

COMMUNICATIONS FORECASTS,
INSIGHTS AND BEST PRACTICES

OUTLOOK 2024

**Porter Novelli experts spotlight communications trends and
actions to help companies do business better in 2024 and beyond**



HELLO,

At Porter Novelli, we help our clients do business better by creating and implementing impactful strategies and communications programming to incite stakeholder action. This means embracing the complexity of our world and responding with insight-driven communications strategies that keep pace with the speed of culture.

2023 brought unexpected global unrest, emerging challenges to corporate DEI initiatives and a sharpened focus on the implications of Artificial Intelligence.

As we head into 2024, our experts unlock answers to such questions as:

- How will the AI influencer landscape evolve?
- How can my organization respond to increasing scrutiny of our DEI practices?
- In what ways can my company keep my workforce nurtured and engaged?

If you have any questions about the report, please contact your client service lead. If you'd like to learn more about Porter Novelli's key offerings of brand growth, corporate counsel, employee experience, and purpose and impact, please contact carolyn.weis@porternovelli.com.

We hope these insights help your organization thrive and live into its purpose, in 2024 and beyond.



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HEALTH

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EVP, DC

FORECAST:

Reevaluate commitments to health equity — or get left behind

Health equity is healthcare. In a recent study published by OPRG and The Atlantic, more than 77 percent of Americans report experiencing discrimination when seeking healthcare. Not only does that indicate that the issue is pervasive—it means that every health brand has a role to play in eliminating health disparities.

ACTION:

Equity and communications that speak to individuals and their specific needs is critical. Data-led insights will be the cornerstone of these communications. All brands should be evaluating their current commitment to health equity, including how they can improve on it, to provide better outcomes for all patients.

FORECAST:

Traditional and alternative health modalities will continue to integrate

Increasing consumer focus on overall health and well-being is leading to greater integration of alternative health with conventional treatments – it is no longer one or the other. Sometimes referred to as “CAM” (complementary and alternative medicine), patients are combining more standard modes of treatment with non-traditional health practices related to diet, exercise and meditation. Many practitioners and even the World Health Organization are beginning to give these practices serious consideration.

ACTION:

Brands should embrace alternative practices as adjuvant therapies to conventional approaches. Pay attention to new practices and products coming to market and don't be afraid to lean in where appropriate. With many health insurers covering certain CAMs, both patients and stakeholders stand to benefit from a variety of treatment options — both traditional and emerging.

FORECAST:

All eyes will be on age

The number of Americans aged 65 and older will more than double over the next 40 years, reaching 80 million in 2040. As the U.S. population continues to grow older overall, there will be greater demands on the healthcare system as people look to manage emerging conditions and overall health.

ACTION:

Brands need to be prepared to speak to their consumers at whatever age, but especially to older adults. Savvy companies will leverage a communications strategy that embraces the right channels and influencers aimed at reaching older populations, the elderly and their caregivers. Furthermore, age-related diseases like neurodegenerative diseases will continue to be a primary focus, with new treatments on the horizon.





DEI

**Deidra
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SVP, ATL

FORECAST:

Diversity roles are disappearing — but DEI commitments shouldn't

Companies are disproportionally eliminating DEI leadership roles, and attrition rates for DEI roles are far higher than for non-DEI counterparts. Yet despite these challenges, stakeholders remain adamant about corporate commitments to representation, with 77 percent of consumers believing that a company's employees should reflect the diversity of the communities where they do business.

ACTION:

In this moment of retraction, stakeholders will be scrutinizing whether companies have lived up to their stated DEI commitments. Brands should keep the following questions in mind: **(1)** Do you promote, retain, and recruit diverse people at all levels? **(2)** Do you have measures of accountability that allow you to track your progress and impact? **(3)** What investments have you made to improve DEI training and ERG support? **(4)** What actions can you share that demonstrate your commitments?

FORECAST:

Consumers will hold you accountable

When it comes to DEI, companies can no longer get away with lip service. Stakeholders want to see companies show up boldly and authentically. 69 percent of respondents in a recent Porter Novelli study believe companies should change the way they operate to address diversity and inclusion.

ACTION:

To address this need, companies must build the operational and communications infrastructure required to truly embed DEI into every part of their organization. Despite the noise in the marketplace, companies need to change their workplaces, workforces, and marketplaces to reflect the diversity of the world.

FORECAST:

DEI messaging may need to change

Given the cultural backlash against “woke” culture that's critical of ESG and DEI initiatives, companies will continue to face scrutiny around their DEI practices. Since the beginning of last year, for example, nearly 40 lawsuits have been brought against corporations alleging that companies did not meet their DEI goals or align with their core shareholder value objectives, resulting in reputational damage and other losses.

ACTION:

Companies need to navigate a delicate balance between the requirements of the business and the interests of key stakeholders. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, companies should continue to walk the walk when it comes to DEI. But when it comes to talking about it, exercise caution to minimize the risk of activist attention or potential litigation. This, however, does not mean pausing or slowing down your commitment to DEI.





Matt MacPherson
VP, ATL

DIGITAL

FORECAST:

Smaller communities will hit big on social

With social feeds showing fewer posts from personal connections in favor of the algorithmic recommendations of strangers and influencers, social networks are becoming increasingly impersonal. At the same time, an uptick in negative posts and comments have made social media downright unpleasant for many users. In 2024, expect to see more people turn to smaller, private and moderated communities like group chats, Discord servers, Mastadon networks, Facebook groups, subreddits and Slacks.

ACTION:

Brands can reach people migrating to these small communities through organic activations like Reddit AMAs and brand Discord servers, as well as partnerships and paid placements. However, it's essential to understand and respect the culture of the communities, while being authentic, approachable, and useful. Watch for new partnerships and paid opportunities in this space.

FORECAST:

AI influencers will go corporate

Following the rise of AI influencers like Lil Miquela and Kami, organizations are beginning to turn to expand their AI footprint beyond influencers to introduce AI executive leaders. Dictador, a Polish beverage company, recently unveiled their new AI CEO, who (unlike a human CEO) is “always on 24/7, ready to make executive decisions and stir up some AI magic.”

ACTION:

As organizations look to break through crowded online chatter, we'll see them harnessing AI in new and inventive ways to help raise brand awareness. Expect to see organizations begin introducing AI “employees” to help represent their brand online, driving corporate narratives and supporting recruitment initiatives.

FORECAST:

TikTok is the future of news sharing

With over 1 billion users, an accelerated growth rate among 18–24-year-olds and a fragmented approach to accessing news, TikTok is poised to see news as a content driver. According to Cision's 2023 State of the Media Report, journalists are 10% more active on the platform, in an effort to meet audiences where they consume.

ACTION:

We can expect brands to adjust to this increased media habit by developing more video friendly updates for media who will want to repurpose and share news with their followers. This is also an opportunity for brands to extend beyond the traditional press release approach to develop multimedia in support of new product releases, news and updates.



Lisa Cesarano
VP, NYC

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

FORECAST:

EVPs must evolve

As companies undergo external rebranding transformations, they should likewise look inward to clarify and (re)define their organizations' employee value proposition (EVP).

ACTION:

Create a compelling EVP that defines what employees can expect from their workplace in light of the new branding and help align employees' individual values with overall organizational goals. A well-crafted EVP can help foster a positive work culture, boost morale, and attract and retain top talent – all of which help companies to do business better. To evolve your EVP, one Harvard Business Review [article](#) recommends following a basic strategy: “Ask people what they want and try to give it to them.”

FORECAST:

Be prepared to confront uncomfortable truths

Menopause. Menstruation. Mental Health. Fertility. Family. Employees increasingly expect their organizations to acknowledge universal health and wellness concerns that companies have historically been uncomfortable talking about openly. And studies show that employees reward companies that care.

ACTION:

Organizations should encourage open communication on these topics and team up with HR to communicate programming and support to employees. Doing so bolsters employee wellness and psychological safety. By creating a more supportive work environment, these communications can also contribute to an organization's culture of DEI, by creating a deeper sense of belonging for all employees.

FORECAST:

Empower employees to work smarter leveraging AI

For many, advancements around AI are leading to concerns about the future of work. In a [recent study](#), EY reports that 75 percent of employees are concerned AI will make certain jobs obsolete.

ACTION:

Clear communication around AI can increase employee engagement, develop skills and ease concerns. In partnership with your organization's IT function, communicate your company's AI strategy and governance to employees. Arm managers with tools to support open dialogue regarding AI – even if that position is still “figuring it out.” Ensure that leaders are prepared to speak to how it may impact jobs and roles and arm employees to pilot, test, experiment and use AI to work smarter.



**Duncan
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SVP, NYC

CREATIVE

FORECAST:

Creative capabilities will expand with AI

Generative platforms will move from being tools that creatives ‘play around’ with on their own time to tools they start harnessing in business to support idea generation. While some corporate sectors have expressed concerns about AI replacing jobs, creatives should approach AI as a tool to foster expanded creativity—not competition.

ACTION:

AI is here to stay: lean in and learn or get left behind. Understand your goals for using AI and the capabilities current AI platforms offer. Become familiar with the latest tools and ensure the data or output is accurate.

FORECAST:

Design tools are no replacement for the real thing

With new tools coming to the fore daily, including but not limited to AI, it’s never been easier to create visual content. Inexpensive solutions are always tempting, especially in times of economic turmoil, but quality must remain a priority for brands.

ACTION:

Prioritize the use of professional services. You can fix your own car, but someone who fixes cars all day will do it better. This rationale also extends to AI. While you and your agencies should be learning to use it as a helpful tool, human experts remain all-important.

FORECAST:

In-office offers new opportunities for growth, innovation

If it hasn’t been implemented already, RTO, or a hybrid of it, will become the new-new-normal. Junior staffers who have not yet had meaningful in-office experience stand to gain much in the way of professional growth. From a creative standpoint, studies indicate that radical innovation is indeed an output of in-person versus remote collaboration.

ACTION:

Get ready to work together in a whole new (old) way. Besides the well-documented contributions RTO makes towards company culture (especially a flexible RTO policy), a full office presents opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas and real time feedback. Set yourself up for success by ensuring the office is conducive to collaborative experiences with things like accommodating work spaces and engaging communal activities.





**Raquel
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VP, LA

FOOD & AGRICULTURE

FORECAST:

There's no such thing as TMI

Looking for a trail of facts, consumers expect brands to be transparent about sustainable practices. From soil health to farming practices and packaging, to how to eat or drink the product, there's no such thing as too much information for audiences.

ACTION:

According to a 2023 McKinsey and NielsenIQ [report](#), "products making ESG-related claims averaged 28 percent cumulative growth...versus 20 percent for products that made no such claims." Your sustainability messaging impacts your bottom line, which is why brands should aim to tell their environmental and social stories in creative ways. Annual reports are a start, but rarely reach a critical mass of consumers. Leverage social, various media channels and creative storytelling to communicate your sustainability journey.

FORECAST:

Brands must talk the Tok

When it comes to showcasing food trends, TikTok has Instagram beat. Given the platform's ease-of-use and built-for-virality algorithm, influencers and emerging consumers alike [prefer](#) the short-form video-sharing social network to Instagram, viewing the former as a welcome departure from Instagram's overly curated aesthetic.

ACTION:

If you want to reach Gen Z and Gen Alpha consumers, head to TikTok. Brands that [perform best](#) on the platform do not over curate and lean in to TikTok's more casual, spontaneous content style. To build a meaningful following and community, utilize relevant hashtags and encourage user engagement.

FORECAST:

Expect experts

Consumers are getting [savvier](#) about fact checking and information, especially when they feel their wallets shrinking. Be able to answer how and why your company's practices are the right practices. And why your products are worth it.

ACTION:

Brands should invest in partnerships with reputable experts, such as scientists and registered dietitians, to tout product benefits. Also, be transparent about what is in your product, as well as what goes into making your product.





Sandy Skees
EVP, SF

PURPOSE & IMPACT

FORECAST:

Consumers want political consistency

Going into an election year, it's not a matter of if, but when brands will be asked to engage in political conversations that matter to their stakeholders.

ACTION:

Know your organization's political POV and approach to communications around politics. Start the year with a full scan of all PAC, trade association and other political contributions your company engages in so there are no surprises. Consumers appreciate consistency, not campaigning. When you determine what's important to your stakeholders, commit to it and hold tight. There will be resistance, but brands who take the long view and maintain their commitment to issues important to stakeholders, will weather most political storms. Authenticity and transparency are key.

FORECAST:

Extreme weather will continue to alarm

In light of 2023's many environmental disasters, consumers have expressed more concern over climate than ever. Not only do they expect to change their own behaviors as a result, they expect your company to take the steps necessary to reduce your own environmental impacts.

ACTION:

For the first time, Porter Novelli research shows that consumers ready to do more than just purchase "green" products. They're ready to make small behavior changes and are looking to brands for guidance on how to live a more sustainable life. 76% of respondents to Porter Novelli's annual purpose poll believe companies should have programs that address environmental sustainability. Stakeholders want brands to be active participants with them in finding solutions for mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

FORECAST:

Progress updates aren't optional

In a recent poll conducted by Porter Novelli, 82% of respondents believe companies should demonstrate how they are following through on their promises to people, the planet, or society. Furthermore, 70% believe companies should talk about how they address similar issues continuously throughout the year.

ACTION:

Don't leave your consumers hanging. They want to know how you've made progress on your stated goals—even ones that will take decades to fully realize. Providing regular updates will not only please your stakeholders but will keep your organization accountable. These updates need to be multi-dimensional and include progress on both product and company efforts. The impact your company is having on the planet and society should be part of ongoing communications and need to find its way across all owned, earned and paid channels.



THE WRAP



**REEVALUATE COMMITMENTS TO HEALTH EQUITY
— OR GET LEFT BEHIND**

**TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE HEALTH
MODALITIES WILL CONTINUE TO INTEGRATE**

ALL EYES WILL BE ON AGE

**DIVERSITY ROLES ARE DISAPPEARING — BUT DEI
COMMITMENTS SHOULDN'T**

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SMALLER COMMUNITIES WILL HIT BIG ON SOCIAL

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**BE PREPARED TO CONFRONT UNCOMFORTABLE
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**EMPOWER EMPLOYEES TO WORK SMARTER
LEVERAGING AI**

CREATIVE CAPABILITIES WILL EXPAND WITH AI

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REAL THING**

**IN-OFFICE OFFERS NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR
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EXPECT EXPERTS

CONSUMERS WANT POLITICAL CONSISTENCY

EXTREME WEATHER WILL CONTINUE TO ALARM

PROGRESS UPDATES AREN'T OPTIONAL

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ABOUT PORTER NOVELLI

Porter Novelli is the strategic communications company built on purpose to do business better.

In a shifting landscape of new influences and audience power, we decode change and navigate culture to shape reputation and accelerate growth. Porter Novelli is a full-service agency that offers cross-disciplinary expertise in the following four areas: brand growth, corporate counsel, employee experience, and purpose and impact.

