

**TOP TRENDS**

**Communication**

**2020**



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**0**

Introduction

**1**

Customer engagement

**2**

Leadership and Innovation

**3**

B2B Communication

**4**

Public Affairs

**5**

Financial Communication





## 0. Introducción

With its "2020 Top Communication Trends" report, Evercom, the Digital Communication and Strategy consultancy, analyses the trends that will define this year's communication strategies for the fourth year in a row.

**2020 is the year of purposeful branding**, of brands taking an active, leading role in social change. At a time when companies compete within the reputation economy, it is **more important than ever to communicate the brand role in the communities where it operates**. Communication continues to strengthen as a lever for productivity and improving business results and talent attraction, one of the main concerns of companies facing competition like never before.

When it comes to connecting with the client, companies will have to adapt to new formats that are here to stay. Video will remain the predominant format, **but podcasts are becoming more and more popular, driven by the use of voice search platforms** and devices such as Google Assistant, Amazon Alexa or Microsoft Cortana. Platforms such as **interactive showrooms** appear as a highly interesting marketing option, at a time when brands need to display their products in an attractive way and omnichannel is more demanded than ever.

On the other hand, **innovation has ceased to be a choice for companies** and has become an obligation that is embedded in their DNA. Leading this communication brings increasing benefits in terms of trust and reputation. On the other hand, competition for talent, which crosses sectoral or geographical barriers, remains a major concern of companies, which increasingly opt for **employee-centric strategies, which place the employee at the centre of the company and seek to improve their experience** at every moment of truth within the organisation.

B2B businesses have already reached a considerable degree of digital maturity that has led them to realise what they really want social networks for and what they expect from them. **LinkedIn continues to be at the forefront as the professional network par excellence in B2B communication**, where the professional profiles of leaders will be true business assets for brands. These companies will also continue to rely on increasingly abundant **data**, which will force them to have profiles that can handle new reporting and monitoring tools, in order to understand and make sound decisions quickly.





In the field of Public Affairs, a **strong and consistent narrative will continue to be essential to effectively convey the message to the public decision-maker**, especially now, at a time when the parliamentary arch is more diverse and complex than ever to reach agreements. The **standardisation of the lobbying activity**, as one more element in the process of public policy making, will be another of the sectoral trends in 2020.

This will be the year of **financial activism**. Communication will be defined by the application of European regulations that will have an impact on the relationship model between companies and shareholders by promoting their responsible and sustainable involvement in the long term. Banks will continue to focus on being great **content sources and on fighting the dreaded fake news with risk prevention and fact check systems** that allow them to act promptly and stop a possible reputational crisis.



# 1. Customer engagement

## THE PURPOSE MATTERS.

2020 will be the year of branding, albeit of purposeful branding, which is based on **honest communication with the communities in which a company operates** and which seeks to find affinity with the end user not only through traditional advertising, but also via all the contact points that are established between the brand and its potential customers.

At a time when competitors are multiplying and it is harder than ever to differentiate ourselves and find what makes us unique, companies have to **communicate their purpose, that is to say, the brand soul**. It is no longer just a question of explaining who we are and what we do, but the reason for our existence. Undoubtedly, brands that know how to do this successfully will have a competitive advantage.

## ALEXA CHANGES EVERYTHING.

The introduction in the market of devices such as Google Assistant, Amazon Alexa or Microsoft Cortana, among others, has **made the user increasingly receptive to talking one-on-one with a machine**. But, as the devices we interact with include this technology, **SEO as we have known so far will be of little use and will have to adapt to the new, more human and intuitive forms of communication**, where the user wishes to interact with brands.

## PODCASTS ARE THE NEW VIDEO.

There is no doubt that video has replaced photography and that the user looks for stories in images to stay informed. But has anyone stopped to think what is going on with podcasts? According to the Reuters Institute Digital Report, millennials are increasingly interested in consuming news through podcasts. Specifically, **48% of young people between the age of 18 and 34 claim to consume this type of content compared to 22% who claim to listen to the radio**. Given that brands aim much of their marketing strategy at millennials, it seems clear that this is a format companies will be forced to explore and exploit with increasing intensity.

## INTERACTIVE FORMATS.

For brands, their products' exposure is key. If we add to this the fact that **the boundaries between physical and digital things are increasingly blurred and that omnichannel is more demanded than ever by the user**, interactive formats appear as a most interesting marketing option, especially for brands within the fashion world.

Imagine that a stylist can get into your brand's showroom and order the product on a digital touch screen, see style combinations before trying them on the model of the day or arrive at the newsroom and have everything already waiting for them to start preparing the fashion production that was due the day before yesterday. Science fiction? Large international corporations are already doing this for real, and it is only a matter of time before these experiences reach marketing and communication agencies.



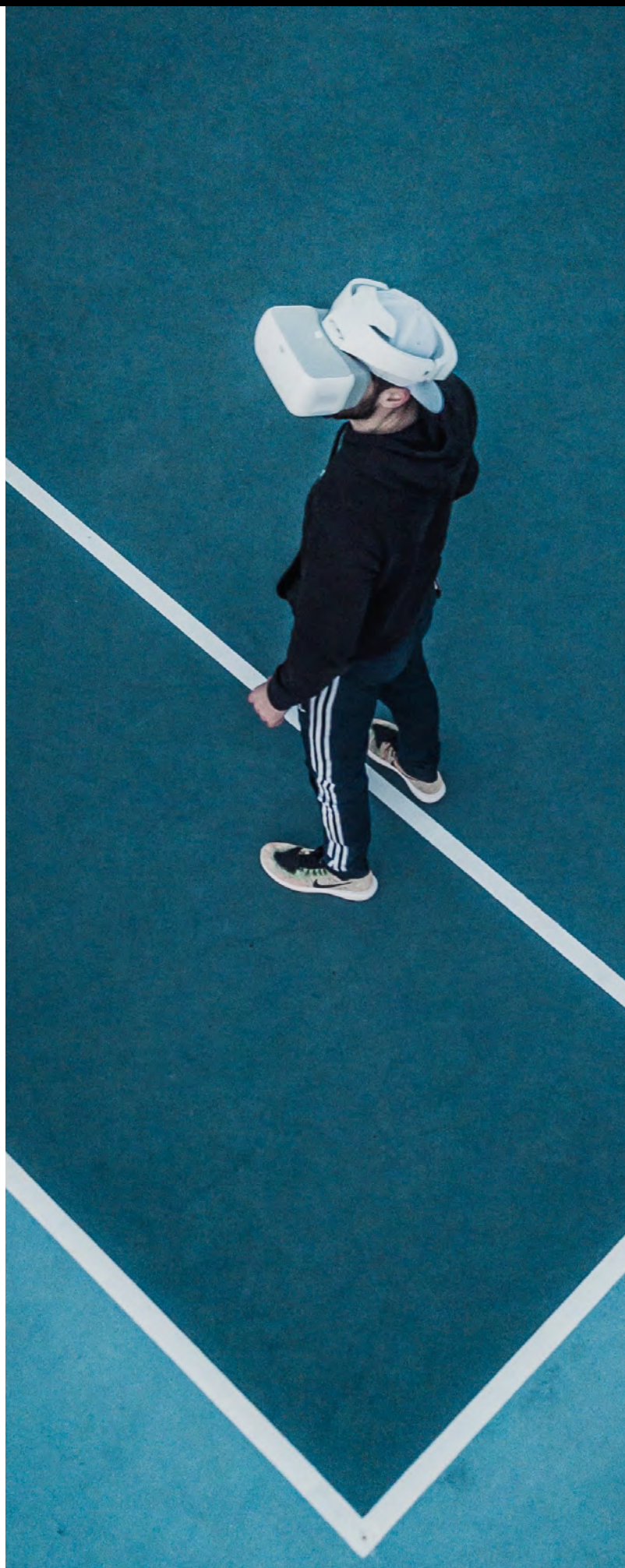
## VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS AND THE IOT EXPERIENCE.

Do the names Miquela Sousa, Erica or Noo-noouri ring a bell? You may not know them yet, but these are **real virtual influencers**, almost flesh-and-blood women who have documented their entire lives and work at the service of creative studios or even fashion brands themselves. Miquela is 19 years old and lives in Los Angeles. Her message perfectly connects with that of millennials, and her Instagram account has 1.5 million followers. She has worked with Prada, Fendi or the US edition of Vogue itself.

The creators of these virtual celebrities equally issue both confidentiality documents and contracts, and the trend has only just begun. How long will it take for a brand to go from hiring one of these models to applying artificial intelligence to its own virtual assistant serving its business interests? It goes without saying that it will not take long. Beware, because the influencer bubble does not seem to burst.

## THE 'PESO' MODEL LINES ARE BLURRED'.

Content continues to be the main communication work tool that is amplified with the arrival of new channels and formats. According to 62% of the professionals surveyed in the PR Tech study, one of the consequences will be that consumers will not distinguish between an informative piece of writing paid for by a brand or shared by an influencer in the future. **The boundaries between owned, earned, shared and paid media are blurred**, so now more than ever comprehensive communication strategies that know how to customise messages, effectively combine those channels and have an impact on your target audience are needed.



## 2. Leadership and innovation

### IT IS TIME TO ACT.

Consumers demand brand responsibility, and thanks to the new platforms they have more power than ever to reward or punish companies. **According to an OCU (the Spanish consumer organisation) study, 73% of respondents already make consumer decisions on ethical and sustainability grounds.** At a time when companies are competing within the reputation economy, it is more necessary than ever to move from storytelling to storydoing, from words to action, not only to convey our narrative to society, but also to be leading the changes taking place around us.

### INNOVATION AS A LEVER FOR CHANGE.

Innovation has ceased to be a choice for companies and has become an obligation that is embedded in their DNA. **Communicating innovation in an effective and relevant way is a form of leadership that has a positive impact on the company.** Leading this communication also brings growing benefits in terms of trust and reputation. Achieving this in an efficient and powerful way is a key to success in the new corporate ecosystem. In this sense, it is essential for innovation to reach stakeholders, as it fades away otherwise.

### FROM CUSTOMER-CENTRIC TO EMPLOYEE-CENTRIC.

At a time when competition for talent transcends sectoral or geographical barriers, many companies have chosen to **implement a strategy that puts the employee at the centre of the company.** Attracting and retaining the best talent can improve the competitiveness of companies, service and customer satisfaction, as well as giving us the opportunity to turn our employees into the best ambassadors of our brand. How is this done? By **aligning our purpose with that of the people making up the organisation, by developing an attractive value proposition (EPV) integrating the different generations, while activating mechanisms for interaction and active listening and taking care of the employee experience** at all moments of truth within the organisation.

### LEADER-ORIENTED VISIBILITY

New CEOs are called upon to represent and **lead change in their company.** In this sense, they play a much more active role in the communication of companies, as it represents their philosophy, as well as their identity. The CEO becomes a true leader and is endorsed to also talk about other strategic issues that do not have to involve the company per se, but that are relevant in the sector in which it operates. Thus, it is important that their image serves the company and not vice versa. Therefore, it is necessary to **develop visibility plans for leaders focused on communicating and conveying the company's communication.**





Data has a better idea

### 3. B2B Communication

#### FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO SOCIAL SELLING.

B2B businesses have already reached a considerable degree of digital maturity that has led them to **realise what they really want social networks for and what they expect from them**. We continue to experience “ghost” profile removals that were abandoned due to lack of strategy. Brands have already learned to focus on social networks that add value to them. More aggressive strategies will be applied to these profiles, which are segmented and geared towards acquisition.

LinkedIn will continue to be the professional network par excellence for B2B businesses and increasingly a space for interaction. The professional profiles of leaders will be true business assets for the brands, especially those with international profiles and local restrictions, which will be launched to explore this way of acquisition.

#### VISUAL ANALYTICS FOR MARKETING.

We live in a data society. Learning to interpret it makes a difference. Just as in the nineteenth century knowing how to read and write gave an advantage to cultural elites, Today **the most seasoned data handlers have a competitive advantage**, also in the marketing world. We will need teams that are skilled in data processing.

Campaign data will be increasingly abundant and campaigns more recurrent, so we will need to be aware and **trained in the new reporting and monitoring tools to help us understand and make sound decisions quickly**. Google did so with Data Studio, paving the way for what has already been reasonably adopted in B2B environments.



## PROGRAMMATIC CAMPAIGNS.

Programmatic advertising will be introduced slowly, but naturally, to B2B acquisition strategies. **Its segmentation and optimisation possibilities are already unquestionable**, and it remains to be seen how professional campaigns will behave in new booming formats, such as spaces for ads on digital television platforms and on-demand content (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO, etc.).

## CONTENT DESIGN.

The battle for content and positioning goes on. The conviction for content generation is increasingly widespread in B2B brands, so **the differential aspect will lie in the quality of content and strategy**. We will evolve from a mere content factory to a much more global concept. The concept of content as an ingredient of a holistic strategy, based on true knowledge and analysis, which is planned, professionalised and constantly evolving.

## THE (OCCASIONAL) RETURN TO OFFLINE.

As a counterpoint to the remaining trends, we will see an occasional return to channels, spaces as well as communication and marketing dynamics that were being neglected. **Spaces that are now less competitive and are again relatively differential**. For example, using print formats, direct marketing mailings or even radio or SMS advertising campaigns. Actions that will draw attention in special account-based marketing campaigns.

Their activation will be increasingly anecdotal, but also more strategic and qualified. These channels will be combined with other more modern techniques, for example, lead nurturing, to generate customised experiences in professional niches. *zadas en nichos profesionales.*



## 4. Public Affairs

### TRANSPARENCY AS AN ESSENTIAL LOBBYING PRINCIPLE.

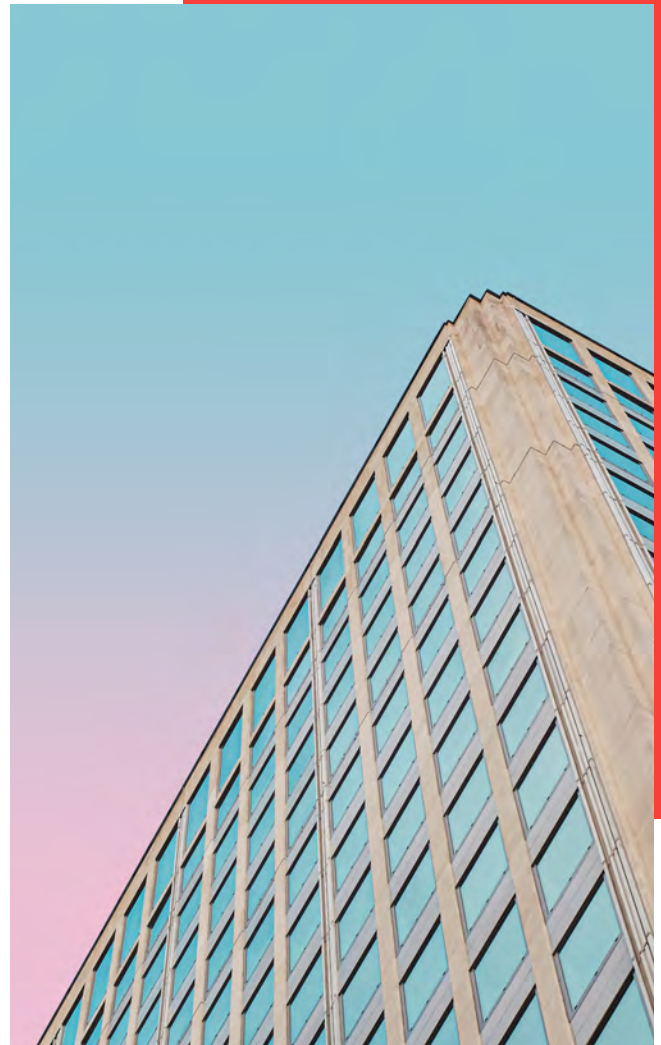
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The standardisation of the lobbying activity, as one more element in the process of public policy making, will be another trend in our sector in 2020. Professionals in public affairs, institutional relations and lobbying need to defend the integrity and honesty of our profession. A profession that is based on **facilitating the participation of the private sector before public administrations** to transfer and defend their interests on equal terms, while ensuring that the political representative has the vision of all parties involved before making decisions.

### CLOSE CONTACT BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR.

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Open relationships between public representatives and business sectors are increasingly standardised. **These meetings highlight synergies that can be beneficial for both sides:** for the politician, it is essential to listen to everyone involved before making a decision, because there is probably no single answer to a specific problem. For the private sector, these meetings provide access to decision-makers and transfer their project and strategy to them, beyond trying to change the decision-maker's position on a specific issue that may condition their development as a company or organisation.





## THE IMPORTANCE OF NARRATIVE.

As has been shown in our policy in recent years, **narrative is getting increasingly important within the new political and social order.** A good public affairs strategy must be supported by a strong and consistent narrative, which effectively conveys the message we want to get across to the public decision-maker. Thus, **public affairs and strategic communication must always go hand in hand**, and more and more clients choose communication and public affairs agencies that combine experience and reliability in both fields.

## AN EVER MORE UNCERTAIN POLITICAL SCENARIO.

2019 has been a year full of elections in Spain: municipal, regional, European and general (twice).

The scenario we face after the fourth general election since 2015 is even more complicated than the previous one, with 16 political parties in Congress and 21 in the Senate. **The new government and specific agreements between the parties will define the year 2020.** In this context, it is essential for public affairs professionals to know the new composition of the Congress and the Senate, so that stakeholders can get their message across to the right audience, at the right time, during the decision-making process.



## 5. Financial Communication

### INSTITUTIONS AS MEDIA.

The trends in financial communication will be defined by **an increase in educational and practical information**, be it by sponsoring third-party initiatives, by relying on branded content or by developing, modernising and innovating their portals as content showcases.

This has been a growing trend in recent years, but by 2020 large institutions, whether they are insurance companies, banks, management companies or even venture capital firms, will create and, if they already have one, **increase the team devoted to creating editorial, graphic or video content**, either for their own communication channels, for their private communications with customers or for sharing with the media.

### MICROTARGETING WINS.

Financial institutions, consultancies, management and insurance companies will double their efforts in **maximising customisation of all the information they submit to their customers directly and via the different contact channels**. Strategies will be increasingly focused on knowing the exact customer behaviour throughout their journey in the process of selecting a product or even their day-to-day, in order to know when to send them certain information. Now more than ever, **AI and machine learning tools will determine the trends in customer behaviour** that will facilitate the most successful microtargeting strategies.



### FACT CHECK IS KEY IN QUOTED COMPANIES.

Hoaxes or fake news travel faster every day through social networks, with great capacity to hit the spot, and can have dire consequences in the short term. Faced with this new reality, **listed companies have become increasingly interested in actively listening to any means of mass interaction to detect threats**. Investor relations and digital communication teams will be even more united and attentive, through fact checks, to any movement on networks that may have an impact on the stability of an asset. Thus, companies will no longer only monitor for them to be constantly listening, so as to respond to user doubts even before they are submitted to them directly, but will follow any news or statement that may affect the action and/or sector in which they operate.



## **BANKS AS NEW COWORKING SPACES.**

Traditional banking is making room for new players who, **with simpler, more direct and less tied-up formulas, are gaining the customer's sympathy**, who no longer finds any difference between the low remuneration of their savings on traditional products, such as deposits, and the fees they are charged for having a card or making transfers. Initiatives such as Banco Santander's Santander Work Café or La Caixa's All in One offices will grow or be adopted by other institutions, including insurance companies, which will need **a physical space that turns the engagement they already generate on social networks into reality**. They will invite non-customers to enjoy spaces for coworking, relaxation, innovation promotion or even training; in short, a lifestyle that is more aligned with the growth of collaborative economy. This may be an excuse for the younger generation not to forget that these banks exist and, who knows, maybe become customers.

## **2020: THE YEAR OF FINANCIAL ACTIVISM.**

The transposition of Directive (EU) 2017/828 (Shareholders' Rights Directive II) **will set the relationship pattern between listed companies and shareholders this year**. The lack of involvement of the latter in good corporate governance has led companies to implement strategies based more on obtaining short-term profitability than on building a relationship.

This law aims to **promote the responsible and sustainable long-term involvement of shareholders**. How is this done? For instance, institutional investors must approve a policy detailing their investment strategy, their involvement with their investees, how they mitigate their conflicts of interest and how they voted at shareholders' meetings throughout the year. This will put them on a par with the practices of international institutional investors. These actions will directly or indirectly put pressure on shareholders for them to take a more active role in the meetings and thus avoid practices, such as greenwashing, so that the initiatives launched by companies **actually generate a positive impact on society**.



**evercom**<sup>®</sup>

Established in 1996, Evercom is an agency specializing in communication and public relations consultancy. It is currently one of the leading independent companies operating on the Spanish market, with offices in Madrid and Barcelona. We are members of ADECEC, the leading association of communication consulting firms in Spain, and of ICCO, an international association that brings together over 1,400 consulting firms. In addition, through the IPRN international network of agencies (made up of over 1,000 professionals) which we are members of, we carry out across-the-board projects internationally.

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