



CORPORATE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES AND TRENDS 2017: United States

Executive Summary of Final Report

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The “CCI -- Corporate Communication Practices and Trends Study 2017” underscores corporate communication as a strategic management function and increasingly, as a strategic business partner for the business enterprise. The need to take full advantage of digital opportunities to engage customers is driving ongoing integration of communication, marketing, and digital media in many corporations. This in turn transforms the discipline of corporate communication. Developments in the communication landscape drive changes in talent and competence requirements for the profession, while the core functions of corporate communication practice remain unchanged. Chief communication officers describe corporate communication as “the guardian of our mission” and “purveyor of Truth.” They also validate the field’s strategic role in engagement and amplification of corporate messaging. Corporate communication is “driving business strategy through communication” with the aim of creating an environment for “conducting business more effectively.” At the same time, corporate communication “helps drive change management within the company” and also helps to “manage reputation in a fraught environment.”

The results of the CCI 2017 Study have significant implications for professional practice worldwide. We outline selected key insights of the 2017 survey findings below. The full results can be found in the [2017 Presentation](#) on the [CCI website](#).

1 Top critical issues in the field of corporate communication in 2017 were identified as maintaining “**trust, integrity, and candor**” in the world of “fake news”; being “**nimble and effective**” in response to the constant and rapid changes; **mitigating reputation risks** in a very fraught environment; developing **talent and competences** in response to **globalization, digitalizing, and integration** of marketing and communication functions; understanding the strategic role of communication in **customer and employee engagement**; dealing successfully with the “**new reporting lines**” that result from the **merging of communication and marketing**; and, helping executives to address proactively with the “**expectation of C-suite communication.**”

2 Top trends driving these issues include:

- **Further expansion of the digital engagement landscape:** direct engagement with stakeholders; new non-traditional media outlets to get corporate messages out; content creation and management for the new channels.
- **Integration of marketing, communication, and social media** to address customers’ digital engagement.
- Breaking down **silos, convergence** of communication functions, **integration** of internal and external communication, and **resurgence** of internal communication.
- **Recent shifts in the communication environment:** “fake news;” expectation of corporations to have a view even on non-business related, political, social issues; accelerating speed; lack of trust.

3 Strategic importance of corporate communication as a business partner is increasing. Corporate communication “**drives business strategy** through communication” and “**creates an environment to conduct business more effectively.**” The corporate communication function is “**becoming an integrator within the business,**” it connects business units (globally) around the enterprise’s strategy. At the same time, **the traditional core responsibilities remain important:** corporate communication is the “**chief storyteller and amplifier of corporate messages**”; as a function, it **builds and guards the reputation of the organization**; and, **engages internal stakeholders and helps to drive action and change.** The nine core areas of responsibility define the function year on year – the ubiquity of these responsibilities remained in 2017: over 80% of respondents listed the following as their core responsibilities:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Communication Strategy | • Communication Policy | • Executive Communication |
| • Reputation Management | • Media Relations | • Public Relations |
| • Crisis Communication | • Employee/Internal Communication | • Intranet Communication |

4 Strategic contributions of corporate communication to the organization’s success focus on **reputation management, corporate storytelling,** and on its **role as strategy amplifier and business integrator.** Corporate communication staff serve as experts in communication, but also as coaches and counselors to leaders in all communication related issues. Corporate communication functions as the **conscience** for the business and as a vigilant **lifeguard for the brand.** Building and maintaining a **reputation** that “**sets the stage for successful business and protects the company in a crisis**” remains the central contribution expected from the corporate communication function.

5 The increasing critical nature of reputation management is also reflected in how chief communication officers see their primary role: 40% of the respondents indicated “maintaining the

company’s reputation” as their main role, followed by the “counsel to the CEO.” **Reputation management as the #1 perceived role of corporate communication** is a change that took place in our 2013 survey; prior to that, **strategic communication counsel was cited as the primary role for corporate communication officers since the first CCI Study in 1999**. In the interviews, many respondents, however, expressed their concern that they had too little time for the traditional main role of the chief communication officer as the strategic counsel to the CEO.

Functions that best describe the role of corporate communication	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Manager of the company’s reputation	40.0 %	10.0 %	2.5 %
Counsel to the CEO and the Corporation	20.0 %	10.0 %	10.0 %
Advocate or “engineer of public opinion,” in support of the company’s policies	10.0 %	12.5 %	17.5 %
Source of public information about the company	10.0 %	5.0 %	5.0 %
Manager of employee relations (internal communication)	5.0 %	10.0 %	12.5 %
Manager of the company’s image	5.0 %	7.5 %	7.5 %
Driver of company publicity	2.5 %	12.5 %	15.0 %

6 Success in managing corporate reputation rests primarily on the corporate communicator’s ability to “focus on the **values**” and “**culture of the company**” and to “**create the ethos of the company**” among the employees, as well as on a “**robust understanding of the digital media landscape**” in order to “**integrate the communication strategy across many platforms**” and to make sure that “reputation is being driven **consistently**” to all stakeholders. **Intentional investments into (stakeholder) relationships** are considered “deposits of goodwill in the bank for the moments of crisis.” The ability to **measure** reputation developments in an objective way, and benchmark what the company is, as opposed to what it aspires to be, is essential for communicative success.

7 Sought-after competences of corporate communication also continue in 2017 to include the traditional communication core capabilities of **writing, editing, and truth-telling** – but in combination with **thorough business acumen**. Today’s communicators should be “**business savvy and know the language of the business, but maintain an outsider’s view** and a **consultative mindset** with the courage to voice the feedback to the company.” **Individual practitioner competences** should include intellectual curiosity and willingness to take intelligent risks, combined with a strategic mindset, an ethical compass, and resilience. **Corporate communication as a function is expected to show agility and speed; the ability to adapt and change; a global perspective; strategy development and change management; vision and excellence.**

8 Dealing with uncertainties in the political, social, and technology environment has become part of daily life for the corporate communication function – “we need to embrace it.” Uncertainties call for **planning, quick assessment, and action**, and **well-established “trust with the senior leaders** to launch all approvals.” According to the respondents, the ongoing **integration of marketing and communication in many corporations, challenges the corporate communication function** to keep it as a merger of equals, instead of becoming “swallowed by the bigger marketing function with more robust budgets.”

9 Budget and staff increases reflect economic confidence. Half of the respondents reported no change in department budgets, but those who reported increased budgets, experienced more significant increases than in 2015 or 2013. More than a third of the respondents reported an increase in their department personnel, and half of them up to 5% increase in staff. “My biggest challenge is talking about company strategy and talent, versus the day to day running of the communications function.”

Increased Budget				
2017	2015	2013	Change	
45.5%	11.4%	10.7%	+5%	
36.4%	15.9%	10.7%	+10%	
0%	0.0%	1.8%	+15%	
18.2%	9.1%	7.1%	+15% +	
Increase in Staff				
2017	2015	2013	Change	
57.1%	13.3%	12.5%	+5%	
14.3%	15.6%	7.1%	+10%	
0%	6.7%	1.8%	+15%	
28.6%	8.9%	7.1%	+15% +	

10 Corporate communication departments continued to increase the percentage of women employees (20.2 on average from reported in 2017 vs. 12 in 2015 as mean number of representatives in category). An increase in female heads of communication was first noted as a trend that started in 2011. However, in the 2017 study, **60% of the Corporate Communication Officers were male**, whereas in **2015, 56% of them were female**. Additional research is needed before we can say the trend toward more female communication officers has been reversed. By comparison to 2015, departments are becoming more diverse. This observation also requires additional study.

Number of representatives	2017 (average)	2015 (mean)
Women	20.2	12
African-American	2.2	1
Hispanic	2.3	1
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4	0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0
Asian	3.4	2
Non-US nationals	4.3	3
People with disabilities	0.9	0
Openly LGBT	2.5	1
Veterans	1.5	0

For the full results of the 2017 Study, please visit the [2017 presentation](#) on the website. For this Executive Summary we compared some of the results with the recent CCI Studies from 2015 and 2013. The results of these studies are also posted on [the CCI website](#).

For 2017 the overall goal of the CCI – Corporate Communication International “Practices and Trends Study” was to outline and analyze the state of the art for corporate communication practice in publicly-traded, multinational companies. The 2017 study followed the goal of focusing on publicly-traded companies established for the first CCI study in 2000, because information in publicly held companies is open to the public, and more readily accessible. Also, public companies are often in the vanguard of corporate practices, because of the pressures of capital markets, their need to respond to the media, and the realities of the global marketplace. And finally, public companies have a greater understanding that their “license to operate” comes from public approval and is maintained by public trust.

The CCI Study 2017 continues the studies conducted every two years from 2000 to 2015. In 2006, 2008 and 2010 CCI conducted benchmark studies of the Corporate Communication Practices and Trends in China. In 2008 CCI, along with research partners in South Africa, conducted a benchmark study in South Africa. Information gathering for these Benchmark Studies was based on previous CCI research studies, as well as other studies of public relations and public affairs. A benchmark study in the Nordic countries is planned for 2018 to be conducted by our research partners in Denmark; a study is also planned for Hong Kong in 2018 by our research partners there.

***A Note on the 2017 survey method and background information**

- Qualtrics Survey: 43 questions
- Survey sent by email to the top communication officer of Fortune 500, publicly-traded, companies: February, March, April, May 2017
- Response rate: 10.8%
- Preliminary Presentation – CCI Conference on Corporate Communication, June 2017
- 20 Telephone Interviews; 11 open-ended questions (10 hours, transcribed): May – August 2017
- Background Information: CCI Practices and Trends Studies 1999 – 2015; Global Communications Report 2017 (USC); European Communication Monitor 2017 (EUPRERA); Arthur W. Page Society Reports (2007 – 2017)

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