

Leading at the Intersections

NAVIGATING DISRUPTIONS IN POLICY, CULTURE, MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY
INSIGHTS FOR COMMUNICATORS

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Our communities, our workplaces and our future will be defined by how we collectively search for inclusive answers to complex questions.



A NOTE FROM

Paul Massey

PRESIDENT, POWELL TATE

GLOBAL LEAD, SOCIAL IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY, WEBER SHANDWICK



Welcome to 2025. The start of any new year is a time for reflection, transformation and hope. That's true today, as we both navigate disruptive global dynamics and mark new frontiers of human ingenuity.

2025 finds us in a perpetual state of polycrisis, the convergence of global challenges such as geopolitical instability, the climate crisis, rising inequality, and accelerating adoption of disruptive technologies.

2025 is the mid-point of this momentous decade for global progress on a range of shared goals to promote peace and prosperity for people and the planet. Individually and collectively, the international community will assess what version of our shared future is possible and what it will take to realize it.

2025 marks the end of a global elections cycle in which half the world's population will have gone to the polls to generally express dissatisfaction with incumbent leaders and to seek new ones for a simpler, less turbulent tomorrow that is unlikely to arise soon.

2025 will begin to illuminate the longer-term impact of the U.S.'s first 'influencer election' where new media gatekeepers played an unprecedented role in shaping a national narrative based more on feelings than facts. It's a hallmark of the 'post-truth' information ecosystem that complicates how communicators connect with stakeholders as fellow humans navigating unprecedented change.

2025 will ask much of us. It may be tempting to take the short-term view, look to easy answers or turn away from the complexity of the world around us. Yet, as we explore in this resource annually, there is immense opportunity to be found by engaging with the change and disruptions underway across policy, culture, media and technology.

Our communities, our workplaces and our future will be defined by how we collectively search for inclusive answers to complex questions. Thanks for joining us as we dive into the central questions for leaders and communicators in the year ahead.



POLICY

Navigating “America First,” Redux

NOW

Entering his second term, President Donald Trump continues to prioritize loyalty, embrace disruption and reject traditional political ideologies and alliances. He has assembled a team of political allies and acolytes – including billionaire executives, erstwhile candidates, and television personalities – along with some traditionally credentialed choices. Trump will again have the final word – one observed around the world – not just as commander-in-chief, but as diplomat, economist, and communications director-in-chief.



John Files
EVP & North America
Co-lead, Public Affairs



Meghann Curtis
EVP & North America
Co-lead, Public Affairs



President Donald Trump continues to prioritize loyalty, embrace disruption and reject traditional political ideologies and alliances.

LOOKING AHEAD

Trump's Priorities for Making America Great Again, Again

01

Spurring economic growth. Across domestic and foreign policy, Trump's "America First" approach starts with achieving the "next and Greatest Economic Boom" by constraining regulation, lowering corporate taxes and wielding U.S. trade policy. Inward-looking economic policies such as import tariffs – or the mere threat of them – embody Trump's unique and often unpredictable, transactional approach to policymaking and negotiation. Organizations engaging directly with the administration will do well to consider these inclinations, while also seeking strength in numbers through industry associations and coalitions.

02

Reimagining the role of government. Trump and his allies aim to dramatically reshape the American contract with government. The administration will prioritize the downsizing of federal agencies, the workforce, appropriations, and regulations in the name of limited-government principles or perhaps simply, efficiency and reduced spending. Businesses and industry associations will need to demonstrate how their policy proposals deliver against this vision of a smaller government.

03

Promises made, but can they be kept? Trump made ambitious promises on the campaign trail – from initiating mass deportations to lowering food and housing costs, overhauling federal agencies, and "making America healthy again." While allies are positioning to advance these priorities, delivering will be politically and logistically difficult due to Republicans' narrow congressional majorities, well-funded interest groups, the legal system, the federal bureaucracy and the limited government experience of some of Trump's nominees. While organizations are smart to ready their advocacy strategies, they may do well to consider the long game.



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Geopolitical Headwinds to Watch

The global economy will enter 2025 with early indications of stability, as inflation moderates and with the G7 economies all forecast to expand by 1-2% in 2025. But global companies will have to monitor geopolitical currents. Russia's war in Ukraine enters its third year. There is potential for an expanded, interlinked conflict in the Middle East, uncertainty over the future of U.S.-China relations, and instability in Africa, a source of critical commodities to the world economy. Regional powers such as India, Brazil, Iran, South Africa and Turkey will play increasingly prominent roles on the world stage. The era of trade liberalization managed through multilateral negotiations and a rule-based order is fading. Tariffs and economic nationalism could disrupt global commerce and supply chains. Migration will be at the top of the policy agenda in both the United States and Europe. National elections will be held in Germany, Poland, Japan, Canada and Australia during 2025.



Jim Meszaros
EVP, Global
Public Affairs



CULTURE

A Complex World Requires Clarity & Leadership from Corporate Affairs

NOW

In a world where everything and everyone is media, corporations feel pressured to meet the demands of a constantly growing, often contradictory, chorus of stakeholders – many of whom could impose significant business and reputational damage if they don't get their way. It's never been more important for companies to have clarity of purpose – to know what's mission critical to their business, their people and their culture – and stand firmly behind it every day.



Maureen Golga
EVP, Corporate
Reputation & Issues



It's never been more important for companies to have clarity of purpose – to know what's mission critical to their business, their people and their culture – and stand firmly behind it every day.

LOOKING AHEAD

A Playbook for Corporate Affairs Leaders in 2025

01

Reaffirm corporate values and purpose. Make the time to reevaluate your corporate values and purpose in early 2025. Articulate bright-line issues and know which external political and cultural conversations you will and won't engage in – and why.

02

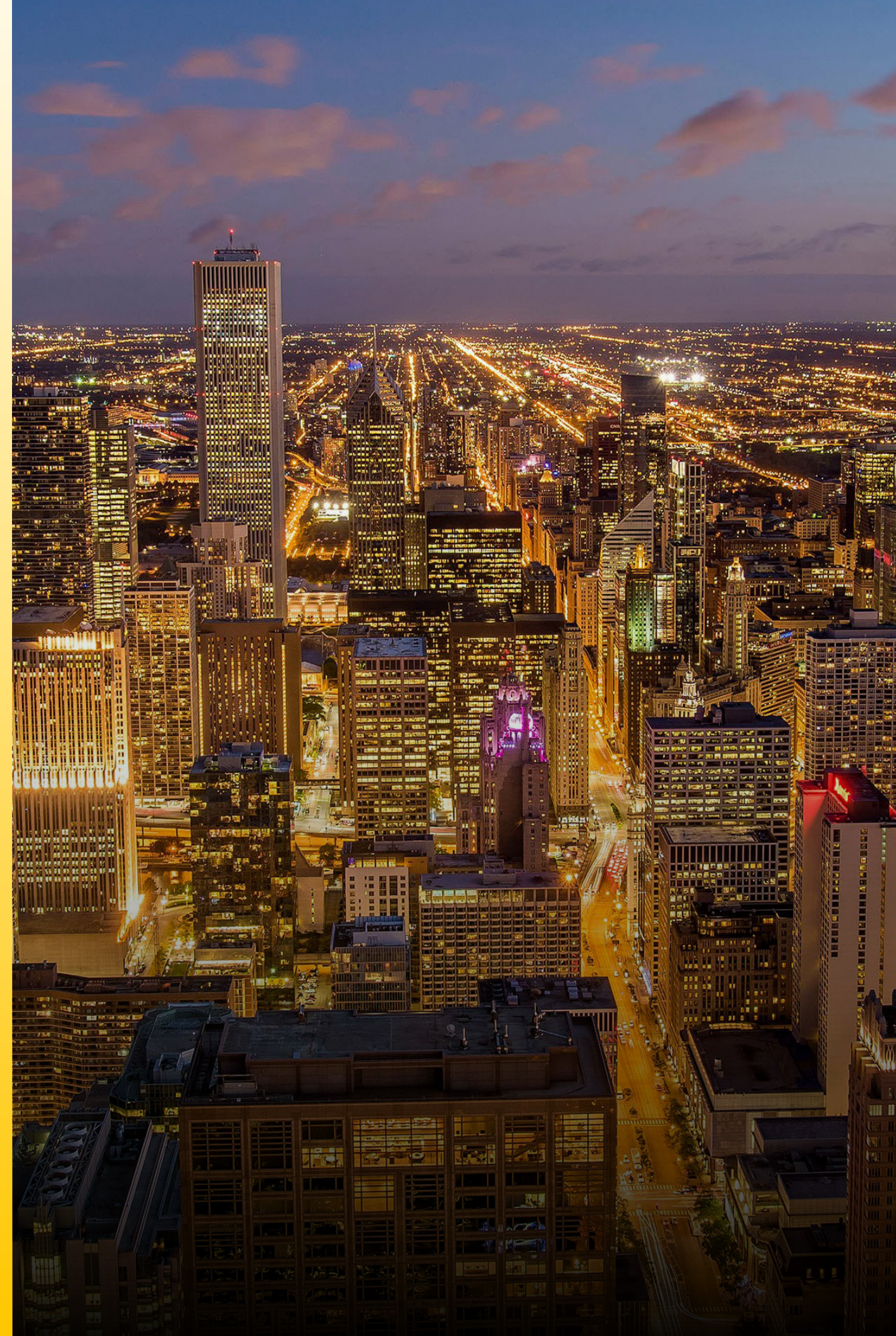
Reexamine existing narratives and strategy. Values shouldn't change, but the stories, messages and actions that worked in 2024 may need to be reshaped or evolved to be credible, relevant and resilient in the 2025 media landscape.

03

Red team everything. Speeches, messaging, internal announcements, web copy, press releases, e-mails – everything can and should be red-teamed, and reviewed with a critical eye by an internal group. Understanding how your critics may respond to your messages and actions before they are made public is a best practice the power of AI grants to every Corporate Affairs professional.

04

Restructure for agility and resilience. While Corporate Affairs teams will always need media and investor relations talent, it's important that leaders augment those disciplines by restructuring to meet new needs. Lead the way in building a team that includes content creation gurus, platform strategists, influencer engagement experts and the culture mavens who can anticipate how stories will travel and evolve.



NOW

Brands as Bridges from the Universal to the Personal

Although it's tricky for brands to take a stand in the public square, it's never been more important for them to spark a positive, connected and civil conversation about the issues that impact daily life and our shared future. People look to brands as cultural touchstones that not only reflect the zeitgeist but shape it. In this moment, that means not just being a voice for good, but expressing their values in a way that matters to people.



Kate Olsen
EVP & North America Lead,
Social Impact & Sustainability



Kristine Fitton
EVP, Strategic Planning



People look to brands as cultural touchstones that not only reflect the zeitgeist but shape it.

LOOKING AHEAD

The New Rules for Brand Advocacy In a Post-truth Era

01

Emotional value is the ultimate cultural currency for brands.

As people stress about quality of life and cost-of-living concerns, they yearn for the brands they support to speak to their values and make them feel seen. Successful brand advocacy efforts will center on care for people's psychological safety, holistic wellbeing and self-expression by connecting universal causes to personal experiences so everyone can see themselves in the campaign call to action.

02

In a time of polarization, brands are called to bridge divides.

That will require a profound understanding of consumers (and other stakeholders) as humans with hopes, fears and needs being constantly redefined as they navigate unprecedented complexity and change. To serve as a bridge, brands will need to stay true to their authentic purpose and the enduring values that underpin their long-term social responsibility and sustainability commitments.

03

Brand influence is co-created, won or lost person by person.

The command-and-control era of brand identity is over. A brand's cultural relevance and meaning is co-created and redefined in culture by brand advocates and adversaries, every day. Messengers will make or break brand campaigns in this environment. Finding voices with authentic, personal views and relevance across digital communities will be better suited to foster trust and invite people into a more inclusive dialogue about the universal issues that matter to their lives.



**CONTINUING
THE CONVERSATION**

**The Crucial Climate Decade
Confronts A Halftime Hurdle**

The sustainability agenda is at an inflection point. The 2024 United Nations Climate Conference – COP29 – was dubbed “the finance COP” but failed to result in a renewed cooperative roadmap to scale investments in the net zero transition and solutions to help mitigate the worst impacts of the climate emergency. As the new Trump administration takes up old promises of an “America First” energy policy, and broader support for the multilateral climate project wanes, new power dynamics will (re)emerge, and the rules for engaging stakeholders on climate issues will be rewritten.



Teresa Wykpisz-Lee
SVP, Energy Public Affairs



Michael Lock
SVP, Social Impact
& Sustainability



01

Progress is possible but the narrative may shift. The climate and energy conversations are highly polarized, but the substance of sustainability investments remains mission critical for organizations and governments. Despite headlines to the contrary, most net-zero strategies are still moving ahead unimpeded. As backlash develops to pursuing climate solutions at all costs – with very present economic trade-offs – climate activists will need to move beyond contentious language and understand how to talk about their green priorities through the lens of common ground issues, such as cost of living, job creation, innovation, and energy independence.

02

All climate politics is local. The United States will withdraw further from international climate collaboration, approve controversial energy projects, and rescind some environmental protections. While national environmental policies and global agreements may stall, local and state-level actions can still move the needle. Empowering regional solutions and community-driven initiatives can help circumvent the political gridlock in Washington and find local ways to talk about controversial topics that translate into real impact.



03

MEDIA

How the Influence Economy Overtook the Digital Ecosystem



NOW

The past year cemented the shift from traditional media to a fragmented, influencer-driven ecosystem. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube, podcasts, and niche newsletters published on Substack saturated public discourse, showcasing the new “media network effect,” where individuals curate their own trusted sources. Corporate America must adapt to engage audiences through unconventional and hyper-targeted channels.



James Walker
EVP, Integrated Media Strategy



Laura Wilson
SVP, Platform Strategy



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Corporate America must adapt to engage audiences through unconventional and hyper-targeted channels.

LOOKING AHEAD

Creators are the New Media Gatekeepers

D1

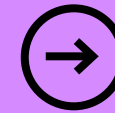
The rise of micro-media ecosystems. As mainstream outlets falter, niche platforms, influencers, and communities are shaping public narratives. Companies must map these ecosystems to understand how they influence their audiences. Success depends on engagement in these spaces – not just broadcasting but actively participating. Expect further segmentation, requiring businesses to identify and connect with highly specific media bubbles in order to drive impact and maintain relevance.

D2

Authenticity speaks louder on podcasts. Audiences today demand authenticity and can detect insincerity instantly. Corporate messages that feel polished but lack depth will fail to connect. Companies need to focus on building genuine relationships with their audiences by sharing stories that are relatable, unfiltered, and emotionally resonant. This may be why podcasts now attract 135 million monthly listeners in the U.S. Podcasts are now a primary platform for long-form storytelling and the uninterrupted audio format enables brands and leaders to engage audiences meaningfully.

D3

Influencers are creating new rules for media. Creators have become key players in shaping narratives. They wield influence that rivals traditional journalists, with their audiences trusting them as primary sources of information. A Pew Research Center report reveals that one in five Americans, including similar proportions of Republicans and Democrats, regularly gets news from online influencers. Businesses must invest in partnerships with these creators, understanding their unique dynamics and working collaboratively to craft campaigns together that feel organic and credible to their followers.



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

How to Win in B2B: Prepare for Prevailing Winds & Behave as a B2H (B2Human) Brand

The digital transformation, a new administration in Washington, and the demand for stronger business outcomes from marketers and communicators will intensify the volatility of the B2B landscape. B2B brands can navigate to win in this ever-changing, highly competitive (yet dispersed) space. Here's how:

01 Adjust the aperture on the decision-making committees. Many brands claim to understand the target businesses (or accounts) they want – but often not the decision makers for those accounts. LinkedIn recently published a report on How to Win in B2B, estimating that 40-60% of B2B deals were abandoned because the buying committee – target buyers, owners and key decision makers in the C-suite; and hidden buyers, technical experts or specialists who use or benefit from the purchase – couldn't agree on how to proceed. Brands need to understand *both* types of buyers and become B2H – Business to Human operations: People, not businesses, close the deals.

02 Focus on how to leverage emerging platforms and best practices. Assess your business's digital maturation across all operations to identify any overlapping capabilities, redundancies or gaps where you intersect with your buyers. Approximately 80% of B2B sales interactions occur through digital channels, and 70% of B2B buyers are nearly finished with their purchasing process before engaging with sales. Brands must find a way to be present with digital activation at all stages of the buyer's journey, especially at the top and middle funnels.



Michael Tirone
SVP, B2B Digital



Q4

TECH

Brains + Bots: Redefining Expertise to Navigate the Polycrisis

NOW

Amid political upheaval, media fragmentation, and declining trust, AI is already transforming how communications professionals navigate today's disruptions. By amplifying human intelligence, AI generates creative breakthroughs, reframes complex challenges, and uncovers strategic opportunities in real time. This partnership is reshaping strategies, simulating scenarios, and enabling brands to adapt and thrive. In the face of global crises, the integration of AI into consulting is no longer theoretical – it's happening now, redefining expertise and engagement as we speak.



Michael Connery
EVP, AI Strategy,
Weber Shandwick Futures



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LOOKING AHEAD

AI Becomes Ubiquitous, Unavoidable, Transformative

As AI disrupts business models and communications practices, here are the trends to watch:



Eben Gilfenbaum
EVP, Digital

**01 AI regulation drives innovation.**

The Trump administration will shake up the still nascent regulatory landscape around AI. Trump has rescinded President Biden's executive order on AI. David Sacks, his announced AI czar, is an outspoken critic of government regulation. The administration and Republicans in Congress will approach AI policy largely through the lenses of U.S. national security interests and economic competitiveness, focusing on unleashing U.S. innovation, improving productivity, and ensuring U.S. global leadership. Leaders across industries should be prepared to engage in these AI policy discussions to help ensure policy makers take a broad view on where and how AI can drive business success.



Chris Ferguson
Chief Creative Officer,
Weber Shandwick South

**02 AI enables human creativity.**

AI is increasingly being used in creative fields. In the next five years we can expect to see more immersive, interactive, and inclusive, experiences with AI. The tools will continue to get better and less siloed – one tool will generate text, image, motion, sound. And, like all great technology, AI will become invisible, making it easier to take something out of one's head and put it out in the world quicker and at a higher resolution. To prepare, learn how to use AI tools, stay updated on trends, and adapt your skills to work symbiotically with AI. After all, tools make being creative possible.



Josh Wu
SVP & Corporate and Public Affairs
Lead, Analytics + Intelligence

**03 AI empowers more actionable insights.**

The integration of AI into research is enabling more effective identification of actionable insights. It empowers analysts to better examine large amounts of text and numeric data to identify recommendations of how clients can break through the sea of sameness with original thought leadership and whitespace content. When used by subject matter experts and continually refined by diverse teams, AI-powered analyses will uncover ever more insightful intelligence for brands and companies as they tackle ever more complex issues and challenges.



Katya Sotiris
EVP & Head of Data
Science, North America

**04 AI empowers smarter stakeholder engagement.**

“Stakeholder-obsession” is the new imperative for businesses, replacing the “customer-obsession” of the late 20th century. In a polarized world, stakeholder views significantly impact reputation, performance, and valuation. Negative reactions can lead to adverse outcomes, necessitating evaluation of business decisions through a stakeholder lens. AI powers a scalable and sophisticated approach to understanding stakeholder needs, leveraging vast publicly available data to analyze preferences, identify emerging concerns, and detect sentiment shifts. This empowers businesses to align strategies with stakeholder expectations, proactively manage risks, and make informed decisions about the world today and where it's heading.



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

Advancing Public Health Communications Through Generative AI

Public health communicators face the complex task of translating scientific research into clear, actionable insights that empower the public. As misinformation and disinformation proliferate on public-facing channels, we need to meet people where they are with credible content that inspires action.

Generative AI presents communicators with boundless opportunities for information processing and content development, facilitating:

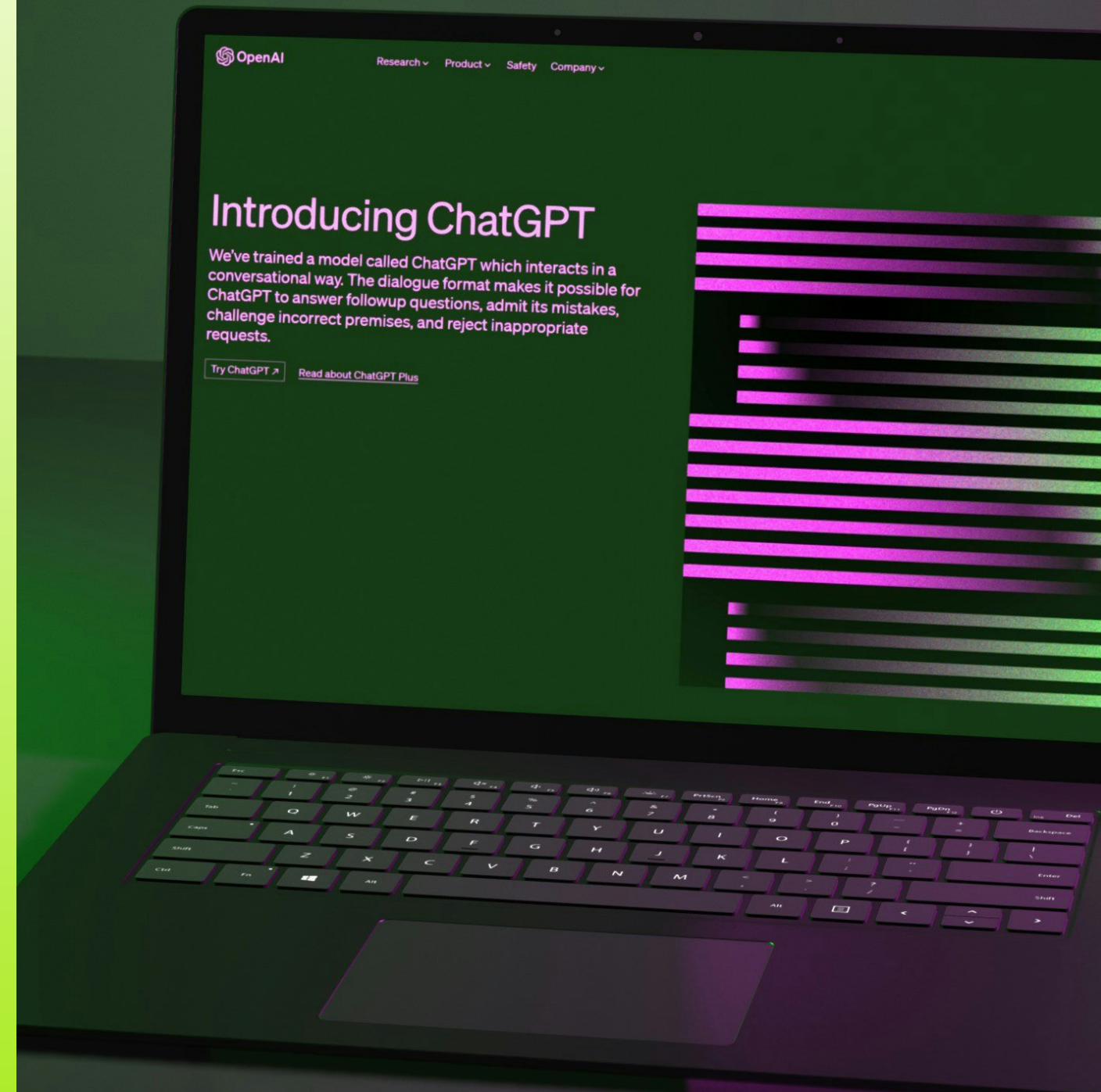
- Improved data processing and insight extraction. AI expands our ability to analyze, interpret, and translate data into digestible messages.
- Customized content creation for diverse audiences. Generative AI can rewrite or translate content. While human review is critical, AI can save time and costs.
- Misinformation detection and response. AI tools can analyze social media and dark web platforms, identifying malicious narratives in real-time and allowing communicators to counter mis- and disinformation.

Successful use of AI in public health communications will balance human intelligence with technology – and it will be vital for communicators to understand its limitations and harness its power in appropriate, ethical, and responsible ways.



Pam Jenkins

Chair, Powell Tate
Chief Public Affairs Officer, Chief Public
Health Officer, Weber Shandwick



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