

Disruption, propaganda for hire and the age of juniorfication

 By [Claudia Ferguson](#)

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As we head towards the end of the year and things start to slow down, it's a great time for reflection of what has been, but more than that, it's a time to regroup, strategise and plan for the year ahead. Looking back on 2017, for me there are three key insights the year has provided:



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Disruption

If you do not see the disruption taking place, you have your head in the sand. It's everywhere – some places more obvious than others, but every industry is experiencing change – and the PR industry is no different. There is no such thing as just traditional PR anymore – rather lines have become blurred between marketing, digital, advertising and social engagement. It is for this reason that globally – just look at the consolidation of agencies that have been happening – PR agencies with advertising divisions, creative divisions, digital teams, CRM teams, analytics teams etc. – there have been considerable mergers and acquisitions to bring in diverse skills so that agencies can offer everything “communication” related to clients. As a result, the competitor landscape has just gotten a little bigger. Has it gotten better? – well, that remains to be seen.

'Juniorfication' of the industry

That brings me to my second point – **'juniorfication' of the industry**. As the industry consolidates, skills and expertise are lost. It is impossible to be all things to all people and when you try, it's not surprising that skills dilute. That's obviously not to say that things shouldn't change – they should.

However, they should be done with a key strategy in mind – one that really focuses on strengths and understands weaknesses. For it is only in the understanding of gaps, that businesses can build and upskill. Today, there is a juniorfication happening across the industry – from journalism to copywriters, PR specialists and everything in between and as a result, some of the fundamentals have been lost. Again, it's not to say that the change is wrong – it's just different, which means that a different mindset is needed.

And, if we consider the skills pool and the age of millennials, it's evident that we also need to relook at not only how we attract talent – but what we consider to be talent, as certainly the same talent and skills that drove the industry previously, is

not the same that will take it forward. It's a complex media and business landscape and with new technologies, new platforms and news requirements coming to the fore – we need a new way of thinking

Propaganda for hire

That's not to say however that the foundational business ethics need to waiver – bringing me to my third point – **propaganda for hire**. There is a crisis of ethics currently – just look at the world around us. Money, power, fame has a way of corrupting – and when business is tough, lines can be blurred. Often things are never black or white anymore, they are a muddled grey – but when the grey starts to shape your business decisions, your strategy and your mindset – it's time to take a step back.

PR has always been known for its 'spin doctoring' and its power to change perception but again there is a line and unfortunately many are crossing it – knowingly or unknowingly. Either way, with disruption, cost containment and slow growth all around, businesses and agencies have become too short-term oriented and are looking for easy ways to cut corners – taking on things that they would traditionally never do. My advice – never compromise the business or your integrity.

Some businesses are focused on building and transforming, while others are focused on integrating and maintaining. What is clear, however, is that PR is no longer limited. We are operating in uncharted waters – one that requires us to be agile and adaptable, but also skilled. It requires us to acknowledge change, share and embrace it but never compromise on our business ethics. It's about hard-core business strategy – for both our industry and our clients. We just need to be brave enough to define it.

ABOUT CLAUDIA FERGUSON

Claudia has worked in the PR space for over 10 years. She possesses key strengths in exposure strategy, campaign management and writing and her attention to detail and leadership skills ensure that her team always deliver results that surpass expectations. She also has key competencies with working with global agencies.

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