

I've Seen 25 Years of Change in My Career – These 3 Lessons Every Business Owner Should Know



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This year marks my 25th anniversary in B2B tech public relations. It's been a time of great transformation for both the tech world and the art of shaping markets and market makers. With all the new tech breakthroughs, global trends and customer expectations, the practice of PR (and all digital-driven businesses) has shifted dramatically to keep up.

From fax machines to Twitter threads, the way we communicate, influence and build relationships has changed. The saying "the only constant is change" rings true in this age of non-stop

disruption. In this business world, it's the adaptable who thrive.

One thing's for sure, looking back on the last two decades: If you want to survive in the business world, flexibility is your best friend. Those who can pivot faster and spot new opportunities in the chaos are best positioned to stay ahead of the game. This means not just keeping up with change, but also innovating and demonstrating serious marketing resilience.

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1. Shift from product to storytelling and thought leadership

Today, businesses must engage with multiple audiences across various platforms, including digital, social and community-based channels. It's no longer just about pushing a message out – it's about creating meaningful, two-way conversations with customers, investors, analysts and other key stakeholders.

In the early days of PR, the focus was on showcasing product specs and technical features, hoping to impress decision-makers with “speeds and feeds.” However, as the industry evolved, PR shifted its focus toward storytelling, emphasizing the business benefits, including the “how” and “why” behind the product.

Focusing on the human side of the offering, including how a solution solves real-world customer pain points and makes people's lives easier, makes it relatable. More customer-centric messaging has sparked better engagement and stronger connections. One key lesson learned is that a compelling narrative can make even the most complex offering relatable.

The companies that rise above the noise in a crowded market aren't just product peddlers; they are leaders. They are thought leaders and trusted experts in their field. Thought leadership is instrumental in establishing brand authority and creating trust with customers.

We've developed and moved markets over the years by effectively positioning executives as thought leaders. This happened through interviews, speaking engagements, contributed articles and videos that showcased their core values, industry knowledge and expertise. It also fostered a deeper connection with their target audiences.

The key takeaway is that thought leadership is central to a successful marketing strategy and consistency and authenticity are essential for effective thought leadership.

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2. Crisis management and reputation building

Crisis management has been an inevitable part of this fast-paced industry where market pressure and rapid innovation can sometimes lead to vulnerabilities like product recalls or security breaches. I learned the key to handling a crisis is a proactive, transparent approach that prioritizes accountability, clear communication and swift action.

One of the biggest PR crises I had to face was the recall of a client's product from several major distribution partners after a couple of reported incidents of battery swelling. We had a crisis communications plan that we implemented immediately. This plan outlined the communications protocol for such an event, including executive spokespeople, messaging development, approvals and so on.

All companies today need to have a crisis communications plan, driven by strong leadership. Long-term reputation building relies on consistent thought leadership, content marketing and positive media coverage to offset risks and maintain trust. Effective crisis management isn't just about fixing the immediate issue; it's about preserving the trust and credibility that can sustain your brand long after the storm has passed.

3. Data-driven decision-making

One of the most significant developments in the ongoing convergence of PR and digital marketing has been the rise of data-driven decision-making. In a world where AI, automation and analytics are of growing importance to business operations, the PR practice has had to become accustomed to these tools to measure impact, get real-time insights and adjust strategies.

Businesses today must likewise embrace a data-driven approach. Make sure that your PR team collaborates with marketing, sales, and product teams to align messaging, drive engagement and support the company's growth strategy. Breaking down silos and fostering cross-departmental collaboration not only strengthens campaigns but also maximizes impact.

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Adapt or perish

The constant pace of change in our world today underscores the importance of adaptability. The business world moves fast, and you're already behind if you're not keeping up. The key takeaway: the timeless secret to success has always been flexibility and adaptation.

You make a plan, see how life shows up and adjust accordingly. So, here's to innovation, embracing change and pushing the envelope. It's an exciting time to be in the game!

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