

CREATING ADVANTAGE IN 2024



GRAYLING
creating advantage

MATTERS THAT MATTER IN 2024



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There are good reasons to suppose that events in 2024 have the potential to shape our world for years, perhaps even decades, to come.

For the first time in history, about half of the world's population will head to the polls across more than 70 countries in the busiest election year on record. Against a backdrop of wars and conflict, geopolitical tension and economic volatility, the outcomes of these elections are likely to be a revealing test of global democracy and will almost certainly have significant implications for economies, international relations, and human rights.

Away from the polls, world leaders will continue to face pressure to accelerate progress in tackling the climate crisis amid concern that 2024 could mark an unwelcome milestone of 1.5°C of warming for a full year.

Meanwhile, technology will continue to evolve rapidly with 2024 expected to be a watershed moment for artificial intelligence (AI). In health, a second vaccine for malaria will be rolled out in 12 African nations with 18 million doses to be distributed. While in the UK, satellites are expected to be sent into orbit for the first time on a rocket launched from the Shetland Islands.

In sport, major events in this year's calendar include the Olympic Games, Paralympics, Euro 2024 and the ICC T20 World Cup.

In summary, the year ahead promises to bring major advances across all sectors and all communications disciplines – perhaps profoundly changing how we work together, solve problems and measure success.

Change can be daunting, it is almost always in some way challenging, but we believe that it also offers opportunities to gain a competitive edge.

Our annual Creating Advantage report looks at a few of the major changes that will dominate our thinking this year. We start to consider how these changes will impact our industry and offer thoughts on ways to create advantage for your organisation in Part I. In Part II, we have complemented the more substantial topics with a series of important issues and developments that can and should be acted on, now.

Whilst necessarily brief, we believe these bite-size insights are equally important for 2024 planning and could be game-changers for your organisation.

Thank you for reading and please get in touch with reflections or indeed suggestions on any related topics from this report and how to prepare for 2024 and beyond.

A person is seen from behind, standing in a vast field of tall, golden-brown grass. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants. The sky is a mix of deep blue and orange, with wispy clouds. The horizon is low, with a line of trees in the distance.

Part I
**MAJOR CHANGE
AND OPPORTUNITY
IN 2024**



THE YEAR OF ELECTIONS

2024 is the biggest election year in history, and it will shape our future for decades to come.

The coming year will see more than 70 elections take place in countries that together are home to more than 4 billion people. It is the first time in history that this will happen, and the spotlight will be trained on democracy across the globe and the inclusivity of electoral processes.

The results of some will have more international significance, and perhaps none more so than the race to the White House which will be decided in November. Donald Trump's bid to win a second non-consecutive term will continue to dominate headlines and his ability to influence the global narrative is unlikely to diminish in 2024, regardless of whether he is the nominated Republican candidate.

Among the issues that threaten to spill over into non-US political dialogues will be the de-prioritisation of decarbonisation and the climate emergency, which could unsettle government and corporate agendas in this arena. And if Trump is elected, the semiconductor cold war involving Europe, the US and China could quickly become hot. Such shifts in the geopolitical landscape will have profound implications for business and industry. Trade and investment patterns will change, regulatory environments will adjust, supply chains and talent pipelines will be affected, and old commitments and targets will be revisited.

EXPERT VIEW



Businesses will need to think carefully about their response to the new political environments they operate in. Will they double down on previously stated commitments? Will they change course? How will this influence public perception and stakeholder relationships?

It is important to understand the evolving political landscape and to factor these changes in carefully considered decisions. Although it may be convenient to go with the current political winds, we know that trust in organisations is key to success and nothing erodes trust like wavering on important commitments.



JOEY JONES
Senior Counsel

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ALLEYES ON AI

AI will be a part of your organisation soon, and your employees will have something to say about it.

There is little doubt that AI is set to become a ubiquitous feature of the workplace and our daily lives. Businesses will, to a greater or lesser extent, have little choice but to embrace the technology.

The narrative to date around AI has often been characterised by controversy and uncertainty. AI is predicted to replace the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs by 2030 and has fuelled concern across the global workforce. But there is also an expectation that AI can create more employment providing that industry and businesses invest in training and upskilling workers.

We believe that in 2024 organisations that do not support and include employees on the AI journey are likely to come under the microscope and be named and shamed. We predict that this will emerge as a key reputational issue in 2024 and that internal communications and employee engagement should be the strategic starting point for corporate AI strategies.

It's not enough to deploy AI technology for easier and quicker internal communications. Rather, the focus should be on effectively communicating your organisation's overall AI strategy and vision to staff. Corporate reputation and brand health may well hinge not only on how this message is delivered, but also on its implementation.



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**REVIVING
SUSTAINABILITY**

GRAYLING

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Trend #3 Trend #3



REVIVING SUSTAINABILITY

With the issue of climate action at risk of being de-prioritised on multiple fronts, the EU will give sustainability a much-needed shot in the arm.

Despite increased focus in recent years on the global climate crisis, evidence suggests that momentum on sustainable action is waning. According to a survey by [FT Longitude](#) of 1,000 chief financial officers from 21 countries and 13 sectors, 37 per cent indicated plans for a near-term cut or pause in spending on ESG initiatives with billions of pounds already withdrawn. Furthermore, data published by [CreativeX](#) last year found that only 4 per cent of advertisements contained sustainability messaging in the past three years and adverts that focused on sustainability declined by 47 per cent in 2023 alone.

This would appear to be at odds with the public mood. Consumer research proves that sustainability strongly influences spending decisions, with companies and brands very much expected to operate in a manner that prioritises the welfare of our planet.

If, as the evidence suggests, sustainability has slipped as a priority for organisations, the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) is set to elevate the issue. The CSRD will require companies to adhere to a single standard of ESG reporting, meaning they can be independently audited, certified, and ultimately compared to one another. The purpose is to ensure fair, transparent, accountable and accessible reporting from all businesses. In 2024, media and public attention will likely be on the complexity of the reporting process, although the EU has put measures in place to support businesses.

Towards the end of this year and into next, however, be prepared for the narrative to shift when the ESG efforts of individual companies start to come under public scrutiny. Regardless of your view on the merits of the initiative, businesses must be prepared for increased media attention and the potential for negative coverage.



LESS NOISE, MORE HELP, MORE HOPE

New platforms, new formats, new trends – it’s easy to get distracted, but to resonate brands and businesses must remember what moves people.

From the launch of Meta’s Threads platform in 2023 to a proliferation of AI filters on TikTok – the digital hyperloop can distract brands and businesses.

As the digital realm continues to evolve at a breakneck pace, strategic and creative teams will be keen to harness new tools – but it’s imperative to maintain focus on the people at the receiving end. Across the PR, marketing, and advertising industries, there’s concern that allowing technology to do the “heavy lifting” could come at the expense of original, insight-based ideas that truly resonate and move people. In fact, an over reliance on digital communications and activations is driving users to private or gated communities that are free from the ubiquity and, in some cases, monotony of brand activations. A recent report by GWI, a leading audience targeting company, suggested ‘time spent on social media has reached a ceiling’.

Theresa Santos, Associate Digital Director, Grayling UK, said that while PR agencies are adept at using social media, a focus on what’s important to the people on them is critical: “A recent report from Canvas8 said that consumers want stability and grounding in their lives this year and they advised that brands and businesses help deliver this. This reinforces our approach to delivering big picture thinking that resonates with people’s lived experience in a consolidated set of platforms rather than trying to do lots of things, in lots of places, lots of the time.”

HOW TO CREATE ADVANTAGE



→ ACTIVATE HELP AND HOPE

Based on your audience insights (and budget), define the creative brief around giving help or hope in 2024 alongside standard metrics. Judge ideas against their ability to deliver these metrics and introduce KPIs around help and hope to force accountability.



→ A DEEP RE-SET FOR SOCIAL

2024 is the time to dig into your social strategy and qualify every element. Organisations should rationalise their platforms and double down on those that deliver the highest ROI. Once the platform mix is clear, ongoing detailed audience research, measurement and testing must inform new creative thinking.



→ USE TECH TO DRIVE INCLUSION

If offering help or hope is a goal, budgets can admittedly be a constraint. That said, tech innovations can be used to democratise access to experiences and services that people may otherwise not have had. Can't afford a holiday to Seoul? The government launched a virtual version of the city in the Metaverse where you can visit Gyeongbokgung Palace or even the mayor's office. Phase 2 launches in 2024 with a focus on connecting local businesses with foreign investors.



EMBRACING DE-GROWTH

Once an economic term, de-growth has become vernacular for a general mindset and approach to life, and it's here to stay.

In 2023, the social media trend of de-influencing gained traction. Contrary to traditional influencers who encourage their followers to buy the latest kit, de-influencers discourage their followers from buying overpriced or ineffective products.

Similarly, de-growth advocates against mass consumption and encourages owning the “less is more” mindset. The concept embraces pre-loved shopping and the conscious decision to shun new products in favour of second-hand goods. In 2023, eBay and Amazon reported increased sales of second-hand items such as clothing, books and furniture, while Vinted – an online second-hand fashion marketplace – rapidly expanded its footprint and increased revenue 51 per cent.

In line with the de-growth ethos, governments are promoting product longevity under right to repair regulations. The EU has backed a law, due to come into force later this year, that seeks to make spare parts more affordable by promoting fair competition and obliging producers to make them available to independent repairers at a reasonable price.

Meanwhile, influencer ‘haul’ content appears to be declining in popularity. In December 2023, Deutsche Bank predicted a downturn in the fast fashion market as consumer habits shift in favour of brands that have strong and demonstrable ESG values. All in all, the de-growth movement demonstrates that sustainability remains very much at the forefront of many consumers' minds.

“Our research suggests we’re on the brink of a major shift in consumption patterns, where truly sustainable brands – those that make good on their promises to people and the planet – will seize the advantage from brands that make flimsy claims or that have not invested sufficiently in sustainability. We’re fast approaching this tipping point where sustainability will be considered a baseline requirement for purchase, and companies should prepare now.” (Consumers' sustainability demands are rising, HBR, 2023).

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white blazer, is smiling and looking out a window. The window has raindrops on it, and the background is a blurred cityscape. The text 'Part II DEVELOPMENTS TO ACT ON, NOW' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Part II
**DEVELOPMENTS
TO ACT ON, NOW**

DEVELOPMENTS TO ACT ON, NOW

→ WHAT'S YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE (CX) COMMS STRATEGY?

Forrester, the research and advisory company, predicts that for the first time in three years, the global average customer experience will improve, thanks to AI. Conversely, according to Accenture's Life Trends report, 37 per cent of us think companies prioritise profits over customer experience. This is a huge communications opportunity. The customer need is clearly there, and companies will be bringing the solution this year. Improved CX is a positive story to tell and one that can be brought to life vividly through communications.



→ A NEW WAVE OF JOURNALISM, A NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Traditional media companies continue to battle rising costs and dwindling circulation in the digital age. At the same time, citizen journalism gathers strength with a proliferation of individuals delivering news via their own channels to substantial audiences. From traditionally-trained journalists to social influencers, commentators and pundits, their output is part of an evolving media landscape that naturally includes media relations. Although some predict a correction in this market as creators struggle to keep pace with the demands of operating solo, the news creator economy still appears to be going strong.

DEVELOPMENTS TO ACT ON, NOW



→ A RETURN OF LONGER FORM CONTENT (MAYBE)

Watch out YouTube – TikTok’s coming for you. Again. TikTok recently reported that users spend over half their time watching videos that are more than a minute long, and so they’ve been guiding their biggest creators to make longer videos. Longer videos also make longer adverts more acceptable to users, which generates more revenue. If Instagram follows suit, we might start to see the return of longer form content everywhere. Something for content



→ SEARCH GOES SOCIAL

Younger generations are using social platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to search for information and products, instead of traditional search engines (Insider Intelligence, 2023). The appeal is in quick, authentic, visual results across virtually any topic, tailored to the individual without the need to leave their favourite platform. It’s time to marry your SEO and social strategies.

DEVELOPMENTS TO ACT ON, NOW



→ EVENTS ARE BACK!

Paused in the pandemic, the return of in-person events, conferences and experiential was patchy across different markets. But we're pleased to report they're truly back in 2024. AMEX's Global Meeting and Events Forecast shows a continued rebound with most major meetings taking place in-person. We are seeing full calendars of industry and trade events across all of our markets. And consumer experiences are also in for a treat this year with so much new tech offering a vast array of exciting creative opportunities.

→ UNLEASHING THE POWER OF EMPLOYEE INFLUENCERS

Employee-centric and employee-generated content is a powerful and cost-effective way for businesses to enhance brand reputation and drive business growth. Arguably, placing people at the centre of a company's employee communications has always been important, but in an AI and automation world, it's even more crucial. By centre-staging faces not logos, companies can tap into a wealth of fresh, authentic, and human content that is far more compelling. Research has shown that messages shared by employees have 561 per cent more reach than the same messages shared on a company's channels (Sociabble).



DEVELOPMENTS TO ACT ON, NOW

→ DO YOU HAVE A SPORTS STRATEGY?

2024 is a huge sporting year. The Olympic Games, Euros and ICC T20 World Cup will all take place. You may not be a sponsor, or a sports brand, or even sports-adjacent, but everyone is operating within the cultural context of a much-needed dose of global unity and entertainment. How can we as communicators help to make these special moments even more special and punctuate some of the turbulence with joy?



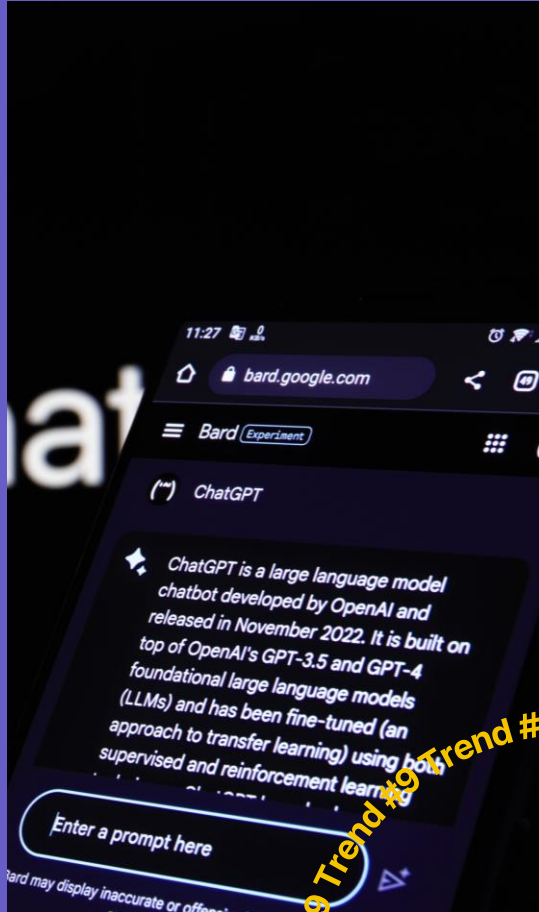
→ TARGETING NON-HUMAN AUDIENCES

As more people use tools like ChatGPT as a portal to the internet, we need to tailor messages to appeal to sophisticated machines which decide if they should put those messages in front of users or not. Understanding how to work around the predictive AI behind algorithms, using tactics such as keyword curation and back-end tagging, is now critical to successful communications planning and execution.

DEVELOPMENTS TO ACT ON, NOW

→ CURATING THE RIGHT AI TOOL STACK

Productivity expectations will rise this year as many useful AI-powered tools targeted at the PR, PA and communications industries continue to reach the market. Kick off 2024 with a review of the available tools and consider reliability, value-for-money and the benefits to you as a business. Most importantly, ensure they are safe, indemnified and private.



→ GET TO KNOW GEN ALPHA

Just when you got your head around Gen Z (sort of), it's time to get to grips with Gen Alpha who are now entering their teens. By 2025, their number is expected to reach two billion people, which will be the largest generation in history. A recent study from global consulting agency Bain & Co. found that an astounding 90% of children and teenagers in the UK and the US identify as gamers making it critical for brands, businesses and policymakers to understand gaming spaces. Young consumers spend about 12.5 hours per week in gaming worlds, more time than they spend on any other form of media.



LET'S CHAT

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