The background of the entire image is a photograph of a complex multi-level highway interchange at night. The roads are illuminated by streetlights and the headlights of moving vehicles, creating long, streaky light trails against the dark asphalt. The interchange is a dense network of ramps, overpasses, and直道 (straightaways).

vuelio

2020 vision  
PR planning for the  
year ahead

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# Foreword

**Joanna Arnold, CEO, Vuelio**

2019 has been a year of extraordinary flux for the PR and communications industry. We end a turbulent decade in which reputation management, audience engagement and political campaigning have fundamentally changed. The General Election encapsulates the new world where public and political debate is now led by social media engagement. Regardless of sector or topic, influence today shifts in real time between an on and offline environment.

The knock-on impact for our industry is that we've had to become adept at managing lots of information and resilient to uncertainty. It is, of course, far easier said than done and a contributing factor in the mental health crisis our industry is facing. The challenge for every employer and work colleague is to do more to help those affected so they feel able to get the support needed.

While it can feel easy to feel dismay at some of these trends, I finish the year feeling a huge amount of optimism. Perhaps this is still the fuzzy warmth from hosting the Vuelio Online Influence Awards where our winners were industry legends and brilliantly representative of our diverse society. Influencer marketing presents a huge opportunity for the PR and communications industry and I'm delighted to be at the forefront of helping recognise quality and define standards.

This has also been a year of huge transition for journalism where (at last) there has been recognition of the critical need for a robust media to navigate fake news and information overload. The role of editors and journalists in deciphering complexity has never been more important and will only become more so into the next decade.



There can be no doubt that the PR and communications industry will change radically in the years ahead driven by a fundamental shift in how technology is used. Today, the majority of practitioners have only scratched the surface when it comes to applying tools and software to understand and engage with audiences. This will change radically in the next decade bringing growth to our industry but, most excitingly of all, powering improved relationships between public and private, government and business.

The next decade will be as transformative as the one just gone. Translating change into opportunity will, as ever, rely on having the right people and (of course) the right technology.

Thank you to all our clients, my team and our network for all of your support and contribution.

# **Introduction**

# A year of change...

A call for ethics, a need for more regulation, the rise of churnalism and traditional mediums making way for new: 2019 was a year for PR to make changes, within its own industry and in reaction to the continuing evolution of journalism into a 24/7 cycle needing to be fed with fresh information.

While a press release to national news desks across the country is increasingly likely to go to centralised hubs under pressure to produce quick shareable snippets of content, PR has had to adapt.

New ways to tell and share our stories have developed in response to these challenges, and as more of the world is connected, new obstacles have arisen alongside new demands from our audiences. Greater accountability is demanded from storytellers across public relations, government and the media, in the messages we send, how we use the new technologies at our disposal and who we choose to work with and why.

This was echoed by Paul Maher, founder and CEO of Positive Marketing, in a [recent interview with Vuelio](#). He said: 'Politicians have woken up, some would say decades too late, to the power of tech to provide and eliminate jobs, to evolve economies and to simultaneously boost and hinder personal freedoms built on privacy. Soon we believe there will be nowhere for the disinterested or apathetic to hide.'

Ethical questions of how employees are treated and their skills developed are also asked – more is expected of companies in how people are rewarded within teams, how new and diverse voices can be amplified in our campaigns and where trust can be built with authenticity. Looking back at the past year to learn from the challenges the industry has faced and to prepare for upcoming trends, Vuelio has gathered insight and predictions from those working within the PR, influencer and marketing industries.

We look at the continuing rise of the influencer and where traditional media will fit into the increasingly digital landscape. We look forward to the challenges and opportunities PR will face in 2020.

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**Certainly, one of the biggest challenges the industry faced in 2019 was the vociferous headlines and editorial pieces forecasting the demise of influencer marketing. We predict 2020 will be about rebuilding trust in the industry, which can be achieved by working with true talent over and above influence. By adapting a talent-led approach, we are better able to solve growing concerns regarding fake followers, promote diversity and increase advocacy as we continue to focus on building long-term partnerships and deliver authentic and credible results.**

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**– William Soulier, CEO and co-founder of [Talent Village](#)**

A large, abstract graphic element consists of several thick, white, curved lines that radiate from the bottom right corner towards the top left, creating a sense of motion or a fan-like shape.

# The industry view

# Move to enduring storytelling

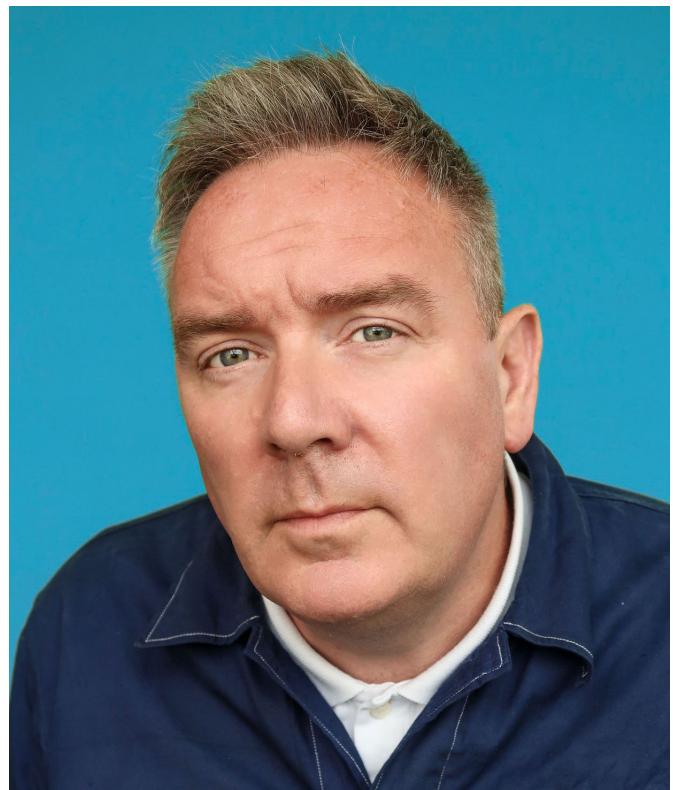
Colin Cather, creative director at [Bottle](#)

The biggest challenge of 2019 that we noticed was the increasing rise of brand short-termism. This is one of the key highlights that reoccur in reports by Binet and Field. Brands are focusing on activation and conversion metrics at the expense of longer-term investment in campaigns and content platforms that reach new audiences. We have our own evidence of the effectiveness of this, so it doesn't require a leap of faith, it just requires commitment, and a desire to move beyond short-term metrics.

In an age where it is pivotal for brands to cut above all of the noise to ensure they are heard and noticed, it is important that they are 'known for' something, not just 'known' or 'seen', and that takes sustained campaigns and enduring storytelling – people want to 'care', but too many brands are still sacrificing this because it's an investment and a commitment.

In the digital world, we spend too much time trying to solve for Google by second-guessing the algorithm, and meetings can be spent staring at a cell on a spreadsheet, instead of simply trusting in the fact that Google is trying to solve for the audience's intent. We believe that the most important learning is just go straight there, think about the audience and what they want, care about and would be surprised-by; Google will reward when this is done well. Also, giving answers to searched-for questions' is just one job... it's not THE job.

Creating Help content is so seductive, because so many insights tools will tell us the 'searched-for' things, but we have to think about the Hub, and particularly Hero storytelling, which takes leaps and creativity, 'jumping-rivers' from the rational insights.



For 2020, one of our priorities is the development – and the presentation to clients – of the audience insights that are focused on meaningful long-term trends, core human motives and universal truths – the ones that drive enduring brand positioning.

As advertising guru Bill Bernbach said (excuse the gendered quote): 'It took millions of years for man's instincts to develop. It will take millions more for them to vary. It is very fashionable to talk about changing man. A communicator must be concerned with unchanging man, with his obsessive drive to survive, to be admired, to succeed, to love, to take care of his own.'

# Treat ethics as a business necessity

Adam Smith, managing director at [Teamspirit](#)

Just over two years ago, BlackRock chief executive Larry Fink called on businesses to define their societal purpose, sending a message to the corporate world that working towards profit alone was no longer good enough. Ethics and purpose have since become a driving business strategy for companies everywhere – being ethical is no longer a behind-the-scenes activity relegated to a footnote in the annual report, it's a c-suite issue.

Some of those in the industry already prioritising societal purpose are Starling Bank and Barclays. Both voluntarily introduced gambling blockers to help ensure that payments cannot be made to gambling sites – an example of businesses stepping up and filling the gaps that exist in current policy, leading by example to meet the sentiment of both investors and users.

Being purpose-driven is also creating new business models such as benefit corporations (or 'B-Corps') – businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. Hundreds of global businesses have taken this path, from crowdfunding site Kickstarter to Hootsuite and Ben & Jerry's.

The fintech sector is also doing its bit to improve financial inclusion and equality – companies like Arabesque are using self-learning artificial intelligence quant models to assess the performance and sustainability of globally-listed companies, while others like Tribe Impact Capital and Tickr offer ethical investments based on the UN sustainable development goals without compromising profit.

The cost of not meeting our new standard of expectations is all too apparent – just look at Facebook's current reputation. With the Cambridge Analytica data scandal, the world saw how Facebook had lost sight of its purpose and broke the implicit value proposition to its users.



Sceptics who may wonder whether this 'fluffy purpose stuff' actually impacts the bottom line should note the torpedoing of Facebook's share price during that period (£\$185 to \$165 in a week). It is now lulling at around \$150.

For the end consumer, the impact is clear – a vast majority (92 per cent) of millennials are reported to be more likely to purchase products from an ethical business. It's a win-win; businesses that display a societal purpose and communicate that to external audiences will see clear financial benefits.

It's not conceited for a business to proudly communicate its purpose to a wide audience. The more we hear about companies taking an ethical stance, the more we'll start to see other organisations taking a proactive approach.

2020 will be the year for business to take a stance.

Don't wait – define the purpose and ethics of your firm, take the lead and don't find yourself on the back foot. If policy isn't moving fast enough for you, do it yourself. Purpose not only makes business sense – it's now a business necessity.

# Cut down on 'churnalism'

Gemma Flinders, senior digital PR specialist at Receptional

One challenge we noticed in 2019 was online publications expecting payment for every piece of content they are sent. This year we have had editors of trade magazines, niche publications and business websites expecting renumeration for posting editorial content or even news releases, despite the relevancy in their industry.

The speed of digital, people wanting more content, right now, 24/7, can create a 'churnalism' out of the most well-intentioned journalists. Although we haven't found this with national news publications as of yet, they present their own challenges for PRs. Namely an underdog's ability to be heard above the noise.

Smaller clients may have better data-led stories and a stronger campaign, but standing out among those companies with bigger media budgets is progressively challenging. A modest media budget may cover a range of attractive, custom data visuals, but a bigger brand with the ability to create original video will always win over the journalist.

Next year, our focus is going to be on offering better media, with an emphasis on video. Most publications will publish an interesting video, so having a strong campaign supported with a 30-second clip is likely to increase pick-up exponentially. In a journalism industry that can favour social shareability over facts and figures-based campaigns, we must ensure they have shareable multimedia along with the press release in 2020.

Influencer marketing will grow even further, and across industries other than lifestyle categories. Influencers have the ability to give brands credibility. By choosing a trusted influential person in their niche, brands can demonstrate how their product works without the accusation of bias.



Chosen influencers should have built up a level of trust and integrity with their followers, meaning their word is more trustworthy than a branded ad.

Engagement metrics should also be the main determining factor for PRs or brands choosing an influencer, as engagement cannot be bought, unlike followers. Influencer marketing is definitely going to be part of my plans going forward.

# Influencer marketing in 2019

2019 was a busy year for the influencer industry, through success and controversy – no wonder industry expert Scott Guthrie wrote over 50 articles on the sector during the last 12 months. His [year in review](#) included both the highs and lows, from Jake Paul's contentious choice to publish branded content for Mysterybrand in January to the [CMA's announcement of new guidelines for influencers](#), urging transparency when working with brands.

In February, the self-appointed Influencer Squad outed 28 influencers they believed to have bought engagement and followers. Concerns over the potential for fraud within the industry and how to prevent it would be a recurring theme through the year, sparking attempts to quell its cost (in his post, Guthrie cited it as being between \$500m and \$1.3 billion a year, based on various datasets).

March saw Instagram, the natural home of the influencer, test its new creator accounts – offering influencers in-depth analytics of their follower counts. In April, the platform began its test of hiding likes. May saw former Unilever CMO Keith Weed – who had previously caused a stir with his three commitments on influencer marketing – invest in influencer marketing platform Tribe. June was a time for questions of authenticity following fashion influencer Marissa Casey Fuchs and her fiancé Gabriel Grossman's sale of their wedding proposal to the highest bidding brand. That didn't stop the rising value of influencers, however – in July, figures showed that spending on the sector in the US and Canada was up 83% year on year.

Summer saw a march towards a safeguarding of professional reputations with Love Island contestants challenging an influencer fraud claim. In September, The Australian Influencer Marketing Council (AIMco) launched as a platform for companies working within the discipline to collaborate and develop standards for best practice.

Helping to continue the conversation on governance was October's #FuturePRoof guide for public relations, increasingly important considering influencer marketing's climb in search popularity according to Google Trends analysis.

The great value in influencers (creative directors, photographers and promoters, all in one) continued, with a November report from IZEA showing a rise of 44% in cost from 2018 to 2019 for a sponsored Instagram photo. And with the spending came stricter rules – Instagram started insisting that creators tag their business partners in branded content to encourage 'a more trusting and transparent community' going forward. With its value already proven and stronger governance coming, influencer marketing is set to continue to be a growing trend in PR.

# Influencer marketing in 2020

Scott Guthrie, independent influencer marketing consultant

The conversation around data will start to shift from 'we need it' to 'can we trust it'? We'll ask questions around data's provenance. For example, is it straight from a platform's API or is the data scraped? We'll also place more emphasis on the contextual intelligence of the communicator in deciphering the data, in organising it, in putting it to productive use, in giving it meaning and in ultimately turning data into knowledge with insight.

This translation of data into knowledge with insight will re-ignite the importance of quality storytelling.

We'll search out passion and purpose within creators' storytelling. Brands should be wary of bandwagoning, though – avoiding jumping on good causes just because they're newsworthy. If brands' declared values are not the same as their lived values they will be called out by influencers and influencers' communities. Watch the number of brands that get it wrong in April 2020 when they attach themselves to Earth Day's 50th anniversary without placing environmental issues at the heart of their businesses.

Instagram will become more eCommerce-focused. Checkout and Creator profiles will be fully rolled out globally. This will put the Facebook-owned app on a collision course with Amazon. At the other end of the scale, Etsy, which offers micro-sellers the chance to connect directly with an audience, will continue to rise in popularity – hailing a renaissance for the artisan.

The TikTok versus Instagram wars will heat up. Instagram will ape more of TikTok's features as it has already done in Brazil with Reels. The battle for young users will become geopoliticised. US authorities will scrutinise TikTok's parent ByteDance to ensure personal data cannot be compromised by Chinese authorities.



We'll think less about whether nano influencers 'trump' micro, mid-tier or celebrity creators. Instead, we'll focus on objectives, budgets and how we intend to measure success.

# The trusted and traditional

Dominic Baliszewski, co-founder and director of YOURS . SINCERELY

With stories including Trump wanting to nuke hurricanes (may still be true), the convenient appearance of @factcheckUK, and a certain party leader's apparent love of killing squirrels, the fake news epidemic has shown no sign of slowing down in 2019. What does this mean for those of us working in the industry, and how will things shape up as we move into the 2020s?

## The old new(s) brands

As the public becomes more savvy about 'fake news', I think we'll see a noticeable swing back to 'traditional' media brands in terms of where people are looking for news. The BBC was the fifth most-visited site in the UK for 2019, up from last year and still ahead of Twitter, Wikipedia and eBay. People have an affinity for brands with whom they have had a lasting relationship and, in a world where it's increasingly difficult to trust what you read, the old news brands have a big opportunity to represent the news brands of the future.

## The continued rise of digital spend

Total digital ad spend is predicted to overtake total offline spend in the US this year and this trend shows no signs of slowing. As the definition of 'news' continues to change, as well as the sources people turn to for said news (Twitter, Facebook), the lines between an editorial and an advertising message continue to blur. I predict this to continue into next year, and as a result, PR will need to continue to cement itself as part of a cohesive digital communications strategy, and not as an 'added extra'.

## The value of the link

Lastly, when it comes to predictions for next year, I have a small rant and a call to arms. I was speaking to a friend who runs marketing in-house for a global brand recently.



I asked how her PR was working and she responded, 'Well, all our agencies internationally now know they have to ask for links. The only place we're struggling is Germany where the agency keeps trying to push that coverage has value without.' This view is surprisingly and (for those of us in the industry) frustratingly common place.

Many brands seem to have forgotten that a carefully-crafted message placed in the right publication, that highlights your brand, product and/or story, can be hugely valuable with or without a link. As we move into next year, I'd love to see the industry collectively reminding businesses of this. Political parties don't discount and ignore coverage where there is no link, and they're trying to influence who people vote as their leader for half a decade. Surely the same is true when it comes to influencing which brand of dishwasher tablets someone buys?



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