

‘Perma-pivot’ PR chiefs head into Q2 even more positive, thanks to new services, different business models, more training

April 29 2021 - PR bosses’ agility and responsiveness to external factors mean that nearly half have significantly reinvented their services and operations over the last year and are even more optimistic than they were at the start of it.

That’s according to the PR and Communications Tracker, a quarterly survey of agency and in-house PR leaders from [Carta Communications](#) and [The Pulse Business](#). Its second iteration has found that 45% have made “significant changes” and a further 41% have made “some changes” to the way they and their team operates since the start of the pandemic.

The communications industry’s ability to enact changes and react to circumstances appear to be contributing towards its upbeat state with a third of respondents (32%) feeling ‘very positive’ about the future of their business over the next 12 months and another 58% feeling ‘quite positive’. This compares to 24% feeling ‘very positive’ at the start of the previous quarter with 63% being ‘quite positive’ at this time.

Reasons to be cheerful include the introduction of new operating models, changing the way client accounts and pitches are run, shifting product mixes and ramping up online training.

Matt Cartmell, Founder and Director, Carta Communications, said: “The fact that the term ‘pivot’ has been so overused across the business world in the last year suggests how unagile other industry sectors have traditionally become. This has never been true of the PR & comms industry where adapting to change is just part of the territory. Our industry has now embraced what I call ‘perma-pivot’, in which any sense of stasis has been banished with leaders forever finding new ways to deliver their storytelling and reputation management capabilities. It’s never been a more exciting time to be working in the world of PR.”

Imogen Osborne, Owner, The Pulse Business, added: “What a relief to see some good news in terms of an upbeat industry that has thrived on re-invention and taking bold steps to maintain growth. At the start of the pandemic, many comms leaders spoke in cautious tones, daunted by the prospect of remote working and managing seemingly disparate teams. In fact, this new hybrid model is clearly producing results and makes a sound business case for constant innovation.”

The PR and Communications Tracker gained insights from these four agency leaders on how they have changed their businesses over the last year:

Darryl Sparey, Managing Director and Co-founder, Hard Numbers, was faced with it becoming increasingly challenging to gain press coverage during the months of lockdown. The agency’s response was to launch a new product area for the business, named Community as a Service.

“The idea is that communities are the best means of marketing for people with a shared interest and create an opportunity for businesses to regularly, helpfully engage directly with their customers and prospects,” said Darryl. “We run communities on behalf of our clients

by identifying a pain point that is of relevance to their prospective customers and inviting them to be part of a community of peers with similar challenges. Once we've established and scaled the community, clients may run this themselves or rely on us to help them continue to nurture and grow this communications channel."

Lis Lewis Jones, CEO, Liquid, explained how her agency focused on increasing its professional development and team-building efforts. Liquid completed 1,250 hours of training in 2020.

"We discovered it was a great way to get the team together on an almost weekly basis," explained Lis. "Our belief was that we would come out of lockdown not only stronger and up-skilled but better connected. Training helped to integrate the teams and 'buddy groups' helped to provide the virtual water-cooler moments we all needed."

Lis also pointed to working groups that were set up to look at key parts of the business and using business development as a means of team motivation that led to 23 new clients and 15 new members of staff.

Frank Marr, Director and Head of Marketing, AM+A, revealed that his agency has built an increasingly global workforce since the pandemic began, particularly when it comes to utilising specialist skillsets in areas such as content production, e-commerce PR, SEO and data-driven campaigns.

"The main change has been further integration of technology into day-to-day PR activities," said Frank. "We've increased our knowledge of how to integrate commerce technology into our creative press office PR operation. Covid-19 meant a large majority of our clients had to adapt and introduce e-commerce elements quickly - thanks to our pool of freelancers and in-house creatives we were able to provide a competitive service to a range of SMEs."

Carol Chan, Managing Director, Comms8, added that her agency is seeing positives despite the pandemic – being an agency working on a cross-border marketing campaign, the Comms8 team is used to remote and cross-time-zone working since they have offices in the UK, Hong Kong and China.

"We used to have regular team-building activities before the lockdown restriction, and since we have been expanding the team in the past 12 months despite the pandemic, one major challenge would be to build the company culture and keep the spirit when we are collaborating from different places."

Carol pointed to technology as a great help in maintaining team bonding, while other contributing factors to success included a focus on staying agile, sharing data-led insights and helping clients to build long-term impact on their businesses.

If you would like to provide your own insights in the next PR and Communications Tracker, please email imogen@thepulsebusiness.co.uk.

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About Carta Communications

Carta Communications exists to improve the way the world communicates. Carta helps progressive companies to take the right steps towards market leadership, delivering tangible return on investment, driving sales and company growth. Carta works with PR, marketing and advertising consultancies, and the service providers that help them to be more efficient.

About the Pulse Business

The Pulse Business delivers real time insight to companies on fast track growth curves. We design incisive Pulse questions that elucidate varied views on many topics. This produces detailed insight which is used by our clients to develop and improve their businesses.