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AI

Generative AI in Organizations

Insights and Strategies from Communication Leaders

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This IPR report features the perspectives of 30 communication executives about generative AI in their organizations along with concerns, opportunities, best practices, and tips for learning more about these technologies.



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Methodology

The Institute for Public Relations conducted online, written interviews from November 2023 to January 2024. with 30 communication executives, chief communication officers (CCOs), agency CEOs, academics, and leaders who were either responsible for generative AI in their function or organization, were knowledgeable about AI in their function, or had knowledge of their organization's position on AI. Some individuals gave permission to be identified while other leaders asked for their information to be white-labeled to protect confidentiality. Of those who provided their names, we encourage you to follow those individuals on social media, along with the other sources mentioned in the report.

Recognition

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- Brian Grace (Nationwide)
- Gary Grossman (Edelman)
- Jamie Hennigan (National Association of Manufacturers)
- Aaron Kwittken (Prophet)
- Ethan McCarty (Integral)
- Brendan Mullin (EY)
- Trity Pourbahrami (The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation)
- Linda Rutherford (Southwest)
- Tejas Totade (Ruder Finn)
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- Alan Shoebridge (Providence)
- Brian Snyder (AxiCom)
- Samantha Stark (160over90)
- Martin Waxman (York University Schulich School of Business)

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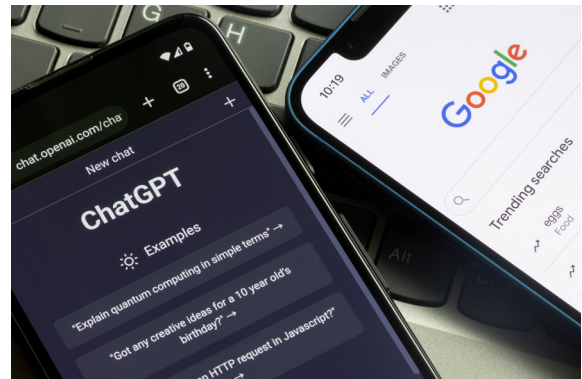
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Introduction

The Institute for Public Relations (IPR) interviewed 30 communication executives and leaders deeply immersed in technology, including generative AI, in their organizations. This report specifically examines the role of AI tools and programs like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, DALL-E, and others, probing how they are shaping communication and marketing strategies. As these leaders navigate the AI terrain, they express a guarded enthusiasm, recognizing AI's power to enhance human creativity and efficiency, while also stressing the need for strong safeguards and ethical frameworks.

The study reveals a range of comfort levels among communication leaders with generative AI, with many leaning toward a positive acceptance, acknowledging its ongoing evolution and learning curve. Communication leaders emphasize that AI should be used as a tool rather than a core strategy, supplementing the work of PR professionals. Additionally, this report investigates the various types of AI ownership and management within organizations, addresses opportunities and concerns, and assesses AI's impact on business efficiency, workforce dynamics, and societal implications. Finally, interviewees offered some of their favorite tips and tricks, as well as their go-to sources for learning more about generative AI.¹



¹ The introduction was created by inserting the report into ChatGPT 4 and asking it to create two introductory paragraphs. Dr. Tina McCorkindale edited the output.

Key Findings

Based on the interviews with the 30 leaders, the following key findings were identified:

Comfortability with Generative AI: Communication leaders are generally comfortable with using generative AI, emphasizing continuous learning and the need for proper guardrails. Communication leaders seemed to be more comfortable using the technology than other organizational leaders.

Concerns about Generative AI: Concerns around security and the need for validating AI-generated content are common, with many leaders emphasizing the importance of reviewing/editing AI outputs. Other risks noted include leaking sensitive information, misinformation, plagiarism, hallucinations, data security, and copyright infringement.

Ownership and Governance of AI in Organizations: There is no consensus on who owns generative AI in organizations, with responses varying from centralized ownership to shared responsibilities across different departments.

AI Guidelines and Frameworks: Organizations are creating guidelines, frameworks, and policies for the ethical and secure use of generative AI. A few said they are waiting to roll out AI in their organizations until they can test and experiment with it.

Ethical and Transparent Use of AI: There is a strong emphasis on the ethical use of AI, particularly in maintaining transparency with stakeholders, such as labeling, and ensuring compliance with industry regulations, especially in sensitive sectors like healthcare.

Use in Communication: Generative AI has positively impacted the communication function, enhancing tasks particularly in the realm of idea generation, content creation, and workflow efficiency.

It's a tool, not a strategy: Generative AI is seen as a tool augmenting communication tasks, especially repetitive ones. Most respondents emphasized generative AI enhances work, rather than functions as a strategy, emphasizing the importance of humans in the process.

Training and Professional Development: Communication leaders emphasize the importance of AI training and professional development, focusing on ethical use, usage guidelines, and the creative potential of AI tools.

What is Generative AI?

Most research indicates that generative AI will have a significant impact on the workforce and in organizations. In a January 2024 report, [Accenture](#) wrote, “Generative AI is likely the most significant change to work since the agricultural and industrial revolutions.” McKinsey, in a [report](#) analyzing the great economic potential and capabilities of generative AI in the workforce, estimates that, “current generative AI and other technologies have the potential to automate work activities that absorb 60 to 70 percent of employees’ time today.” In July 2023, [Adobe’s survey](#) of more than 6,000 digital workers across five countries found, “An overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) say AI is having a positive impact on their work and more than one-quarter (26%) call AI a ‘miracle.’”

[Microsoft](#) defines generative AI as “a form of artificial intelligence in which models are trained to generate new original content based on natural language input.” [Google](#) describes generative AI as building “on existing technologies, like large language models (LLMs) which are trained on large amounts of text and learn to predict the next word in a sentence.” When prompted by this study’s author, ChatGPT defined generative AI as, “Artificial intelligence systems that can create new content, including text, images, and audio, by learning from large datasets and identifying patterns.”

Discussing more sophisticated AI technology, [the Google DeepMind team](#) developed a taxonomy exploring “artificial general intelligence” or AGI, which means that technology matches, or in some cases, outmatches humans in tasks so it can perform tasks that humans cannot.

They classified five hierarchical levels of AGI:



ChatGPT and Google Bard are classified as “emerging,” the most basic level. The researchers contend that no level above “emerging” has been achieved, but the authors believe this is within the grasp of AGI. When prompted, ChatGPT said the future of AGI “is anticipated to be a transformative phase in which these advanced AI systems possess the ability to understand, learn, and apply intelligence to a wide variety of tasks, akin to human cognitive abilities, but its trajectory is still uncertain and subject to ongoing research and ethical considerations.”

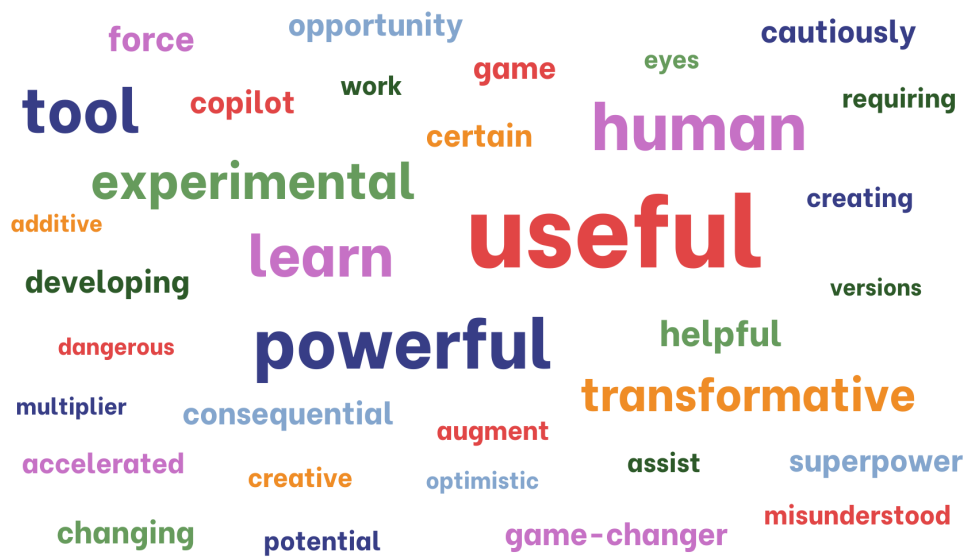
Jonathan Adashek, SVP of marketing and communications and CCO at IBM, noted businesses can do more to help encourage AI adoption. He said, “According to IBM’s Global AI Adoption Index, 40% of companies have not yet deployed AI, underscoring a dramatic gap between hype around AI and its actual use. I think businesses can – and must – do more to help get people out of the ‘AI sandbox’ and into a reality where AI is driving real progress for business and society.”

From November to December 2023, [Muck Rack](#) conducted a study of 1,001 public relations professionals and found that the number of PR professionals who said they use generative AI increased from 28% in March 2023 to 64% in November 2023. In this IPR report, all the respondents had used generative AI, but three out of the 30 organizations had not yet adopted generative AI.

When talking about generative AI, most respondents referred to ChatGPT and its applications. Some of the other tools mentioned include Microsoft Copilot, Open AI’s DALL-E, Jasper AI, Google Bard, Bing Chat, Bing Design, Stable Diffusion, Stable Audio, Adobe Firefly, Canva, Writer, Rytr, Midjourney, and Lumen5. Some said their organizations have created their own internal version of ChatGPT.

Most noted AI was a “tool,” rather than a strategy, used to supplement and enhance the work of communicators and marketers. Most interviewees were enthusiastic about generative AI, but cautious. Trity Pourbahrami, a communications officer at The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, said she sees generative AI as a “tool that can be helpful to us as long as strong safeguards are put into place.” Along those same lines of helping people work better, Steve Clayton, VP of communications strategy at Microsoft said, “AI is illuminating the potential for lots of simple automation in the comms professions. That’s the low hanging fruit.”

The 30 communicators offered a word or phrase to describe their perceptions of generative AI that is assembled in a word cloud²:



Comfortability of Communication Leaders with Generative AI

Most communication leaders said they and their team skewed toward being more “comfortable” rather than “not comfortable” regarding generative AI, but acknowledged they were constantly learning about the technology. A handful said they were “very” or “extremely” comfortable using generative AI and were enthusiastic about how it could improve the way they work. Many said they were open to growth with “proper guardrails” in place. One agency CEO in Asia said their agency was not there yet in terms of being comfortable with the technology but were working on it.

² A word cloud is a visual representation of textual data, where size and location indicate the frequency of the word in the data. The larger the word, the more often respondents used that word.

Jamie Hennigan, managing vice president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said, “We are still feeling out the possibilities and the landmines.” Similarly, Integral CEO and Founder Ethan McCarty, said, “We are comfortable dabbling.”

Security was mentioned as a concern, and most mentioned they had to validate and review the content after the generative AI program created it. But overall, much learning was happening around AI.

Brian Snyder, global president of digital at AxiCom said, “We’re testing and learning all the time.”

One leader noted he was more comfortable using AI for internal rather than external content. Alan Shoebridge, AVP national communication at Providence, said, “I’m very comfortable using it for creating and editing internal communications. I’m not comfortable using it for external content at this point aside from editing.”

A CEO of a small agency said he was concerned about how slowly some of his employees were adopting generative AI. He said:

“It took me many months to persuade a designer to give it a try (now she uses it daily) and I wish we had more ability to make use of it in the areas we stink at (largely project management, time-tracking and other left-brain activities) that most of my creative and strategic team find dull.”

One AI expert Martin Waxman, who is an adjunct professor at the York University Schulich School of Business, discussed how comfortable he is using AI tools in the classroom:

“I’m very comfortable using the tools and [I] pay attention to the issues including hallucinations/ lies, attribution and bias. I have built generative AI into the assignments in my Digital Marketing Strategy course and encourage students to test it and analyse how their prompts evolved, what worked, what was the quality of their output and discuss how they fact-checked for accuracy.”

Comfortability of Organizational Leaders (e.g., CEO, CXOs) with AI

In April 2023, [McKinsey](#) conducted a survey of 1,684 leaders to examine the current state of AI and its use in organizations. Fifty-five percent of respondents reported their organizations have adopted AI and 40% said their organizations will increase their investment in AI overall because of advances in generative AI. Additionally, 31% said their organizations have adopted AI in more than one business function. In January 2024, [Accenture](#) published a report on the impact of AI on the workforce and how leaders need to “lead and learn in new ways,” which involves helping guide employees and prepare them for a changing workforce.

In this IPR report, interviewees said their organizational leaders were not as comfortable with AI compared to the communication function, as organizational leaders skewed more toward the “not comfortable” or “skeptical” side of the comfortability continuum. Companies that were more technology driven, like Microsoft, tended to say their leaders were “very” comfortable. For example, one communications leader (not at Microsoft) said their entire C-suite is piloting Microsoft Copilot.

Even though some organizational leaders were not using AI, some of them encouraged others in their organization to experiment with AI but do so responsibly. Others noted their leaders developed frameworks for use or established workgroups to test before rolling them out to a broader internal audience.

For several of the interviewees who said their organization had not yet adopted generative AI, they said their teams were more comfortable using the technology, but their leadership was still worried about

vulnerability to the brand personality or voice, or the risk of leaking proprietary information. One leader said his agency was still working on legal guidance before rolling it out. Another nonprofit CCO said she was thinking about reputation risks if targeted by misinformation. Nearly all those who said they had not yet adopted generative AI said their employees were interested in using it.

Ownership of AI in organizations

Communication leaders did not have a consistent response in terms of who owns generative AI in their organizations. Some of the responses included:



Gary Grossman, Executive Vice President & Global Lead, Edelman AI Center of Excellence, said Edelman has created an AI Task Force, AI Center of Excellence, and an AI Ambassador team to test, train, and rollout GenAI tools and usage based on their established guidelines and policies.

Five respondents said that no one owns generative AI or regulates AI internally in their organizations.

Concerns about Generative AI

In [PRovoke’s survey](#) of 406 communication professionals in the industry conducted in March 2023, 59% of communication professionals said the communications function needs to move faster to manage risks. In this IPR report, one corporate communications executive in Asia said his organization has been using AI for several years, “but the adoption of generative AI is a different rubicon to cross.” Interviewees shared some of their concerns with generative AI.

For agencies and companies, leaking sensitive, proprietary, or confidential information is a concern. Sam Stark, EVP at 160over90, said:

“We needed to make sure that team members weren’t putting sensitive information about our company or clients into GenAI since it has the potential to leak sensitive information, which is very concerning. We rolled out a policy that requires anyone using GenAI to get approval of the platform ahead of time to ensure the tool is safe and meets our data security requirements.”

One executive at a large agency who manages technology said the risks at his agency were, “legal risk (copyright, confidentiality, etc.) plus reputation (e.g., authenticity, reputation and so on).” He said the agency was currently testing and learning in protected environments as they figure out long-term policies. One corporate executive based in Asia said keeping confidential data out of the tools was his biggest concern.

Plagiarism, hallucinations³, data security, accuracy, and copyright infringement were other concerns communicators discussed. One healthcare CCO particularly noted the additional challenges in a highly regulated industry where they work closely with legal/regulatory and their chief medical officer to ensure they don’t publish anything inaccurate.

Some agency leaders noted they were concerned about their clients and how they are using generative AI. Ethan McCarty (Integral) said:

“We are more concerned for our clients -- many of whom are deploying various sorts of communications technologies that purport to make use of genAI safely. We are concerned that proprietary data will leak into public LLMs. To some extent, we share this concern when it comes to our own research and methods, but not to the point that we’ve taken action around this concern.”

Communication leaders noted other concerns about generative AI in the workplace. A couple of leaders mentioned the potential for bias as one of the challenges. One person also said their employees were concerned about the impact of generative AI on jobs and another said the potential to overwhelm with excess content is also concerning. These concerns can impact AI usage. To encourage AI adoption, Jonathan Adashek (IBM) suggests building trust is critical:

“One of the biggest barriers to AI entry is trust. As marketers and communicators, we must help build trust in AI by moving from storytelling to storyshowing to make the technology ‘real’ for the public. IBM does this through three repeatable use cases in customer care, HR and coding. We also act as strategic advisors to our business partners, pushing them to continue to deploy trustworthy AI – the kind that helps protect our brand and empowers us to tell great stories.”

To address concerns, organizations are creating frameworks, guidelines, or policies to guide employee use. Some are instituting training programs coupled with an approval process employees must apply to before they can use generative AI at work. A couple of communication leaders mentioned their function works closely with the legal team to ensure transparency and compliance. A few leaders who had not adopted generative AI in their workplace reported they were actively testing the technologies in a controlled and restricted environment before rolling out to the overall organization. One CCO of a trade association said her legal office had restricted the use of generative AI until they figured it out. She said the “lack of education is breeding discomfort.” Another corporate executive said they have communicated to departments to not use beta tools to upload any sensitive company data.

For educators, programs that have traditionally detected plagiarism have more difficulty detecting AI-generated content. Some educators have banned their students from using AI while others educate the students on responsible use. Martin Waxman (York-Schulich School of Business) said he encourages students to actively test the tools and determine whether the outputs help them or slow them down. He said, “I don’t think we should bury our heads in the sand. Instead, we need to test, adapt, continue to push students to explore and be open to their insights.”

³IBM defines an AI hallucination as when a generative AI chatbot “perceives patterns or objects that are nonexistent or imperceptible to human observers, creating outputs that are nonsensical or altogether inaccurate.” In other words, generative AI creates or “hallucinates” false information or misinformation.

AI Guidelines and Frameworks

In McKinsey's generative AI study conducted in April 2023, 21% of respondents said their organizations have established policies on employees' use of generative AI tech in their work. Most respondents, however, said their organizations are not addressing AI-related risks. For example, only one-third (32%) of respondents said their organizations are mitigating inaccuracy, and 38% said they are mitigating cybersecurity risks.

Most leaders in this IPR report said their organizations have created guidelines or frameworks for using generative AI. Tejas Totade, chief technology officer of Ruder Finn, said, "We have established a framework of GenAI do's and don'ts in collaboration with our legal team and as long as we are able to work within that framework in addition to traditional legal principles, it is just like using any other tool." For some who do not have guidelines or a framework, communication leaders worry about staff unintentionally putting confidential information in the tools.

But overall, most communication leaders are actively thinking about AI and its impact on their work. Gerry Tschopp, global head of external communications at Experian and CCO at Experian North America, said, "Ethics should be top of mind for organizations using generative AI. Organizations should choose responsible AI operations – just as they would a business partner—with a focus on fostering consumer confidence and brand allegiance."

Steve Clayton (Microsoft) said, "We're thinking about governance very much on the creation side related to areas such as social media content provenance." Linda Rutherford, Chief Administration Officer at Southwest Airlines, said her company is developing guidelines for use, policies, and ways to learn from experiments and tests to think about generative AI at scale. One healthcare CCO said she is in a heavily-regulated industry so ethics, compliance, and transparency are paramount.

Regarding labeling of AI-created content, only a handful of interviewees said they label generative AI-created content. Most said they were discussing how and if labels should be included in guidelines. Dr. Cayce Myers, a professor at Virginia Tech University [wrote a blog for IPR](#) outlining the arguments for disclosure in that "it reveals bias, honesty, and upholds the tenets of transparency," and "honors their (stakeholders') trust."

Specifically in public relations, a [Muck Rack](#) study conducted from November to December 2023 found that 21% of PR professionals at agencies said they never disclose their AI use to clients, compared to 6% of PR professionals who work in-house for a single brand. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations surveyed 328 public relations and communications professionals from December 2022 to March 2023 and found that 39% of practitioners claimed to understand the ethical implications of AI use.

Impact on Communications Function

In April 2023, five months after the release of ChatGPT, [WE Communications and USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations](#) conducted a survey of 400 communication leaders to determine their perception of AI. Eighty percent of respondents said AI will be *extremely* or *very important* to the future of PR work, but only 16% of respondents said they were extremely knowledgeable about the applications of AI in communications.

In this IPR report, most interviewees said they have already seen the impact of generative AI on the communication function. Gerry Tschopp, global head of external communications at Experian and CCO at Experian North America, said, "AI frees time for our teams to focus more on high-level strategic planning, building relationships with key stakeholders and helping them deliver value to our organization and stakeholders."

Gary Grossman (Edelman) talked about the benefits of AI in the agency's work:

“Over the past year, GenAI has dramatically advanced AI tool use in PR, well beyond media monitoring and analytics. At Edelman, we are embracing this development enthusiastically and responsibly, seeing these tools as the first wave in the next iteration of the PR profession. GenAI will not replace the need for PR professionals. Instead, people will become orchestrators of these tools to create higher quality content and more effective outcomes for our clients.”

Only a couple of interviewees said generative AI has not affected their work yet. Some leaders said it has augmented the work they do, especially the “lower-value” communication tasks, as Alan Shoebridge of Providence described it.

Leaders also said it changes how they work, but not the strategy of the work. One communication executive said they use it behind the scenes to generate new ideas, story angles, and content. Aaron Kwittken, CEO and founder of PRophet, said AI has impacted their production, delivery, and workflow, but it's tactical and somewhat subordinate to strategy except for instances where AI can serve in a predictive capacity using past data to predict future outcomes

Other agency leaders discussed how generative AI has impacted their work. One communication executive said AI has “ignited a new wave of exploration and opportunity while creating some concern, especially with our agency partners as it can replace/automate some of that work.” One solution for that, according to Ethan McCarty (Integral), is to adapt the agency model. He said:

“We have been moving away from fees based on time and materials for a long time towards value-based pricing. The advent of GenAI makes this more urgent and makes it more urgent that we are able to communicate the value of our work to our clients rather than the time it took to produce. This is a foundational aspect of our communications strategy.”

Brian Snyder (AxiCom) said generative AI has made his agency's work more effective and efficient with deeper insights, bolder ideas, and more compelling content. He said, “But [AI] is always in support of humans, never replacing them.”

Some corporate leaders have been preparing for the changes of generative AI. Nationwide CCO Brian Grace said:

“Fortunately, we knew Natural Language Generation was coming years ago, so we were ready for this. We knew that when it arrived, it would up-level the work we do, freeing up time to do higher level strategic counseling. That vision is slowly becoming reality.”

AI also offers other questions about how it impacts relationship building with media and influencers. Ephraim Cohen, global managing director of media + platforms, of FleishmanHillard said:

While we are currently grappling with the operational and skills impact of GenAI, we need to also focus on the potential to fundamentally impact how we build relationships with influencers and entire newsroom teams. As GenAI is used to create a wider range of more complex editorial content, our focus may expand from developing personal relationships with influencers to



develop storytelling opportunities, to developing new types of content and datasets to help influencers and newsrooms train LLMs.

Similar to how search and social algorithms became editorial gatekeepers for what content people see, GenAI is the new editorial content creation team under the direction of journalists and editors. Our job is to form relationships in order to understand and deliver the content that will train the new editorial content creation team known as an LLM.

How Communicators Are Using Generative AI

[Ragan and The Conference Board](#) conducted a survey from September to October 2023 of 174 marketing and communications professionals to find out how they were using generative AI. More than half (53%) of respondents said they increased their use of generative AI to inspire thinking, followed by to write press releases/articles (40%), to conduct research (40%), and to create social media content (33%). Twenty percent of marketing professionals and 19% of communications professionals reported using generative AI frequently in their daily work.

[Muck Rack's study](#) conducted from November to December 2023 found Generative AI is mostly used for writing social copy (64%), research (58%), writing press releases (58%), and crafting pitches (54%). Seventy-four percent of PR pros report an increase in the quality of their work using AI and 89% say they complete projects more quickly with AI. Interestingly, both in the WE Communications/USC study as well as the Ragan/The Conference Board study, nearly one-fourth thought AI would negatively impact creativity in the field.

In this IPR report, communication leaders who had and had not adopted generative AI in their organizations said how they were using or would like to use generative AI:

Communicators Use of Generative AI

- Generating ideas
- Brainstorming
- Removing duplicates from lists
- Editing
- Summarizing materials
- Creating content and copy such as blogs, bios, briefings, press releases, social media posts, and FAQs
- Building scripts, emails, memos, and general writing tasks
- Generating data insights
- Creating images and videos
- Augmenting employee experiences
- Orchestrating content supply chain
- Identifying reporter interest, sentiment, and relevance
- Personalizing media pitches
- Drafting speeches
- Combatting disinformation
- Generating images, SEO, and code (for programming languages)
- Automating customer responses
- Reducing time to respond to customer inquiries
- Increasing team efficiencies
- Reducing corporate overhead resources

Soon after ChatGPT was released, [the Chartered Institute of Public Relations](#) found the most likely areas for increased investments were data and analytics (60%), content creation (53%), and AI (39%).

In [PProvoke's survey](#) conducted in March 2023, 89% of communication professionals said they expected AI to become part of “business as usual” within the next six months. Also, 49% of respondents said they believed AI would have a positive impact on the quality of work produced across the communication industry in the future.

AI Training and Professional Development

Some communication leaders are just starting to develop AI training for internal audiences. One senior executive said her organization had a plan to create a “robust” training system. Some communicators have attended trainings from their vendors, industry groups, or on other platforms such as LinkedIn Learning. Some in-house leaders created trainings for their employees while some agency leaders created trainings for their clients.

One communication executive said their organization has launched a generative AI academy for practitioners, created academic partnerships to train on deep skills, and implemented all-employee training to promote AI literacy and to better understand the landscape.

Noted topics include understanding AI in general, but also ethical use, usage guidelines, prompt engineering, and how AI can be used as a “powerful, creative tool,” as one agency executive described it.

What Communicators Need to Know

Communication leaders encouraged other communicators to “embrace” generative AI and “empower” people to be part of the process. Using AI tools strategically is important while also realizing most are in learn and test mode. Multiple interviewees said “experimenting” is key. Brian Grace (Nationwide) said, “Always be experimenting and learning. Treat GenAI as an extension of your team, a force multiplier.”

Leaders also need to be flexible and adaptable, but also be cautious. Risk and security were noted by multiple communication leaders as being critical factors. According to one communication leader, failure to train employees properly on security and IP implications can be problematic for organizations. Therefore, thinking about governance and controls is important. Some noted that communicators need to involve their compliance and risk departments. One communication executive said:

“In my conversations with other comms leaders, we are in test and learn mode. I think we need to be cautious, but learn as much as possible as this evolves and develops. AI is here to stay and can be a great tool for communicators if used right/safely and appropriately.”

Communication leaders were also expected to be connected with new developments. Alan Shoebridge (Providence) gave the following suggestions:

“Use some of the available AI tools so that you can at least understand them. Don’t get swayed too much by the biggest negative or positive voices on AI. Think critically about what’s happening with AI in your profession and have a personal perspective on it. The truth is that nobody truly knows what will happen next with AI, but there is clearly opportunity here as well as uncertainty. Embrace that. Be a realist about what’s happening.”

Aaron Kwittken (PRophet) suggested communicators should look to where AI is headed:

“Communicators should use GAI [generative artificial intelligence] to get 60% of the way there on first drafts, possibly for some non-linear inspiration as well. BUT, the real focus should be on predictive and prescriptive AI. THAT will actually impact our business in material ways when it comes to earned more media coverage and ensuring brand safety.”

Similarly, Ethan McCarty (Integral) offered this advice about the hopefulness of generative AI:

“I hope communications professionals can see genAI’s potential to unlock creativity and accelerate progress as high value rather than a value-destroyer. Microsoft nailed it when they started using the word “co-pilot” – if we can see genAI tools as a trustworthy, knowledgeable, reliable companion in the world of work, we’re going to be able to make a bigger more positive impact as a profession. If we circle the wagons, slow our curiosity, and go on defense we are doomed to be a marginally, higher-value postal service for those who flex their ability to accommodate and drive change.”

Martin Waxman (York-Schulich School of Business) noted that communicators should think about the broader impact AI may have on society and stakeholder relationships:

“I believe that right now, we may be too focused on how AI improves productivity and that could reinforce the uncertainty (FOBO or fear of becoming obsolete) many people are experiencing. Instead, we should widen our thinking and consider the impact AI might have on relationships between an organization and its various audiences. It’s important to ensure we have ethical guardrails in place to avoid AI-powered persuasion, which could alter organization-public relationships and the balance of power in a negative way. We also need to disclose AI encounters transparently and accept that we’re all walking in quicksand, and we need to maintain an open, flexible, yet critical mind that puts people first.”

Ephraim Cohen (FleishmanHillard) said professionally, communicators should look at what jobs will look like at a task level in three to five years as well as generative AI’s impact on reputation management. In terms of agencies, he said communicators need to think about how this impacts workflow, operations, and capabilities.

Communicators also noted that training should happen now as organizations should take advantage of the power of generative AI. As one PR agency executive noted with the growth of AI, “The team structures, roles, workflows, and timelines are all likely to evolve as more and more powerful platforms are rolled out with GenAI integrated into them.”

One communications executive warned people to, “Be cautious of various platforms until you understand all the implications. Proceed only with clear governance of the process across the organization and think about the effects of brand/organizational voice.”

Communication leaders should also be prepared for the role that AI could potentially play in the spread of mis/disinformation. In a [recent roundtable conversation](#) with members of the [IPR Digital Media Research Center \(DMRC\)](#) and [IPR Behavioral Insights Research Center \(BIRC\)](#), experts said communicators should “keep a human/expert in the loop to discern whether something is authentic or nefarious.”

Impact of Generative AI on the Business

Three major themes emerged about the impact of generative AI on the overall business: increased efficiency, workforce impact, and societal impact; the latter two were addressed both positively and negatively.

Efficiency

Overwhelmingly, communication leaders embraced the time-saving nature of generative AI. According to several agency CEOs in the U.S. and Asia, increased efficiency allows for more innovation, creativity, and an increase in strategic focus. Eliminating generic and repetitive tasks was one benefit, according to one government communication executive. Similarly, Steve Clayton (Microsoft) said, “I think it will be net positive in removing repetitive, drudgery work and freeing comms pros up to apply their time and energy to the creative side of the business.”

Workforce impact

Agency executives talked about how generative AI may impact their work. Several said this may put price pressure on agencies or move to a more value-based billing model. Also, some tasks may be moved in-house. Overall, though, the impact was seen as positive as interviewees did not talk much about potential job loss. Brian Snyder (AxiCom) said:

“As tools and platforms improve, generative AI will transform the way we work, reducing time spent on low-value tasks and creating opportunities for our people to spend more time on thinking about using modern, earned-first communications and marketing techniques to solve business problems for our clients.”

In an [IPR blog post](#), Dr. Laura McHale, a leadership psychologist expert, referenced her 2023 book, “Neuroscience for Organizational Communication,” in which she talks about the threat of generative AI to entry-level and junior communications roles. She said this type of “technological encroachment is as inevitable as taxes and deaths.” She said generative AI presents an opportunity though:

“[Generative AI provides] an impetus to up our game and focus our time and energy on how to develop more perceptive, sincere, thoughtful, and yes, human communication — that can only be done by people.”

Societal impact

A couple of communication leaders noted the impact generative AI would have on their external remit. Martin Waxman (York-Schulich School of Business) looked at the significant impact of AI on a broad scale:

“I believe AI is going to disrupt and transform communications, marketing, and education. But it is hard to predict what forms that will take. That is why ethical, empathetic communications, transparent disclosure, and an openness to new ways of thinking are key.”

In the healthcare industry, Alan Shoebridge (Providence) believes AI may help patients and ease the burdens on caregivers over the long term. He said:

“Over time, I think AI will really help our patients have access to more information and supplementing the care we deliver.... Overall, I think AI has the potential to help address many gaps between the growing population of patients and the lack of enough caregivers.”

Ethan McCarty (Integral) noted the overall broader societal implications of AI:

“[AI] will inevitably lead to the disruption of many ‘internal monopolies’ within corporations. For example, do you really need all those people in the procurement department if your AI can not only author but negotiate contracts? Nope. Same with many other facets of business, communications and marketing included. Marketing is the real prize here, of course, because genAI will potentially enable businesses to market to ‘demographics of one’ since the right systems can produce infinite variations of offers (as infinite as the needs of humans!)

Additionally, if we are lucky, product design will get to the point of creating utterly and completely bespoke product configurations – this effect will either represent the biggest breakthrough in accessibility and equity in human history or reify our current, horribly lopsided power structures by cementing advantages for the very, very privileged indefinitely. Kind of a coin toss, but we can still do something to tip the scales. Groups like [ExperienceFutures.org](https://www.experiencefutures.org/) (a non-profit for which I am also a trustee) are building practical models for corporates to adopt that can ensure they benefit from the genAI wave without taking that benefit off the backs of underprivileged populations.”

Who to Follow and Resources

The contributors of this IPR report as well as the IPR team generously offered AI-related resources. Other than webinars, training courses, and conferences, some suggested YouTube, LinkedIn, or Reddit for additional resources. The suggestions are:

- [AI Tool Report](#)
- [Bloomberg AI Journal](#)
- [Axios AI+ newsletter](#)
- [Christopher S. Penn’s The Almost Timely Newsletter](#)
- [Dave Birss’s LinkedIn Learning Courses](#)
- [Dave Pell’s “Nextdraft” LinkedIn Learning](#)
- [Ethan Mollick’s “One Useful Thing”](#)
- [Google courses](#)
- [Kara Swisher and Scott Galloway’s “Pivot” podcast](#)
- [Kevin Roose and Casey Newton’s “Hard Fork” podcast](#)
- [Microsoft courses](#)
- [PRophet’s “A Taste of Sunday Brunch” newsletter](#)
- [Schulich School of Business Future of Marketing Institute](#)
- [TechCrunch](#)
- [The Neuron](#)
- [The Verge](#)
- [TLDR newsletter](#)
- [USC Center for PR, “Welcome to AI” discussion](#)



Tips and Prompts

The most popular tip from communication leaders about generative AI is just to use. Ethan McCarty (Integral) suggested using it every day:

“It does help if you tell the system to pretend it is someone else like ‘You are a frustrated communications executive trying to rename a benefits program. The program offers your employees free financial advice. Your company’s brand voice is witty. Please generate ten names for this program.’ What you get will probably be eight total duds, one marginally usable idea, and one that stinks but leads to a creative breakthrough that just might restore your faith in the magic of human wit.”

A Guide to Generative AI

The contributors to this report and the IPR team offered some of their favorite prompts when using generative AI:

- **Write in the style of:** One communication executive said, “I’m an Elton John fan and asked it to write a profile on the singer. It was very accurate and eloquently written.”
- **Put the AI in character:** Identify the audience AI is serving such as employees or communication executives. Brian Grace (Nationwide) tells AI “You are a (enter job/expertise).” This prompt helps steer the result to be more specific and actionable.
- **Identify tone:** Ask AI to write in a certain manner (e.g., formal, informal, humorous, etc.)
- **Dig deeper:** After the first results, follow up with, “What else?” “What about X?” “Tell me more,” or “Give me 10 more examples.”
- **Ask ChatGPT about its favorite prompts**
- **What do you suggest or need?** Ask generative AI, “Tell me what else you need to do this,” and it will ask for specifics.
- **Summarize:** Ask generative AI to summarize text in a more digestible size such as one paragraph or one sentence.
- **Translate:** Generative AI can translate into some languages but should be reviewed by a fluent speaker.
- **Ask its expertise:** If writing about a specific topic, such as employee engagement, ask it to tell you what you should include when writing about that topic.
- **Write and edit:** ChatGPT can write presentation titles, bullet points, press releases, and other drafts. However, everything should be reviewed and edited for accuracy and flow.

Sam Stark (160over90) offers advice for helping get acquainted and find the best prompts:

“I recommend executives start integrating it into their workflows where they can in accordance with their company policies. This will allow them to learn the power of prompts and best practices on their own, given every individual’s needs will be different. Experiment over and over, you’ll be surprised at the tools’ strengths and weaknesses, including hallucinations where the model makes things up. Always verify your research, teach the model your tone of voice or look and feel, and in the cases of models like ChatGPT, understand that there are ways to better protect your privacy like disabling your chat history.”

IPR has a Slack channel that includes learnings about what works and what doesn’t work with generative AI as well as sources. The channel has a Google Docs bookmarked where team members can include their favorite generative AI prompts and learnings. IPR also has a AI-labeling and disclosure requirement for its research-related content.

Future Learnings

Interviewees wanted to learn more about how to mitigate risks, such as preventing plagiarism or misinformation in content, and how to apply generative AI in the workplace. Brendan Mullin, director at EY, said understanding more about the applications of communication and marketing functions would be helpful. One leader said he would like to leverage generative AI to schedule, budget, and track time. One Office 365 user said they would like to find out how to use generative AI inside their firewalls without the risk of leaking sensitive company information externally.

But overall, the sentiment around AI was that the tool should supplement and improve work, rather than “outsourcing to a machine,” as Martin Waxman (York-Schulich School of Business) said. Real-world cases, both successes and failures, would also be helpful for communicators.

Conclusion

This IPR report underscores a pivotal moment in the field of communication, marked by the integration of generative AI. The insights from 30 industry leaders reveal AI is emerging as a critical tool reshaping strategies, enhancing creativity, and redefining the future of communication. The cautious optimism shared underscores the potential of AI to augment human skills, while also highlighting the need for continuous learning, ethical governance, and robust security measures. The report not only charts the current state of AI in communications but also shows the industry’s readiness to adapt and evolve.

Looking ahead, the path for communication professionals is clear: embrace the transformative power of generative AI while focusing on ethics, transparency, and human-centric values. As our industry moves forward, industry leaders should continue to share their experiences and learnings, fostering a collaborative environment where innovation thrives alongside ethical and thoughtful use of AI. In doing so, the communications industry can harness the full potential of AI, not just as a tool, but as a partner in crafting meaningful, impactful narratives.⁴

⁴ This conclusion was created by inserting the report into ChatGPT 4 and asking it to create two concluding paragraphs. Dr. Tina McCorkindale edited the output.



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