

PR is an agent for change in Africa says new report

The State of the African PR Landscape 2022 Report has found that - from crafting effective crisis management strategies and navigating how to minimise reputational risk for clients, to expanding clients' reach on digital and social media - the shift in focus to these areas of business has been substantial in the African region.



Source: © Matthias Ziegler [123rf](#) The State of the African PR Landscape 2022 findings show the agility and credibility of the public relations

The report, the first report by the Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) Africa, which is the newest arm of this global professional PR body, surveyed over 550 PR and communications practitioners from across 27 countries within Africa.

Positive change for business

Two findings contained in the report show the agility and credibility of the public relations (PR) industry as well as its wide scope to effect tangible and positive change for businesses.

According to the report, 67% of respondents say the perception of PR has improved over the past two years. Furthermore, when asked to describe the profession's standing in the boardroom, 33% say leaders were relying on PR counsel more than ever.

"Across the world, PR professionals are increasingly taking more strategic and senior positions in companies - but there are still organisations where it is a relatively ignored or misunderstood discipline," the report notes.

Trusting PR

For Karena Crerar, CEO of Edelman Africa, bringing in PR and communications practitioners and agencies sooner as part of the strategic and advisory team for businesses, has value far beyond just navigating a crisis.

“We often find, from a reputation management perspective, that when struck by a crisis, companies like to hold their cards close because they’re not sure in that moment who to trust” she explains.

“They tend to only engage legal counsel at that point, which is certainly the right thing to do, but bringing in a reputation management partner with an ‘outside-in’ view is so important because otherwise, you’re consulting in an echo chamber.”

Crerar says the advantage of entrusting PR and communications professionals to steer the communications of the business from the outset is about ensuring you always have the right counsel and positioning, long before you need it in a crisis.



Reputation management is essential to business decisions

Miranda Lusiba 8 Nov 2021



Digital and social media lead the way

The PRCA Africa report crucially notes the changing role of the sector and asked respondents which PR activities they thought had become more important in their country in the past two years.

Digital and social media led the charge by way of increased importance for practitioners at 51%, followed by reputation management at 48%, and crisis management at 47%.

To this, Crerar posits, “I do think that the pandemic provided an opportunity for communications consultancies to elevate their role for businesses and truly have a seat at the table in terms of real, risk-related conversations.”

She adds: “It created numerous unfamiliar scenarios and challenges that left some companies with no choice but to seek external expertise.”

On the flip side, many PR firms such as Edelman were rallying globally to determine best practices for clients based on research and expertise.

The Covid effect

According to the report, Covid-19 contributed to a decline in the importance of event planning and organisation, as they only showed meagre levels of importance during the last two years. This is understandable in the context of the widespread lockdowns and restrictions on gatherings many countries in the region implemented.

In terms of what she would like to see going forward for the industry, Crerar says, “I believe communications has a fundamental role to play in many aspects of business, including but not limited to employee engagement after ‘the great resignation’, sustainability strategies and purpose-driven work.

“I think going forward, it’s about continuing to find ways to elevate the role that we play in helping organisations to build trust with their stakeholders - regardless of which areas of the business that is driven by - to achieve sustainable impact and outcomes.”

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