

**2020 WREAKED HAVOC ON SOCIETY
BUT MAY HAVE PERMANENTLY ELEVATED THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY'S
STATUS, IPREX AGENCIES REPORT**

COLUMBUS, OHIO – March 1st, 2021 – IPREX, the \$420m global communications network, today released insights about the lessons of 2020 and implications for 2021 for the independent PR and marketing industry, based on inputs from its offices around the world. Despite – or maybe because of – its many challenges, 2020 heightened the need for communications services.

“While the impacts of the pandemic and the economic disruptions weren’t experienced uniformly across sectors or markets, there are some powerful learnings that both give optimism for the year ahead and highlight areas for communications and marketing leaders to prioritize, wherever they operate. Challenges abound and vary widely, but solutions without fail include solid communications strategies,” said Julie Exner, Global President of IPREX.

Uneven Disruption and Uneven Recovery

Firms with deep experience supporting hospitality, tourism, and travel suffered alongside their clients, as the impacts of the pandemic brought much of that sector to an abrupt halt. While these firms continue to recover, many IPREX firms also expect to be impacted by the emergence of new or changed trade dynamics, from the aftermath of Brexit for the E.U. and the U.K., to the next generation of China-U.S. relations under a Biden administration, among a myriad of others.

Global Scale Challenge Reinforces Global Scale Solutions

While each country, region and metropolitan area around the world shaped its response to the challenges of COVID-19 based on local realities, the capacity to share experiences, stories and data created a strong awareness of the value of global connections. Alliance efforts in the future won’t be a return to past practices or models, but new forms of global cooperation, collaboration and partnership with independent firms on-the-ground in key markets operating with the benefits of shared talent, technology and best practices.

The Complicated Future of Facts Means More Communications Needs

Both the pandemic and the accelerating polarization of societies around the world have contributed to the fracturing of traditional sources of public information, undermining citizens’ confidence in official messaging from government and private brands. IPREX firms have seen an increased demand related to developing strategies to reinforce the credibility of those institutional players. This need isn’t likely to abate anytime soon. Specifically, IPREX firms report a rise in the increasing sophistication required in using digital and social media tools for the delivery of effective messaging.

Purpose-Driven Work on the Rise

Many corporations supported by IPREX firms are engaging in unprecedented efforts to ensure they are meeting their obligations to all their stakeholders: customers, employees, communities and investors. Corporate social responsibility efforts are moving into new levels of investment and sophistication. IPREX firms report clients are increasingly coming to their agencies for environmental, social and governance (ESG), sustainability and purpose-driven work.

Equity and Systemic Racism Demand Thoughtful Navigation

Set off by events in the U.S. (in particular, the death of George Floyd), but reverberating around the globe, issues of racial and ethnic equity have now been raised to a level of awareness such that brands and organizations cannot sit on the sidelines. Authentic and inclusive voices, as well as clear intentionality, are now reputational commitments being made by IPREX itself, as well as by the clients IPREX agencies serve through their public relations and strategic communications services.

About IPREX

IPREX is a \$420 million network of communication agencies, with 1,220 staff and 93 offices worldwide working across the spectrum of industry sectors and practice disciplines. IPREX is the tenth largest communication group as ranked by The Holmes Report in its survey of public relations holding companies and global networks.

ENDS

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IPREX partner quotes for media use

CANADA

David Eisenstadt, Founding Partner, TCGPR (The Communications Group Inc)

While we work across Canada, most of our clients reside in Ontario, where the strictest health restrictions have been experienced. Predictions are that this province could see the country's strongest economic growth in 2021, so we are optimistic as we look ahead. The "buying local" notion is gaining in popularity and that could be a growth opportunity for businesses in Canada... We do look forward to the day when we'll be able to get back to some of the old norms, especially in-person relationships that have been replaced by video screens.

CHINA

David Croasdale, Managing Director, Newell Public Relations

China was the first into the COVID-19 pandemic and seems to be the first major economy to emerge from it. In 2020, it was the only major economy to experience any growth (2.3%)... On the client-side, data analytics and artificial intelligence are making big inroads into the activities of marketing managers at leading firms... A brave new world beckons in 2021.

GERMANY (Dusseldorf)

Ralf Weber, President & CEO, M/E Brand Communication

It makes me optimistic that vaccines are available now; this brings hope to companies and industries. Hope means confidence. This means in consequence, that companies get back into a development mode rather than a survival mode, although the latter will dominate 2021.

GERMANY (Hanover)

David Mache, Chief Executive Officer, MT-Medien

The Corona pandemic has created a new normal of communication: nothing can be planned anymore. This creates uncertainty, but also an enormous need for consulting. With professional crisis communication, we give our customers orientation and safety. Even in turbulent times, we use our external perspective to ask the questions that are essential for focusing and strategically aligning communications. We have the solutions and concepts to push aside the communicative barriers in a pandemic. We know the future trends and support change management.

GREECE

Mania Xenou, Owner, Reliant

The development of vaccination has been proved an unprecedented achievement putting an end to the uncertainty. At the end of this difficult period, we are all armed with much knowledge, intelligence, resilience and new ideas about our business future. "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger."

INDIA

Xavier Prabhu, Founder & Managing Director, PRHUB

The number of tools and platforms in the PR professionals' arsenal has grown tremendously allowing us more options to ensure value is delivered to clients; and in many cases more targeted than before. Making it much more exciting than before and opening up immense learning opportunities for the willing.

IRELAND (Cork)

Ann-Marie O'Sullivan, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, AM O'Sullivan PR

The value of strategic communications was really showcased in 2020. Whether organisations had a need for issue management or reputation management or needed support through a restructuring project, the PR industry stepped up with the necessary support.

IRELAND (Dublin)

Jim Walsh, Founder and Chairman, Walsh:PR

The challenges for many businesses in 2021, particularly those that have been closed for much of 2020, will be to communicate the fact that they are open for business again... Our experience in 2020 and looking ahead to 2021 is that our clients are willing to continue to invest in communications because they are seeing the value in staying close to their customers and stakeholders during this difficult time. We've benefited from some of our clients above the line budgets being invested in PR as PR represents a more agile communications tool.

JAPAN

Keisuke Maeda, CEO, Asoviva

The PR agency is in demand more than before. According to the research by Senden Kaigi magazine, PR agency is the second most consulted partner for those who worked in digital, following web production, in the last year. However, our research in 2020 shows that 80% of respondents are concerned about fake and false news. This implies trusted communications are needed and that's where the PR agency plays an important role.

MEXICO

Silvia Pineda, Managing Director, Dextera Comunicación

IPREX has become for us a creative, courageous and intelligent hub from which we extract a lot of insights on how to increase our value and our business. The constant sharing of information and experiences makes us believe that we have the strength to bypass the next challenging months.

POLAND

Jakub Zajdel, Chief Executive Officer, more communications agency

I look forward to 2021 with much more confidence, optimism and a set of tools and solutions to strive to thrive rather than try to stay in business.

PORTUGAL

Ana Paula Salgueiro, Senior Partner, Influence Suite Portugal

Sincerely, in 2020 due to pandemic context and lockdowns, we were completely focused on the client's needs and on the management of our agencies through a perfect storm, implementing new work methodologies and moving faster into digital mode. However, along with the great challenges raised in 2020, also came important lessons learned. The Portuguese PR industry, in general, showed resilience and capacity to adjust to a fast moving social and economic environment. Clients had to reinvent their business models, adjust operations to the pandemic context and many of those changes needed to be communicated, so the work volume was constant and quite intense. To speed up the business

digitalization proved to be crucial and revealed good opportunities to team up with new business partners, with specific skills in areas that most agencies do not have in house and that fact is proving to be an interesting experience, with benefits both for clients and internal structures.

RUSSIA

Askar Isaev, Chief Executive Officer, Altezza Communications

The pandemic made some clients better understand the vital importance of communicating clearly with their stakeholders both outside and inside their organizations.

SINGAPORE

Anu Gupta, Director, Asia PR Werkz

There lies an opportunity in every crisis. We have a renewed approach that reflects the changing needs of our clients, that is, as needs changed, Asia PR Werkz transformed and reinvented ourselves.

SPAIN (Barcelona)

Óscar Iniesta, Partner Senior Consultant, LLYC

In the last 10 years, an important transformation of communication has already been noticed, mainly marked by the digitization of communication processes and its impact on the way of managing communication. The pandemic has not only come to confirm this transformation, but has also abruptly precipitated the adoption of new forms of communication far beyond what was contemplated by the first perspectives.

SPAIN (Madrid)

Mayté González-Gil, Chief Executive Officer, Influence Suite

Clients appreciate honest consulting more than ever in the face of the uncertainty and economic problems that have come with the pandemic.

UNITED KINGDOM

John Williams, Chairman, Mason Williams Communications

When the government restrictions on movement and entertaining end there will be a huge pent-up demand for the services our customers offer. That is hotels, bars and restaurants in the main... I think it will take at least two years before we return to the “good old days” – and that might be being optimistic.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Arizona)

Josh Weiss, President, 10 to 1 Public Relations

In 2020, we saw companies generally follow one of two strategies: to hibernate or accelerate. The companies that chose to hibernate essentially tried to minimize their footprint and costs to conserve cash with the plan to reenter the fray once the pandemic passed. The companies choosing to accelerate were the ones who doubled down by being more aggressive or pivoting their businesses quickly to maximize short term returns in hopes of a long-term positive effect... The number of new prospect inquiries has increased sharply at the end of 2020 and into 2021 from both companies that have been accelerating and those that have been hibernating... As vaccination rates increase, I’m optimistic we’ll see inquiries continue to blossom from companies that want to be well positioned for the PC (Post COVID) economy.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Michigan)

Frank Buscemi, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Creative Officer, and Tom Eisbrenner, President, MBE Group

Ironically, a result of the global pandemic is that we made our company much more healthy.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Minnesota)

Kathy Tunheim, President & Chief Executive Officer, Tunheim

In the crazy, noisy world of 2021, it has never been easier to push out messages...and never been more difficult to actually be understood. And the work of strategic communications people like those across the IPREX network is about helping clients be understood. Increasingly our clients are keenly aware that one-way communications can't deliver on their business goals and two-way communication has always been at the heart of what we do. We listen, we discern, we deliver real engagement and, over time, understanding.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (New Jersey)

Christopher Lukach, President, AKCG

2020 has boosted my sense of risk tolerance... we're coming out of the COVID era with a different, perhaps more refined sense of who we are.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (North Carolina)

Natalie Best, Chief Operating Officer, French/West/Vaughan

The PR industry showed resilience in 2020, and we are poised to navigate our clients around what's ahead in 2021. The world has changed forever, but the need for authentic, trustworthy and purposeful communications is needed now more than ever.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Ohio)

Laura Phillips, President and Partner, Vehr Communications

The IPREX brain trust is bringing unparalleled insight to each team to benefit communications strategies, whether for our agencies or the local entities and global brands we serve.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Oklahoma)

Jeff Risley, Chief Strategy Officer, Saxum

I'm optimistic about our business -- and our profession -- in 2021 because now, more than ever, the world needs great communicators. What many businesses, individuals and politicians think is communication is really nothing more than canned reactions, at best, or yelling into the social space, at worst. Real communication is a dialogue, and our profession knows how to create and sustain dialogue among stakeholders... Our industry is rising to this moment and helping these businesses make meaning beyond making money. That gives me great hope for free-market capitalism, in general, and our profession, specifically.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Tennessee)

David Jarrard, President & Chief Executive Officer, Jarrard Phillips Cate & Hancock, Inc.

The pandemic has been – and remains – a transformational season for businesses and organizations across the globe... Necessity has sparked such successful innovation that how we work together as a firm will be forever changed, to the benefit of our colleagues and clients.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (Washington)

Roger Nyhus, President and Chief Executive Officer

A key challenge brands face is bruised reputations due to COVID-19. Our industry is uniquely qualified to help build brands back better than they were through authentic, creative and collaborative strategies.