

The 'truth' about PR - IPRA report back

By [Ingrid Lotze](#)

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Integrity and trust were the key themes that dominated the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) world congress held in Johannesburg last month.

'Leadership in Communication - the way to Trust' was this year's theme at the annual [IPRA](#) PR gathering. The event attracted senior speakers from many countries, all of whom explored the theme from different angles.



Presentation by Rod Cartwright, Partner and Director, Global Corporate & Public Affairs Practice, Ketchum

Something that in this hyper-connected, socially driven world in which command and control is more of a myth than ever, we have called Leadership at the Speed of Now

This year over 300 people from 30 countries heard industry greats like Rob Cartwright from Ketchum; Svetlana Stavreva, CMO from IBM Eastern Europe; Sconaid McGeachin, President & CEO Middle East, Africa & Turkey, Hill & Knowlton; and Jeremy Galbraith, CEO for EMEA at Burson-Marsteller, to name but a few.

Despite coming from different parts of the world and diverse organisations they all seemed to largely agree on the following:

- The PR world has changed dramatically.
- Trust is the oil in the machine of the modern world.
- Authenticity is key for both leadership and communicators to build this trust.

- The power of shareable content is massive and the way to do this is through storytelling with integrity.
 - Integrity is key, as consumers - especially millennials - want to see action behind a brand's words.
 - Have a purpose, put people first, personalise and be honest.
- Corporate reputation is linked to leadership reputation.

The consensus view across the speakers was that we are all moving toward or are already taking a multichannel approach to communication and that everything needs to be integrated across all channels, both internally and externally. With digital subsuming practically all communication channels (other than good old human face-to-face contact), PR and communication are growing in influence and we are moving to the 'top table' in the corporate world.

Truth

All the speakers agree, the truth wants out, digital developments are enabling it, media have transformed to expose it and consumers - especially millennials - want it. If we don't keep pace with the massive change, we will become irrelevant. In South Africa and in other emerging markets we are not yet there, but the good news for these markets is that there is more opportunity to change.

Purpose

#2 The 12 dimensions of authentic corporate purpose



Jeremy Galbraith, CEO, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Burson-Marsteller

"Although awareness is critical to authentic corporate purpose, all 12 dimensions are highly important when it comes to establishing an authentic corporate purpose. Focusing on one or two dimensions is unlikely to be sufficient to overcome the skepticism of internal and external stakeholders; therefore, the diagnostic toolset we present will enable leaders to tackle the full gamut of authenticity dimensions in a comprehensive and cohesive way. We chose identity and image to capture the idea that authenticity has both internal and external components and that an authentic corporate purpose is both about how the organization sees itself as well as how others see the organization."

Whether the attending PR professionals were asking questions of the keynote speakers, networking during the breaks or mingling at the IPRA Golden World Awards, the feeling was that leadership, passion and awareness of purpose from the top, are key to the success of all organisations across the globe. The reputation of an organisation is linked to the reputation of leadership and the necessity for open and authentic communication was highlighted in almost every presentation.

Another dominant theme as a key to business' sustainability was creating a better future for all, but doing it in a meaningful, sustainable way, not just for the publicity.

Many speakers over the two-day conference spoke about the need to tell stories, but the caveat highlighted was that brands

need to walk the talk first. Communicating what the brand is doing is important, but actually doing business with a purpose is critical for building trust and longevity. And if brands don't build trust they will lose customer loyalty and obviously revenue.

Storytelling



Jeremy Galbraith, CEO, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Burson-Marsteller

Storytelling is not only a dominant theme within IPRA, it dominates in marketing and communication publications across the globe. The agreement is that brands need to tell stories across all platforms with consistency and with authenticity and a strong visual component.

The successful campaigns and businesses are being bold, brave and disrupting the norm and then telling the story about it with integrity. This is the marrying of innovation, operations and communication across the organisation and is the sweet spot of business growth.



Presentation by Colin Byrne, CEO UK & EMEA Weber Shandwick

As IPRA celebrated its 60th Anniversary at the congress, the changes in the industry over the past six decades were clearly evident. The industry has morphed dramatically to what it is today. Engagement, personalisation, equality, digital, disruption, storytelling and authenticity are the dominant themes of today.

ABOUT INGRID LOTZE

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