

## **Henry**

Hi. My name is Henry, and I'm here at the CIPR Horizon conference. I'll be interviewing the speakers and catching up with the attendees about some of the learnings from today. So, we've just heard from Sheeraz about creating a sense of belonging in the PR industry. Sheeraz, thank you very much for your talk this morning. If you could just summarise for us some of the main things that you talked about today.

## **Sheeraz Gulsher**

Absolutely. Thank you for having me. So, I suppose today we talked about practical ways we can make the industry more inclusive of people from all backgrounds. I think when you think about the world of PR, our jobs are very straightforward. We need to communicate messages from organisations to a breadth of audiences, and it's so crucial to have a variety of lived experiences on your teams. It'll make your jobs a lot easier, the comms will be more authentic, and honestly, it'll make the industry a far better place.

## **Henry**

You talked about a lot of representation at the junior level for people from ethnic backgrounds but not at the more senior level. Why do you think that is?

## **Sheeraz Gulsher**

I think PR does exceptionally well in attracting and retaining talent from the most junior levels. This is thanks in large to organisations like the Taylor Bennett Foundation, Brixton Finishing School, and I think people in the last, I'd probably say in the last ten years, have been more, I suppose, woken up to it. They know what the challenges are; they know how homogeneous the industry is and how that becomes a problem because we're communicators, and we need to be able to communicate to diverse audiences.

In terms of senior talent, this is a challenge we're facing right now. I think the challenge is we can get great people through the door, but we're not retaining them. So it's really important that businesses create environments where people from all backgrounds can feel like they belong, bring their whole selves to work, thrive and go through the ranks.

I suppose the final practical tip for bosses, comms leaders and agencies, is creating a really clear trajectory of progression. That's something I had major challenges with going through the ranks and hundreds of other people I've spoken to. And I think the industry can be a lot better than that because we want to see representation, senior leadership, from people from all backgrounds because it inspires younger people, it shows that they too can one day reach these incredible heights, be in the boardrooms, be leaders because everyone has that right to have a fair shot.

## **Henry**

Do you feel that there's a particular reason that diversity and inclusion have fizzled out, especially since the high of 2020? Because that was one of the core things for a lot of brands and organisations to talk about diversity and inclusion, obviously after George Floyd, is there a particular reason, do you think, that it's just died down?

## **Sheeraz Gulsher**

I think there's a combination of things. So research from people like us found that conversations on D&I rely so much on tragedy, horrific things happening in the news, on Twitter, as you said, following the murder of George Floyd, everyone falling over themselves trying to make a statement, post a black square or do something.

## **Sheeraz Gulsher**

Unfortunately we've found a year on from that, those conversations fizzled out. I think it's really important to be consistent, be really consistent with these conversations. Otherwise, it just doesn't come across as authentic, and people can see through it. So I think agencies and comms leaders need to work harder in making sure everyone feels heard and everyone feels seen, really, because it will make a much happier work environment because of it.

## **Henry**

One of the things that did come out is the idea of blind applications. And you were asked about this during your talk today.

## **Sheeraz Gulsher**

I don't think there's a silver bullet to this. Everyone has their own approach, and whatever way you cut it, it works well for certain people. A challenge I read recently was a study around blind recruitment, and the writers argued that what blind recruitment does is it puts people at a disadvantage. If you don't have early access to a relative or a friend, for example, in the PR industry, versus someone from a diverse background that's less likely to be in the industry or in these circles already, the person has quite a big advantage. So, yeah, there are pros and cons.

## **Sheeraz Gulsher**

For me personally, my consultancy, Braver, is extremely transparent, with different diverse perspectives. For us, it's a superpower. We want to champion that, and we put all of those details front and centre. For example, beyond gender and ethnicity, we look at people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, people with different sexualities, people who are neurodiverse.

Age is a big one as well. So, for us, we put that front and centre, but people come to us for that very reason. They want diverse perspectives, and they feel that that's what the team needs and that's what the business needs. So it's really up to you. I don't think there's a definitive answer.

There are studies that suggest excuses either way, but for anyone who approaches, for me, it's a wonderful thing if someone has a different perspective in an industry that's often quite homogenous, I think. CIPR study found that a quarter of the industry is privately educated, and it's often people from Russell Group universities or whatever. But it's four times the average private schooling of the national average, which is a bit of a challenge because we need to be representative and allow all voices in so we don't risk falling out of touch, really.

## **Henry**

Do you then think that it needs to be started from an early age of people getting into comms and it being seen as a sort of industry that anyone can enter, not just those that are going to private education?

**Sheeraz Gulsher**

Of course, there are challenges at the grassroots level, often like in our communities. Not many people know where I grew up or what I do. They don't understand it. My mum thinks I'm a journalist, so it's an interesting one. There are challenges at absolutely all levels, and I think the PR industry is doing a good job, like, for example, university outreach or going to schools.

There's a great company called Making the Leap. They invite professionals to go into schools and speak to kids about what their prospects could be. I went years ago, and I talked to maybe 14, 15-year-old kids about PR, and I told them, "Actually, I've worked for Nintendo and Snapchat." They were absolutely blown away and they didn't realise that was an opportunity open to them.

In their eyes, it was like you have to be a computer games programmer to be able to work in the gaming world. That's absolutely not true. So I think we could definitely work harder and show the next generation that actually, these opportunities are open to them, and they too can thrive here.

**Henry**

We've just had our session with Jay Richards, and we have-

**Fatima Banglawala**

Fatima Banglawala from Johnson & Johnson.

**Henry**

Thank you very much. So that's quite an interesting session. Jay did discuss Gen Z and their spending power obviously increasing throughout the year. What do you think about that?

## **Fatima Banglawala**

I think it's absolutely true. I come from a family of four, and all of us are Gen Z, so I see first-hand how much spending power they truly have and even the influence they actually have on millennials. So, my dad's trying to be cooler, so he's thinking, he's asking my brother what brands he should wear, and he's actually imitating some of the things that my siblings and I care about or the brands that we are buying from.

So actually, I think they're massively influential, and I think they're growing, even though they don't have, as Jay also said, that they might not be spending right now, but there will be a point in time where they will be holding the purse strings. But even without holding the purse strings, they have a huge amount of influence right now because they are ultimately the cool generation.

## **Henry**

You say that we should start off with Gen Z. What's the one thing you could change to say, "Right, this is definitely going to make that difference."?

## **Fatima Banglawala**

To engage with Gen Z, I think if I could wave my magic wand and think of a way that we can really engage with Gen Z better, I think it's really doing the research to find out where they're living because not all of them are on social media. I think there is this almost like a blanket statement that if you want to engage with younger generations, you just go to TikTok or Twitter or Instagram.

Actually, I think that we live in a lot of not just virtual spaces, but the in person spaces as well, and really looking at where it is that we're going or frequenting. We're still the people that spend time shopping, actually in the shops, not just online. I think it's doing the research of not just the virtual spaces where we exist, but actually the places in person that we're also frequenting and where we also have footfall because I think that's probably where you can make the most meaningful impact in engaging with us. I say us because I am Gen Z.

**Henry**

Thank you, Fatima. Thank you so much.

**[pause]**

Hi, can you tell us your name and one memorable moment from today?

**Trudy Lewis**

I'm Trudy Lewis from Colinear Limited. My moment for the day was Jay Richards. Yeah, I think just generally talking about Gen Z and Alpha, which I hadn't thought so much about, was probably the most standout moment. Some of the things that he talked about have to do with social media and parents and how that translates to children's future. It was very interesting to hear what he had to say about that.

I think what it will do for me is make me a little bit more mindful about how I interact with Gen Z and then Alpha eventually. I coach people, so one of the biggest issues that come out is about how to interact with Gen Z. It is a big thing for many, and it's coming up with a solution that maybe they can do something with. So, yeah, I will incorporate some of what he said.

**Henry**

Hi, I'm Henry. I work with holidaymakers. If their travel company goes out of business, we work to get them home as part of the UK Civil Aviation Authority. One of my main hobbies I like travelling, and I have the pleasure of speaking with you today, Grace. So, Grace, if you could tell us a bit about yourself?

**Grace Fogarty**

Of course. My name is Grace Fogarty. I'm a presentation skills facilitator. I'm also an actor and a comedy writer, so I love to bring creativity into the workshops that I deliver to help people really present themselves confidently, no matter what situation they're in.

## **Henry**

Thank you, Grace. One of the things that you talked about in your breakout session was a framework, which is how I introduced myself today. Could you discuss a bit more about it?

## **Grace Fogarty**

Absolutely. The framework is network outrageously, become heroic and awesome. The framework has been designed so that anybody can use it, no matter what situation you're in, whether that's a formal networking event or it's a more informal conversation with someone you meet who's in the same industry as you. I designed this framework so that it's really simple and it's memorable and that's what we covered in the workshop.

## **Henry**

One of the things that quite a few people talked about was the initial step of starting up that conversation because that's quite a challenge for a lot of people, including myself. How do you think people can get over that initial barrier of starting up a conversation?

## **Grace Fogarty**

That is a great question. So I think there are a few different things you can do. First of all, use the environment around you to start a conversation. So whether that is commenting on... I commented on the beautiful display of oranges that are in the lobby this morning to start a conversation with someone. Maybe it's a conversation about the coffee that you're drinking. Using your environment as a natural way into conversation is a really simple way to do it.

Henry, you actually shared a brilliant example in the workshop, which was to use humour. I think something that's really important when we're networking is to find a human connection with someone really early on to break the ice, so using humour, making a joke, and making someone laugh is a really nice way to just settle into a conversation. Once that's happened, then you can move into your more formal introduction and get the conversation going.

## **Henry**

Grace, do you think that because so many people focus on that human connection, do you think it should be much higher up the framework, or do you think it's a case of it staying after you describe your name and your outcome as well as your business?

## **Grace Fogarty**

Yeah, that is a really good question. I think human connection is kind of the golden thread of what's so important to remember when you're networking.

In terms of a flow of conversation, an introduction is something you're always going to have to give, and it's something that I've seen people struggle with a lot of really knowing how to give a compelling, attention-grabbing introduction right at the beginning. So that's why we focus on it first in the framework, so people know how they're introducing themselves, and then they can flow into a conversation.

## **Henry**

You talked about a call to action as one of the most important parts of the framework, having that sort of end goal of the networking interaction. Maybe you could describe a bit more about that.

## **Grace Fogarty**

Absolutely. It's really common for when you're at, particularly, a formal networking event, to start to get to the end of the conversation, and you think, "Oh God, I've got to wrap this up. I don't know what to say. I don't want just to say, 'I've got to go to the toilet.'" You want to wrap it up in a professional way, but also, in order for your networking to be productive, you need to end with a call to action so that you've got a reason to follow up with someone.

A couple of things we looked at in the workshop are asking someone directly for their e-mail and saying, I'd love to have a coffee with you so we can carry on our conversation, or asking someone to connect with you on LinkedIn. If you do those things there and

then in the moment, it means that you've firmed up that connection, and then it's easy for you to follow up afterwards so that you can make sure that that person becomes part of your network and you can really help each other just beyond that event or that conversation.

## **Henry**

If you could get the delegates from the conference today to take home one thing, what would it be to take back to their organisation if they were asked, "What did you learn?"

## **Grace Fogarty**

Gosh, that is a great question. I think that the essence of remembering. If someone feels nervous about networking, remember it is all about building a human connection and asking good questions. It takes the pressure off you. You don't need to know what to say. Ask interesting, open questions. That's a really easy way to build a human connection, to get the conversation going and to stay memorable. So I think that would be the biggest thing that I'd love for people to take away.

## **Henry**

Thank you very much, Grace.

## **[pause]**

I've just sat in on a fascinating discussion on preventing burnout with Subira. Could you give us a summary of some of the things that you discussed?

## **Subira Jones**

Absolutely. So, number 1, there is a difference between being run down and being burnt out, which means there's no amount of rest you can take to prevent burnout. Anyone who says that they don't know what they're talking about. Number 2, stress is just like fire. It can be productive when it's well managed or disastrous and catastrophic when mismanaged or worse. We don't know it's occurring, which means burnout is like a house on fire. If you call the fire brigade because your house is on fire and their

response is, could you please just breathe in and breathe out, you'd be left in the lurch. So, when it comes to preventing burnout, it's time to put out those fires.

## **Henry**

We've just come out of one of the biggest life events, the COVID pandemic. Do you think that that saw an increase in burnout?

## **Subira Jones**

Absolutely. In 2019, before we'd even heard of Coronavirus, 54% of working days were lost due to stress-related ill health. By 2022, when the world has reopened, and we can go revel in the arts and fly to sunnier destinations, you'd think that number would decrease, but it has actually increased to 84% of working days being lost. It has definitely gotten worse, despite the fact we can now re-enter into our work-life balance we once had just doesn't work.

## **Henry**

Why do you think that is?

## **Subira Jones**

Because being burnt out is not the same as being run down. So when people want to go for walks and implement healthy lifestyles, like taking breaks and meditation, going on holidays, that's all well and true for those who are run down. Burnout is a completely different phenomenon. Burnout is part of the mental health crisis. It's like telling someone who's anxious to just calm down or telling someone who's depressed to just be happy. It's completely futile.

When it comes to burnout, we have to empower people to take back their personal power, take control of their lifestyles and their careers and really learn how to put out those fires, i.e., the unnecessary stress in their life they may be competing with so they can have the capacity to be innovative and solution-focused in finding their own solutions and navigating the uncertainty which life is.

## **Henry**

Do you think that the work-life balance over the past few years has become blurred? What I mean by that is I've definitely experienced it where when you were working from home when you shut down the laptop, you don't have a place to commute. Your commute is from sometimes your living room to your bedroom. It's very difficult to see the difference between the two.

## **Subira Jones**

Absolutely. I think what it's done is demystified people and helped them realise work-life balance doesn't exist, and that's because a lot of us, myself included at one point in time, would use work as a distraction. So, going to work was a bit of respite from the monotony or the chaos which may have been your life in the pandemic. The national lockdown meant you didn't have that reprieve, that respite that we once had, which is why it's really important to acknowledge that true burnout prevention is a lifestyle.

It's not about the amount of hours you're working, how much you're commuting, the workload. True burnout prevention really means that you have a lifestyle that's stress mitigating, that's fulfilling and fun. So when you're not working, you can switch off.

I'm someone who is a business owner. I can work from absolutely everywhere, but the moment I shut off that laptop, I'm not working. There's part of me that is still switched on because solutions and inspiration for work will come to me, but I'm able to switch off and engage with my family and my friends because I know that there's a difference between using work as escapism and actually having a lifestyle you don't have to escape from.

## **Henry**

Obviously, a lot of organisations talk about well-being and caring for their employees. What can employers do for team members who are experiencing burnout? Because, as you say, it's not a case of just telling them, "Why don't you take a chill pill?" type of thing. What kind of steps can they take?

## **Subira Jones**

Number 1. Never tell the person or your team that you think they're burning out because they will double down to prove to you that they're not burning out, which will just expedite their journey to burnout. What I often say to people, to managers, to team leads, to the C-suite is to introduce burnout education.

A lot of people don't actually understand what burnout is and through their well intention, people end up living in a burnout cycle because well-being initiative just masks the fact that there's an actual problem, i.e., if burnout is like a house fire and the fire brigades just tell you to take a chill pill, take a break, use your paid annual leave. The person is going to be still in danger, still struggling. They're going to be away from work but not thinking about life. They'll be thinking about work still.

What you need to do is bring in that educational piece, which is why I founded my boutique management consultancy. We deliver inclusive burnout intervention services such as webinars such as workshops to not only bring awareness of the problem of burnout but to educate people on the problem of burnout so that organisations can take action around burnout because sustainable high performance only happens when burnout is eradicated. So if you can fireproof your people from burnout, you can future-proof your business for success.

## **Henry**

One final question from me, if that's okay. If you could get us as delegates to take one bit of advice from what you've said today or from the conference, what would that be?

## **Subira Jones**

Is the lemon worth the squeeze? So many of us take on unnecessary stress or undue pressure that's just not for us. Resilient people are really good at making lemonade. But oftentimes, we may not need lemonade. We may not even like lemonade. Ask yourself, is the lemon worth a squeeze? If it is worth a squeeze, can you make anything else other than lemonade, i.e., is it an obstacle, or is it an opportunity for you to create

something different, to excel in your career, or to experience something different in life? If it isn't worth the squeeze, leave it alone.

## **Henry**

We've just finished a session on reimagining the world and how sustainability, technology, and innovation play a pivotal role for people and nature to thrive. I'm here with Diana.

Diana, thank you for your session. Could you summarise some of the things you discussed today?

## **Diana Verde Nieto**

Yes, absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. We are entering into this new era of reimagining, and reimagining not just the world but actually businesses.

Sustainability have been one of the things that we can basically reach peak of it and everybody does it. It's not a differentiator anymore. Yet we are so far away from meeting all the targets and being where we are in terms of really bettering the state of the world and also the livelihood of people.

What we are seeing is how companies are entering this reimagining era, reimagining their business models, reimagining products and sustainnovating. Sustainnovating is about how to innovate in your business with sustainability at the heart of it, how to break the silos, and how to let the sustainability knowledge flow into the organisation in every single business function. Also, how do you equip your suppliers to really actually have that knowledge themselves?

In a way, it's not about what you know but how you enable others to know. In that way, you make your organisation sustainable.

## **Henry**

With Gen Z and Gen Alpha starting to drive change regarding sustainability and the environment, can this be kept up once they become economically influential? As they get older, as they start to be able to get a job, what steps can be taken to ensure it remains a priority?

### **Diana Verde Nieto**

I always say that culture is what you do when nobody's looking, and this is what this generation has done. Gen Z's and Alpha are to sustainability what Millennials were to digital. They grew up with it. If you think about pre-love, it's what they do. They don't think about, "Okay, let's do just new." It's part of their culture.

When you think about renting, it's part of the culture. When you think about business or brand as a service, it's what they do. Netflix, Amazon, and Apple services, this is how they grew up.

I am very much hopeful in this generation because I think, for the first time, it's a generation that they will put their money where their heart is. They also have seen first-hand how we older generations have done it wrongly. They have the voice, and I think that the Greta effect is very real. She started as a lone voice, and every time she turns up, it's billions of people following her all over the world, regardless of their religion, their race, their gender, anything, it's about their beliefs.

I am very hopeful in this generation and I really, truly believe that when these guys start earning money, they will start demanding different things because the default setup for this generation is sustainability at the heart.

### **Henry**

During your speech, you talked about the reimagining model. Maybe you could divulge a bit more into that.

### **Diana Verde Nieto**

Yes, of course. So far, we have looked at sustainability as risk management and how to be less bad, how to cut carbon, cut waste, cut plastic, cut, cut, cut. But we haven't actually reaped the rewards of that. We are moving into how to be less bad to how to be positively good. ESG and legislation is helping companies to do that, and yet, of course, this costs money, and we are still quite far from this side.

But the first thing is about starting to focus on which direction is the direction to travel, and it will be no choice for companies then to think that mainly because of risk management and legislation. But that is what is going to start training them to think about how to be less bad and how to be positively good, how to stop thinking about what is the impact of my business, and to think about what are the outcomes of doing business.

When that happens, the world will become better. Is it going to happen tomorrow? No. But I think that we started to gear and to start moving towards that direction.

## **Henry**

How do you make climate change hot? Or, as some put it in the chat today, sexy. How do you do that?

## **Diana Verde Nieto**

Climate change has the biggest advertising budget than any Tom Cruise movie. You cannot avoid it. It's in every headline in every country in pretty much every language. Unfortunately, it's all about doom and gloom. What we need to try to do is start moving those very fearful narratives into positive narratives that we want to engage with. This is going to take time, but I think that these positive narratives have started to arise.

Sir David Attenborough is probably one of the biggest, most powerful voices, one certainly I admire the most, in which he started to start narrating this concept, which is true, that we actually have all the solutions. Prince William with the Earthshot Prize is about hope and encouraging innovation. I think that very slowly, as we approach into

2030, these narratives will start arising, because the doom and gloom has not worked since climate change was discovered, which unfortunately was in 1658.

### **Henry**

If you were to meet a genie and they could grant you a wish, what would it be?

### **Diana Verde Nieto**

That we would come back to have water at the levels that we had in the beginning of the last century. Because this is the biggest threat to humanity and we don't see it. It's a blind spot. That will be my wish.

### **Henry**

Thank you so much.

### **Alan Oram**

Hi, I'm Alan from Alive With Ideas. The most memorable thing from the day so far is Mark Shayler's session. It just appealed to me because it was about creativity, innovation and how we can all contribute to making organisations make a positive impact on the world from a sustainability perspective.

### **Henry**

Mark, thank you so much for joining us and thank you for such a great session this afternoon. Your session gave people lots of food for thought and a whistle-stop through music education. The Spice Girls, Elvis.

### **Mark Shayler**

I find music is a time machine. It takes you straight back to the moment that you first heard that song or when that song was first released. I use that to pin the changes in climate, the changes in biodiversity, the changes in plastic, and the changes in resources. Whatever it is I'm talking about, I pin it to those time things, number 1. Number 2, it's really disarming when you get a 55-year-old bloke dancing around the

stage like he thinks he's in *The Smiths*. Suddenly everyone has their attention pushed onto the stage.

In terms of concept, that's why it's like that. In terms of the talk, what I wanted to demonstrate is how business has created these problems and how it's fundamentally the only thing that can fix them, and it is. Enterprise is a gift. *Profit* is not a dirty word. But the way we make a profit has to change. The way that companies are measured with their quarterly and annual returns the companies act unfit for purpose, needs to change massively.

I try and then finish off by giving the audience pride and reassurance, that the work that they do matters and that they made the right choice. When they go back into the office or the studio or the factory, they feel empowered to do something about it. That's what I try and do.

## **Henry**

You said that diversity could be seen as a strength here. Could you possibly divulge a bit more into that?

## **Mark Shayler**

Not just diversity can be seen as a strength, it is a strength. If you want to innovate differently, you are not going to come up with better answers by asking the same people, people who look like you, the same or even different questions. You've got to go and find people who aren't like you.

This isn't just about gender. It isn't just about ethnicity. This is about background as well. Whether it be working class, middle class, or the way we're educated, all of those things really matter. We've got to look for answers in different places; otherwise, we're going to carry on this perpetual cycle of developing the same products, the same services, and declining the environmental stock of the planet in the same way.

## Henry

Mark, in your presentation, you continuously mentioned the word *hope*. One of the words that I've heard in my day-to-day job is about opportunity - such important words, not just today, but for future generations. How can they stay motivated in a situation where they are struggling to save up for a new house or to go on holiday, how do they stay motivated?

## Mark Shayler

Firstly, hope and opportunity. Being able to stay up whilst the world feels like it's going down - this is hard. In a cost of living crisis, how can people continue to think positively? Then there's this issue around sustainability being a middle-class or an income-based concern. That's true; we failed here. We have to democratise creativity, and we have to democratise sustainability.

The way that we do that is by changing our business models. Everybody should be able to afford a pair of jeans that last them for life and that are made with as little resources as possible but cost £200. No one can afford that. You have to change the business model that sits around that, so those things come out at, I don't know, £12 a year spread over 20 years. That means that we can pass the benefits of a less damaging life right the way down or along the socio-economic profile.

This is, I think, what happens. People get demoralised by the climate news or they don't believe it, one or the other. They get demoralised by the plastic news, by the biodiversity loss news, and think, "Well, what difference can I make?" It's about systems.

Look at China. That's what I hear all the time. Every fraction of a degree matters. We're not going to hit 1.5. We have to stop short of 2. If we hit 1.7, it's way worse than if we hit 1.6. Every single action matters, and being able to give people the agency to do that is the most important challenge that we've got.

## Henry

You talked about a quote, "With great power comes great responsibility." Given what you've just said, do you think it's down to the big companies to make that first step, so to say, in sustainability? Your Nike, your Amazon's, et cetera, in making that sense of we are going to do something about it for others to then follow? Or is it a case that, it needs everyone here, even though some might not have as much of a pulling power in persuasion?

### **Mark Shayler**

It needs everybody. If we look at the big environmental challenges that we face, climate change, biodiversity collapse, nothing else comes close. Those two are heads and shoulders above everything else. We have to do something, we have to turn our lights off, we have to use, drive more efficiently, all those things. But it's a really small way of doing it.

Government needs to stimulate and business needs to stimulate new methods of energy production. I gave the example of the Eden Project drilling down under Cornwall, 5 kilometres, and hopefully being able to produce net-zero energy by 2035. That is a game changer. We don't need to do anything. We can carry on using energy in the same way. But that's foolish because the less energy we use, the more cost-effective it is, the cheaper our bills are, and the more money we have to spend on other things. So we all get lifted by a change in behaviour.

### **Henry**

After your talk, there was a Q&A session, and pretty much straight away, the main theme that came out was around greenwashing. You said that we're getting to a danger of it going the other way.

### **Mark Shayler**

Greenwashing has become a massive issue because advertising, marketing, and, dare I say it, the PR world has not let the truth get in the way of a good story. They will pretty much say anything to spin it. Those days are over. We need some real serious analysis of green claims.

Thankfully, DEFRA has launched a new Green Claims code, and the Advertising Standards Authority, who are an unlikely environmental guardian, I'll admit, are applying that with great gusto, arguably applying it too firmly in many ways. Greenwashing, we're going to see decline. We then move into green cocking. The portmanteau of greenwashing and peacocking. "Look at me, I'm great. I'm the greenest." That's on the decline as well.

What we're seeing on the rise is green-hushing. Organisations doing great stuff but not wanting to shout about it for one of two reasons. One, they don't want someone to come and hit them over the head with a big stick, saying, "Yeah, but you did this in the past," or "You do this in another country." Also, not wanting people to dig into the science of it.

We're in danger of silencing voices that really need to be heard, and that's a massive fear for me. How we can combat green hushing but still make the messages have base in science and resonate with me as a customer, as a citizen of the planet and go, "Yeah, I like that company because they care like I do."

## **Henry**

If I spoke to one of the delegates here today, and I asked them, what one thing did you learn from what Mark said? What do you hope that they said?

## **Mark Shayler**

What I think they'll probably have said is that the first punk band were the New York Dolls. I suspect they'll probably say that. I think they'll remember the last couple of slides, which were, your job is not to move pencil or pixel. Your job is to move hearts and minds. The fact that the PR industry is an amplifier and you can either amplify really bad music or you can amplify brilliant music and help more people understand.

You are, I said in there, the babel fish; you're the narrator, you're the bit that sits between the businesses and the ears of the customer, the consumer, even the politician. That is a very powerful role. Don't misuse it.

**Henry**

Can you tell us your name and one of the memorable moments of the day today?

**Rachel Miller**

Sure. Hi, I'm Rachel Miller. I'm the founder of All Things IC. I think one of the best things for me today has been getting together face-to-face with people. You can't beat face-to-face conferences. The key takeaway for me is probably the AI conversation with Katie King. I thought that was absolutely fascinating and making it real for people, so it's not just conceptual. Lots of really good real-life examples. All the speakers were fantastic, but Katie was the highlight for me.

**Henry**

I'm here with Katie, who did a fascinating session on PR, AI, ethics, and what comes next. Katie, thank you so much for the session. Everyone is talking about AI right now. What's the one thing you want people to know?

**Katie King**

I want people not to be afraid of it. I want people to have a better understanding that it is really augmented intelligence and big data and insights. It isn't just gen AI, but gen AI is super powerful, and now we've got this ability to tailor these GPTs. So embrace it, get started, get your hands dirty with it, and it's going to revolutionise the way you do work.

**Henry**

Recently, I found on one of the social media networks a government department using AI in a video speech. With the rise of some press releases also being written by AI, do you see that as a danger of not knowing what is real and what isn't real?

**Katie King**

I think the danger is more have we got the information accurate? Does it really matter who's written it? What's most important is, is it accurate? Are we not plagiarising? I've been working with a lot of legal counsels, trying to make sure that PR and marketing

teams are protected. I think it's just essential that we make sure we are putting great material together. We're not plagiarising, and we are on brief.

### **Henry**

Do you think that the use of AI will lead to a decrease in the size of PR agencies, as some tasks can be automated?

### **Katie King**

What I am recommending is that we evolve and take advantage of a lot of these tools to do our jobs better and to actually scale up to be more strategic. Then maybe to broaden what we do and make what we do much more strategic, and maybe even cannibalise some of the wider marketing pie. They don't necessarily need to decrease; they hopefully can expand, but they will change the nature of the type of services that they offer.

### **Henry**

You touched on the scorecard. Maybe you could give a bit more information on this.

### **Katie King**

I'm more than happy to share my slides, and you can find the scorecard at [aiinbusiness.co.uk](http://aiinbusiness.co.uk). You give yourself a score of 0-5 across ten core areas, and it touches on things like do we have the right mindset for change? Are we doing a proof of concept? Are we thinking about the big macro issues of privacy, bias? Do we have a business case? They're just four or five of the really key elements of that scorecard.

### **Henry**

Do you see a danger in customer service departments being replaced by AI, being replaced by chatbot computers that could easily solve queries and solve cases, which could sometimes lead to a detriment to the customer at the end?

### **Katie King**

We've definitely seen a rationalisation because CX, you can, for example, automate 85% of the call centre queries. Of course, there's a bit of rationalisation, but we still need those people there. We still need to be able to escalate up to a human, the more complex queries.

But I think what we are actually doing is, for once, really understanding our customer better and using technology to make the customer journey and the history and knowing our trends and predicting what we might be able to do. As long as we keep that human in the loop and automate and personalise, I think we'd actually be in very good shape.

### **Henry**

One of the questions in that Q&A session was what would come after AI? You touched upon quantum computers.

### **Katie King**

Yeah, I mean, I can't predict what's coming next. I know if you look at Gartner, you can look at the cool technologies that are coming down the line and the innovation trigger, and there are many, many of them. I do worry about the dominance of Silicon Valley. Of course, you've got the tech companies standing up saying, "Regulate us," but they do have real dominance.

You look at the Googles and Microsofts, and even Amazon getting in on the act and so on. That worries me, and I think we need to balance regulation, and innovation, and the monopolies, and mergers commissions, and those guards that do protect us. We need AI to help solve some of the United Nations big macro issues and that's about equality and being able to use AI to solve some very complex issues all around the world, not just to have dominance of some Silicon Valley companies.

### **Henry**

What type of industries are you seeing that are a bit more cautious about expanding upon the use of AI?

## **Katie King**

I've just returned from Canada, where I spent some time with North American banks and Canadian banks, and they're one of the key ones that have, for example, Bank of America banned ChatGPT. Now, we've got the GPTs announced this week where you can effectively tailor them and make them unique and proprietary for your own organisation. I think that's going to alleviate some of those issues.

Of course, heavily regulated industries like financial services and healthcare have got to be really careful in the way that they handle customer data. They're the obvious ones, but I don't think that they're excluded from it. I think they can gain incredible benefits, as I outlined in my talk today.

## **Henry**

Can you tell us your name and one of your highlights of the day today?

## **Son Pham**

Hi, sure. I'm Son. I am a campaign manager at Global Brand Communication Agency Manifest. One of the highlights for me today definitely hosting the session, sharing the space with brilliant industry colleagues, discussing the future of PR and how we can make the industry more inclusive.

## **Henry**

Alex, thank you so much for your discussion today about the changing media landscape and what comes next. You said little changes are happening constantly and that social media expert is hard to define. Could you possibly expand on that?

## **Alex Partridge**

Yeah, sure. Thanks so much. The main point is that the platforms change continuously. Every day, there are updates or little tweaks to the back end of all the platforms. I would never call myself an expert because it's something that changes so often. It's so difficult to keep on top of it.

I think the biggest skill to have is actually adaptability and the ability to keep up with the changes and to run tests and experiments to see what's working and what perhaps stops working. That's when I say I don't think it's possible to be a social media manager, semi in jest because it's something that's ever-changing the landscape. It's difficult to become an expert at that. I think the real skill is that adaptability and the ability to shift as the algorithms change.

## **Henry**

You said that one of the future changes was the rise of VR. What challenges do you see with the increase in VR being used?

## **Alex Partridge**

I think there are many benefits. I think in education, it will be good, and in healthcare, it will be good. I think we're already living in a mental health pandemic with kids and people in general spending far too much time immersed in social media, and I think this is going to amplify that problem. It's going to keep people occupied. It's going to give people no reason to leave the house. I think it has to be done hugely responsibly and hopefully, the big companies put that first over profit, but we'll have to see.

## **Henry**

One of the things you discussed was the issue of micro-influencers. Not those large influences with over a million followers, but some with just up to 50,000 followers. Given the rise of social media apps, you are able to shop on some of these, like the TikTok Shop and the Facebook marketplace. Could it possibly flip the influencer market on its head, especially with PR agencies?

## **Alex Partridge**

Yeah, definitely. I think it is doing that already, and we're going to see an acceleration of that trend. People just trust micro-influencers more. There's such an awareness now that the big accounts that they're just going to get a wedge of money, and they're going to promote a product and they're probably not intrinsically connected to that product.

Whereas the micro-influencers, that somebody who goes hiking every day, if they start talking about a particular boot that helps them with their hiking, you're going to trust that opinion a lot more because it's just such the niche is there, and the expertise is there.

## **Henry**

You talked about the expectation gap between what people see on social media versus reality.

## **Alex Partridge**

Yeah, so I think the expectation gap is a big problem. It's already a big problem with people comparing their behind-the-scenes with other people's highlight reels, especially when that highlight reel is being edited and enhanced in all sorts of little ways that might even be obvious to the subconscious. You're all of a sudden comparing your behind-the-scenes with someone else's edited highlight reel and that expectation gap.

When people are searching for holiday destinations, for example, they might see a picture of Paris, which is a beautiful place anyway, but they might see a picture where the sunset's perfect, and the rain's been edited to look slightly more shiny than it actually is. Then they arrive, and it's like, "Oh, is this it?" Because Instagram's told them that it's just picture-perfect. I mean, it is beautiful. It doesn't need that expectation.

I think education is the solution and really raising awareness and hammering down that point that everything pretty much what you see on social media has been tweaked, enhanced, and made to look a little bit better than in real life. So when you do actually turn up in Paris, then you're not disappointed.

## **Henry**

Hi, Advita. Thank you for opening and closing this great conference today. Can you tell us one of the memorable things that you will take back from this conference?

**Advita Patel**

For me, it was definitely seeing such a range of diversity in the room for me, and the energy that that brought as well and it demonstrates that the different voices and the different thinking that we have on stage today make such a big difference in how we can think about the future of PR and communication. That was definitely a highlight for me.

**Henry**

Thank you so much for tuning into the podcast. This was my first CIPR conference, and I've had a lot of fun. I hope to see you all again next year.