effect" on our industry. Yet, here we are. In 2018, I think #MeToo will inspire more movements. Unfortunately, people will still behave badly. Due to many of the tools we use as professional communicators, like social media, for example,

we'll have access to much more information at unprecedented speed, so they won't get away with it as much, hopefully.

**Lessons from 2017:** Three lessons: pundits are prolific, but they should not call themselves journalists; the half-life of technology continues to be crushing; and doing good because it's the right thing to do is not only ethical, it's also great for business.



*Allyson Hugley, President, Measurement and Analytics Practice, Weber Shandwick*

**Prediction for 2018:** In 2018, PR will shift attention to emerging challenges that have the potential to compromise confidence in our industry – bot traffic, audience fraud and biased machine-learning algorithms. We will also begin to see a concerted effort to elevate understanding around the range of ethical questions and challenges posed by AI and the role of communications in addressing those challenges.

**Lesson from 2017:** As much as we fear and fantasize about the potential of AI, a considerable amount of human hours, effort and oversight are required to train AI systems to deliver useful outcomes. The best results (for now) still come from a human-machine balance that skews more human than machine.

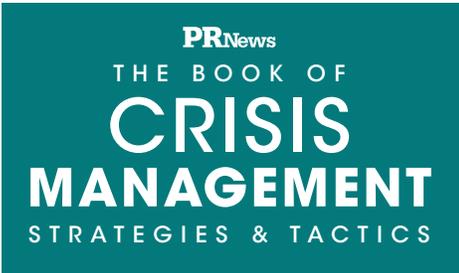


*Evan Kraus, President, Managing Director, Operations, APCO Worldwide*

**Prediction for 2018:** With trust in large institutions waning, look for companies to push even harder to make themselves feel more local, to reconnect with communities where they work and operate in authentic and impactful ways. This means an even greater role for employees, who will be increasingly unbridled to serve as advocates, and for technology, where programmatic content targeting using increasingly robust data models will expand dramatically.

**Lesson from 2017:** There is no limit to how fast a movement can take hold. From #MeToo to Hate Has No Home, organic social movements from the grassroots caught fire and made an impact across the country.

*Continued on page 7*



Develop a robust crisis plan and put together an agile team that can respond to any eventuality with the 9th edition of Crisis Management Strategies and Tactics. The book includes case studies and contributions from Wells Fargo, Chipotle, United, Uber, United States Marine Corps and The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.

**THE 9TH EDITION OF THE BOOK OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT IS AVAILABLE NOW IN BOTH DIGITAL AND PRINT.**  
Buy your copy today at [www.prnewsonline.com/crisis-management-guidebook-vol-9/](http://www.prnewsonline.com/crisis-management-guidebook-vol-9/).

# Consumer Engagement with B2B Brands in 2017 Holds Steady vs 2016, IMG Models Tops List

As we end the year with this edition of *PR News*, we begin the first of three data installments provided exclusively to us by data partner **Shareablee**.

In the chart below, you'll see Shareablee has gathered the top 15 most-engaged U.S. B2B brands on **Facebook**, **Instagram** and **Twitter** for January 2017 through November 2017, or most of the year. In the coming editions of *PR News* in early 2018, Shareablee will be providing data for the most-engaged U.S. B2C brands and nonprofit organizations during 2017.

Now to the analysis of the current chart. There has been much shuffling among the most-engaged B2B brands when compared to 2016. What has remained fairly steady, year over year in this category, though, is the level of consumer engagement with social posts, Shareablee's Ron Lee says.

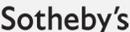
Despite B2B brands suffering a 0.49% drop in engagement, called "actions" in this table, the category saw a 38% increase in actions per piece of content posted, indicating an increase in quality over quantity, Lee says. The category's engagement held steady despite a 10.5% decrease in posted content, he adds.

In terms of individual brands, **IMG Models Worldwide** maintained its position as most-engaged B2B brand, generating almost 30% of the category's actions, with 19.2 million actions, which was down 23% year over year. Despite the drop in consumer engagement that can be attributed to the 52% decrease in posted content this year, IMG Models Worldwide still saw a 60.6% increase in consumer actions per post. This was the highest consumer engagement rate per post of our Top 15.

IMG Models Worldwide garnered the most consumer ac-

tions of the Top 15 on Instagram with 24.4 million actions. Its top Instagram post was of entertainer Selena Gomez at the American Music Awards.

**Hootsuite**, at 13, is notable for being the most-engaged B2B player on Twitter, with 620,000 consumer actions. ■

Shareablee		SOCIAL SCORECARD				
TOP B2B BRANDS – JANUARY - NOVEMBER 2017						
Based on Total Actions (likes, comments and shares) Data provided exclusively to PR News by Shareablee.						
Rank	Brand		Total Actions	Total Content	Actions per Content	Total Audience
1	 <b>IMG</b>	IMG Models Worldwide	19,201,316	4,058	4,732	1,488,610
2	 <b>Pantone</b>	Pantone	5,428,294	799	6,794	1,683,992
3	 <b>Sotheby's</b>	Sotheby's	5,205,570	5,835	892	1,040,160
4	 <b>aws</b>	Amazon Web Services	2,017,430	11,805	171	1,545,688
5	 <b>LOCKHEED MARTIN</b>	Lockheed Martin	1,740,873	1,821	956	929,268
6	 <b>Informatica</b>	Informatica	1,611,764	2,161	746	287,727
7	 <b>LENNAR</b>	Lennar	1,486,363	2,488	597	1,483,754
8	 <b>Pulte Homes</b>	Pulte Homes	1,442,794	258	5,592	145,936
9	 <b>FedEx</b>	FedEx	1,063,171	764	1,392	2,349,229
10	 <b>realtor.com</b>	Realtor.com	1,010,922	11,828	85	748,235
11	 <b>IBM</b>	IBM	956,770	1,561	613	1,431,161
12	 <b>ERICSSON</b>	Ericsson	871,286	1,565	557	648,148
13	 <b>Hootsuite</b>	Hootsuite	829,248	9,870	84	8,819,406
14	 <b>ups</b>	UPS	780,874	935	835	1,945,760
15	 <b>CAT</b>	Caterpillar Inc.	700,368	1,100	637	1,549,442

# In an Unprecedented Year, Multiple Mistakes Earn Equifax Top PR Crisis



I know “complicit” is **dictionary.com**’s word of the year. In my mind, “unprecedented” captured the top spot and should now probably be retired.

In 2017, a precedent was created for everything, no matter how bad, strange or bizarre.

Want more evidence? “Unprecedented” has been rising steadily, especially in the past year, according to **Google Trends** [please see chart]. It helps, of course, to have the media calling virtually everything that happened on any given day “unprecedented.”

And precedents weren’t only political. Corporations shattered precedent. We had an unprecedented fine slapped by the **EU** against **Google** (\$2.7 billion) for manipulating search results to promote its price-comparison shopping service over those of others.

We also saw unprecedented venality from **Wells Fargo** when it announced that it “missed” another 1.4 million fake accounts that its employees created, boosting the total of bogus accounts to an estimated 3.5 million.

And, of course, 2017 brought the unprecedented incompetence on the part of credit-reporting firm **Equifax**, which failed to prevent a breach of consumers’ credit information and then sat on the story for nearly two months.

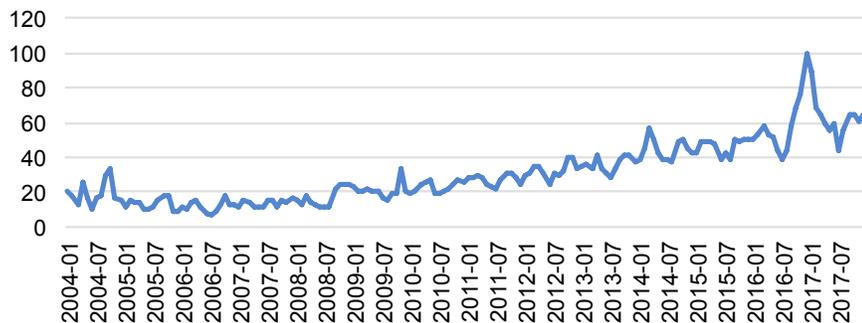
There were other crises unmentioned in this column and the charts to follow. They deserve to be listed here, at least. They include President Trump’s announcement of a travel ban. It resulted in chaos in many of the nation’s airports, not to mention the havoc it created for immigrants here and elsewhere.

Another crisis, which was handled far better than the travel ban, was **Tiki Brand**’s response to white supremacists carrying its torches during protests in Charlottesville, VA. Tiki distanced itself from the supremacists to great applause on social media. Also a nod to **Chobani**, for its crisis work.

But how to determine what truly was “The Crisis of the Year”? I went back to a valuable lesson **Southwest Airlines** taught me years ago. It assigns any unexpected news event into one of three buckets:

- ▶ **A media crisis:** Pretty much anything that blows up on **Twitter** falls into this bucket.
- ▶ **A reputational crisis:** Something that will have a long-term impact on your brand and/or reputation.
- ▶ **A business crisis:** Anything that will seriously damage or touch your bottom line.

## Use of the word "unprecedented" from Google Trends



So, in looking at the worst of 2017, I assigned crises that had long-term negative impact on the bottom line or the stock price an automatic #Fail. Media crises for the most part received a B average and reputational crises generally received a C. In cases of a tie, the results of a company’s effort to mitigate a crisis were considered tie-breakers. Here are my nominees for Worst Crises of the Year. ■

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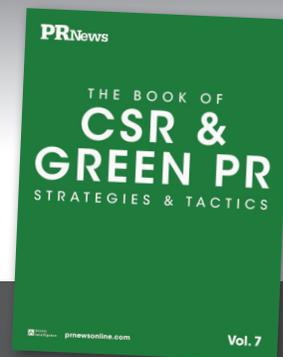
Chart on page 6

## CSR & GREEN PR GUIDEBOOK

PR News’ CSR & Green PR Guidebook captures best practices in communicating the positive relationships that organizations are building with their communities of interest. This six-chapter guidebook connects the dots between the effective communication of positive social contributions and corresponding improvements in bottom lines.

**Chapters include:**

- Cause Marketing & Community Relations
- Sustainability Initiatives & Reporting
- Employee Communications and CSR
- Social Media & CSR
- Philanthropy & Human Rights Communications
- Stakeholder Communications



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Company	Crisis	Grade	What We Learned
Equifax	The company, whose business centers on trust, allowed the biggest data breach in American history, revealing personal credit information on one-third of Americans. Executives compounded it by selling off stock after the breach was discovered but before it was made public.	F-	If a crisis reveals you to be incompetent at what should be your core competency, you won't recover. Since the breach was revealed, sales are off by nearly 30%, profits are down significantly and customers are fleeing by the millions.
Uber	Where to begin? Uber appeared to gouge customers during the anti-Muslim travel ban protest in New York. There were revelations of sexism and gender bias, a CEO was caught on tape yelling at a driver, a massive data breach. You get the gist.	F	There's both a value and a cost to your company culture. For Uber, known for its hard-charging tactics and take-no-prisoners culture, losses climbed 40%, a potential investor lowered its offer by 30%, it lost its license to operate in London and its share of the U.S. ride-hailing market declined from 90% to 75%. Meanwhile, for Lyft, which has a reputation for being quirky, nice and more generous to its drivers, market share has steadily increased.
Fyre Festival	The over-hyped festival that turned into a very expensive disaster in the Bahamas has become synonymous with concert disasters. Ongoing lawsuits will keep the brand in the news for a while, but it's unlikely that anyone will trust it again.	F	Terrible communications turned bad publicity and slams in social media into lawsuits by disgruntled investors, vendors and attendees. Ultimately a U.S. attorney filed charges of fraud. The brand that the festival was designed to promote will not recover.
Bell Pottinger	One of the world's largest and most powerful PR firms was driven out of business because of a campaign in South Africa that used divisive racist themes to try to influence a vote.	F	Even the best PR people can royally screw up an apology. However, the real damage was done by a corporate culture that apparently put profit over ethics.
Kaspersky Labs	When revelations of ties to the Russian spy agency FSB raised suspicions among U.S. government officials, Kaspersky's CEO responded with bluster and pompousness, which didn't win over investigators. Ultimately, they banned Kaspersky's software from U.S. government computers.	D+	In addition to a ban on its use by U.S. government agencies, Best Buy dropped Kaspersky from its shelves, proving that arrogance and bluster don't help much in a crisis, especially when you're dealing with regulators.
Mario Batali / Harvey Weinstein et al.	Both Weinstein and Batali were charged with sexual harassment. It appears both essentially will lose their companies. While Weinstein balked, within days the Batali name was gone from every product and promotion around the world. While Batali's mea culpa exit speech was excellent, the potential brand damage was too great to survive. His second apology, in a newsletter, was essentially the same as the first but added a recipe for pizza dough cinnamon rolls. Many fans found the good-tasting recipe in bad taste.	D+	When society is in the middle of a cultural turning point, and you represent a celebrity brand charged with sexual misconduct, it doesn't make any difference how good or bad your apology. It takes only a nanosecond for people to renounce all association with you.
Wells Fargo	After two more rounds of revelations around fake accounts and extra fees, Wells Fargo has improved its apology style and is attempting to rebuild its brand.	C-	Keep apologizing until you get it right. After hitting a two-year low, Wells Fargo stock has rebounded and at least the market has regained some confidence in the brand.
United Airlines	After a series of embarrassing passenger incidents, the most noxious of which involved passenger Dr. David Dao being forcibly dragged off a plane, United's response was initially lame, but its apologies improved over time.	C-	If policies need to change, make them change quickly. United's stock price tanked, but profits are up and passenger demand, after initially declining, has recovered, which shows that while a crisis may be a big hit on YouTube, it doesn't necessarily change passenger habits.
Papa John's	After Papa John himself, CEO John Schnatter, decided on an earnings call to blame the NFL's depressed ratings and kneeling players for the chain's decline in sales, the incident became an online trend. Comics and commenters had a field day, rejecting the premise and slamming the quality of Papa's John pizza as the cause of the decline.	C-	Diversions tactics seldom work. Papa John's stock price plummeted when the crisis hit and still hasn't recovered. But that may be as much the fault of the food itself and competition from online delivery apps as it is a CEO's silly comment.
Facebook	The revelation that Russia was able to set up thousands of fake accounts to manipulate U.S. voter opinion during the 2016 presidential election came as a bigger shock to Facebook than it was to the American public. Facebook's apology was weak and it's clear that the brand, led by Mark Zuckerberg's outright dismissal of allegations initially, continued to be in denial about the vulnerabilities of its platform and how much damage it may have caused.	C	Social media habits are hard to break. Facebook just posted its best quarter, the number of users still is growing and its stock price continues to rise. The fact that Facebook now admits it has had a hand in the decline of democracy and civil society doesn't seem to have mattered much with users. Its standing on Capitol Hill might be a different story.
The Oscars	The Oscars was a classic media crisis that took place in front of the world. In short, the wrong Best Picture envelope was handed to presenter Warren Beatty. While heads rolled, and blame was assigned, the reality is that neither PWC nor the Oscars saw any true fallout.	B	The Oscars is still working with PwC, so the abject apology and rapid removal of the accountants embroiled in the mistake seemed to have saved the day.
Pepsi	When Pepsi put Kendall Jenner in an ad that earned the scorn of the Internet, it turns out that it had no effect on the brand or the business.	B+	Pepsi's rapid response and the widespread discussion of the commercial increased favorability for Pepsi.



Michael Lamp, SVP, Social & Digital Media, Hunter Digital

**Predictions for 2018:** I expect the online and offline worlds to collide even further. Greater adoption of VR technology will lead this trend, but so will more emphasis on the reinforcement of marketing messages across all consumer channels. Our phones will become even more of a connective tissue, allowing us to seamlessly receive, translate and (re)deliver IRL messages to various digital audiences. We're all influencing someone, after all. This is especially intriguing for PR pros, as the earned messages we place carry trusted and significant weight and must complement (not contradict) messages delivered in paid and owned environments.

**Lesson from 2017:** The public isn't yearning for more content from brands. Sorry. What it is hungry for is better, more personal content that it can relate to, either functionally or emotionally. And as PR pros, we have to get smarter about how we source that content and where we distribute it.



Pete Marino, CCO and Chief Public Affairs Officer, MillerCoors, President, Tenth and Blake

**Prediction for 2018:** The **Disney** and **21st Century Fox** deal is just the tip of the iceberg on consolidation as media players realize they need to bundle more scale to deliver audiences and content that marketers demand.

**Lesson from 2017:** I re-learned in this world of social media to avoid reacting too quickly and posting something when provoked. It's very easy to want to respond, but the upside is typically not there. It's best to let sleeping dogs lie, not respond and let the news cycle move to something else.



Matt Prince  
Sr. Manager, PR & Brand Experience, Taco Bell

**Prediction for 2018:** Experiential marketing will push past micro-influencers as the buzz word for the year. Brands will disguise the selling of products as the selling of experiences – using localization, augmented reality and one-to-one interactions to accomplish it.

**Lesson from 2017:** Know your place, know your space and get all your executives media-trained.



Rob Stoddard  
SVP, Industry & Association Affairs, NCTA-The Internet & Television Association

**Prediction for 2018:** With growing acknowledgment that social media platforms aren't a panacea for our social ills, and that they can harm as well as help our social discourse, in 2018 communicators will need to marry so-

cial responsibility with authenticity to generate meaningful results in social media.

**Lesson from 2017:** It's not just "a PR problem." Brands must live up to their promise through their corporate behavior. PR alone will never save you.



Stacey Tank  
CCO, The Home Depot

**Prediction for 2018:** Companies will spend more energy (and money) syndicating their content versus over-producing content that too few people consume.

**Lesson from 2017:** In the darkest times, we cannot forget to tell stories of hope. When times are at their worst, humanity can be at its best, as we saw during the unbelievable number of disasters in 2017.



Melissa Wisheart  
Director, Biddable Media  
22squared | Atlanta

**Prediction for 2018:** Although **Facebook** historically has been a walled garden, given the increased pressure for transparency (from Russian-funded ads for U.S. elections) and reporting snafus that have eroded trust in its reporting and metrics, I expect Facebook will allow key tech partners and agencies a peek behind the curtain. As campaigns and data become more connected, this will be an *amazing* thing for digital marketers looking to follow the consumer cross-device and cross-platform.

**Lesson from 2017:** Strategies are nothing without execution. As marketing initiatives become more advanced, implementation of those strategies has become more complex. I've learned that planning tactical implementation along with strategy ensures that you're up and running much more quickly and you'll face fewer roadblocks.

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**Note to Subscribers:** New CSR reports and FTC guidance concerning influencers have been added to the PR News Essentials page.

Please visit this excellent research tool at:  
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**1. A Muffed Apology:** This isn't last week's edition of *PR News*, but you'd be excused if you thought it was. In this column in our Dec. 12 edition we derided the actions but praised the apology of Chef **Mario Batali** for repeated acts of sexual harassment during a span of some two decades. Batali rather quickly apologized after a Dec. 11 story in *Eater*, saying, "I apologize to the people I have mistreated and hurt...much of the behavior described [in *Eater*] does, in fact, match up with ways I have acted. That behavior was wrong and there are no excuses. I take full responsibility and am deeply sorry for any pain, humiliation or discomfort I have caused to my peers, employees, customers, friends and family." That was the gist of another apology he issued, Dec. 15, in his newsletter, one of a series of apologies last week. Unfortunately, appended to the Dec. 15 newsletter apology, was a recipe for pizza dough cinnamon muffins. "In case you're searching for a holiday-inspired breakfast, these...muffins are



Chef Mario Batali

a fan favorite," he wrote as a prelude to the recipe. As you'd expect, social media went wild. When seemingly alert brands and organizations make silly moves such as this one, we're forced to ask, 'Was there a PR person present when the decision was made?' Writer **Josh Jordan** (@NumbersMuncher) somehow penetrated the meeting and provided the following transcript to **Twitter**: *Mario Batali*: How do we address the sexual harassment? *PR Team*: With a heartfelt apology. *MB*: A cinnamon roll recipe should do the trick. *PRT*: That's a horrible idea. *MB*: Yeah, let's go with that. *PRT*: You need to apologize. *MB*: OK. Quick apology and then rolls. *PRT*: We're doomed. Since Dec. 12, four more women have come forward to accuse the chef of improper behavior, putting the total at 8 victims. Known for his Italian cuisine and the orange clogs that match his ginger locks, Batali was fired Dec. 15 from *The Chew*, the **ABC** show he co-hosted weekdays. He's stepped away from his restaurant and culinary empire for an undetermined amount of time.

**2. Smiley's People:** Although former **PBS** and **CBS** host **Charlie Rose** went relatively quietly when charged with sexual harassment, fellow PBS-er **Tavis Smiley** is not. The veteran interviewer is denying allegations that led to his PBS show being suspended last week. "I have never groped...coerced [or]...



Tavis Smiley, Journalist

exposed myself inappropriately," he tweeted Dec. 18. As PR pros know, it's unwise to make statements you are unable to back up with facts. That goes for Smiley and PBS.

**3. New Business Model?** As **Katie Paine** points out on page 1, 2017 has been bizarre. It's appropriate then to end 2017 with what seems a strange story. While we've heard of sources demanding payment from journalists for interviews and we know some publications charge brands and writers to be featured, we'd not heard of subject-matter experts charging PR pros to pitch them. We have now. A PR rep attempted to pitch an accomplished journalist and academician. Eventually he told the PR rep he could be contacted through a particular platform; should he respond, it would cost the PR pitcher \$20. The platform is called **Earn.com** and it urges customers to replace public email platforms with "an inbox that pays you." It features lists of experts that one can receive replies from for a fee. The groups include CEOs, angel investors, venture capitalists and a slew of programmers. Our PR rep was seeking a response from the writer about a pitch related to blockchain. The journalist is part of a group of "500+ Blockchain personalities." Should this idea catch on, PR pros might need to set aside money to pay for pitching.

**4. Platform Prater:** Engagement is good, but shamelessly begging for people to comment, share and like your posts is bad form. At least that's what **Facebook** is saying. There are exceptions, Facebook says in a Dec. 18 post, including seeking engagement for a post about a missing

child or one that raises funds for a cause. Examples of forbidden engagement baiting are things such as "share this post with your friends for a chance to win a free trip to..." or "like us if you're left-handed and were born during the summer." The Newsfeed algorithm will be tweaked to demote Pages or individuals who continue to deploy engagement bait. The changes will begin in a few weeks, Facebook says. Of course, Facebook is facing charges that it's changed society for the worse, including how bogus political ads might have influenced the 2016 U.S. presidential election. – In a somewhat related story, **Twitter** began Dec. 18 implementing a policy it hopes will reduce the amount of violent invective spewed on its platform. Those who post tweets advocating violence may find their tweets removed, the company says. Repeat offenders will be subject to removal from the platform. It's part of a larger effort to reduce offensive behavior on the platform.

**5. People:** Congrats to *PR News* Hall of Famer **Rob Stoddard** on his new post as **NCTA's** SVP for industry & association affairs, where he'll manage public affairs, member relations and meetings/special events. **Brian Dietz** was upped to SVP for strategic communications, leading media relations, digital communications, brand management/promotion and digital grassroots activities. – **WE** named **Kona Luseni Barrasso** SVP, technology and **Kristen Jordan-Poinsette** VP, health. Luseni Barrasso comes from **Burson-Marsteller**, Jordan-Poinsette



Kona Luseni Barrasso, SVP, Technology, WE

joins from **Marina Maher**. – **CooperKatz** promoted 14-year veteran **Kathleen Reynolds** to VP/director, client services. – **Rasky Partners** named former MA Labor Secretary **Ron Walker** COO. ■

**Attention Subscribers:**  
Your next edition of *PR News* will be dated January 9, 2017. Wishing you and your family a happy, healthy New Year.