



USC
Annenberg
*Center for
Public Relations*

THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

MAY 2017

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BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The role of public relations is evolving. The ANA partnered with the USC Center for Public Relations at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism to understand current client-side marketer perceptions of public relations.

The ANA surveyed its members in late January/early February 2017. This was a simple survey with seven primary questions covering areas including the trends most important to the future of public relations, how public relations demonstrates its value, and how public relations will evolve over the next five years.

In total, 100 client-side marketers participated in the survey. Of those, 53 percent are “senior marketers” (director level and above) and 47 percent are “junior marketers” (manager level and below). On average, respondents have 17 years of experience in marketing/advertising. Thirty-four percent of respondents work at organizations which have an annual U.S. media budget of \$100 million or more; the other 66 percent work at organizations which have an annual U.S. media budget of less than \$100 million. Those organizations are primarily B-to-C for 42 percent of respondents, primarily B-to-B for 15 percent, and equally B-to-C/B-to-B for the remainder.

Findings from this survey of ANA members have also been integrated into a broader report from USC Annenberg titled [Global Communications Report \(GCR17\)](#), a comprehensive survey of more than 800 public relations executives from around the world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public relations is evolving, according to ANA members.

- Digital is driving public relations. The most important trends to the future of public relations are all digitally focused — social listening, digital storytelling, and real-time marketing. It is important to note that these top three trends are interlinked. Digital is improving the quality of public relations, as it allows immediate outbound communication and inbound feedback.
- The public relations function is converging with marketing. The borders between public relations and marketing are breaking down. These are no longer separate disciplines, as public relations facilitates marketing. Public relations will further evolve over the next five years by becoming even more closely aligned with marketing.
- Internal staffing and spending to support public relations are on the rise. Over the next five years 62 percent of respondents expect internal staffing to increase and 75 percent expect spending to increase.
- It's all about results! Public relations can demonstrate its value most effectively by demonstrating how its programs achieve measurable business outcomes and by improving measurement of results. Fundamental to measurement is having clear goals in place at the start.

IMPLICATIONS

Walls are breaking down between marketing and public relations. That is due to the digital transformation and rise of social media. Public relations is becoming less of a specialty as it becomes more closely aligned with marketing.

The next generation of talent entering the job market interested in public relations needs a broader skill set to recognize that marketing and public relations are increasingly commingling.

As the ANA has seen elsewhere, marketers place a huge emphasis on accountability and ROI. Public relations is no exception, and practitioners must be cognizant of the need for programs to be measurable.

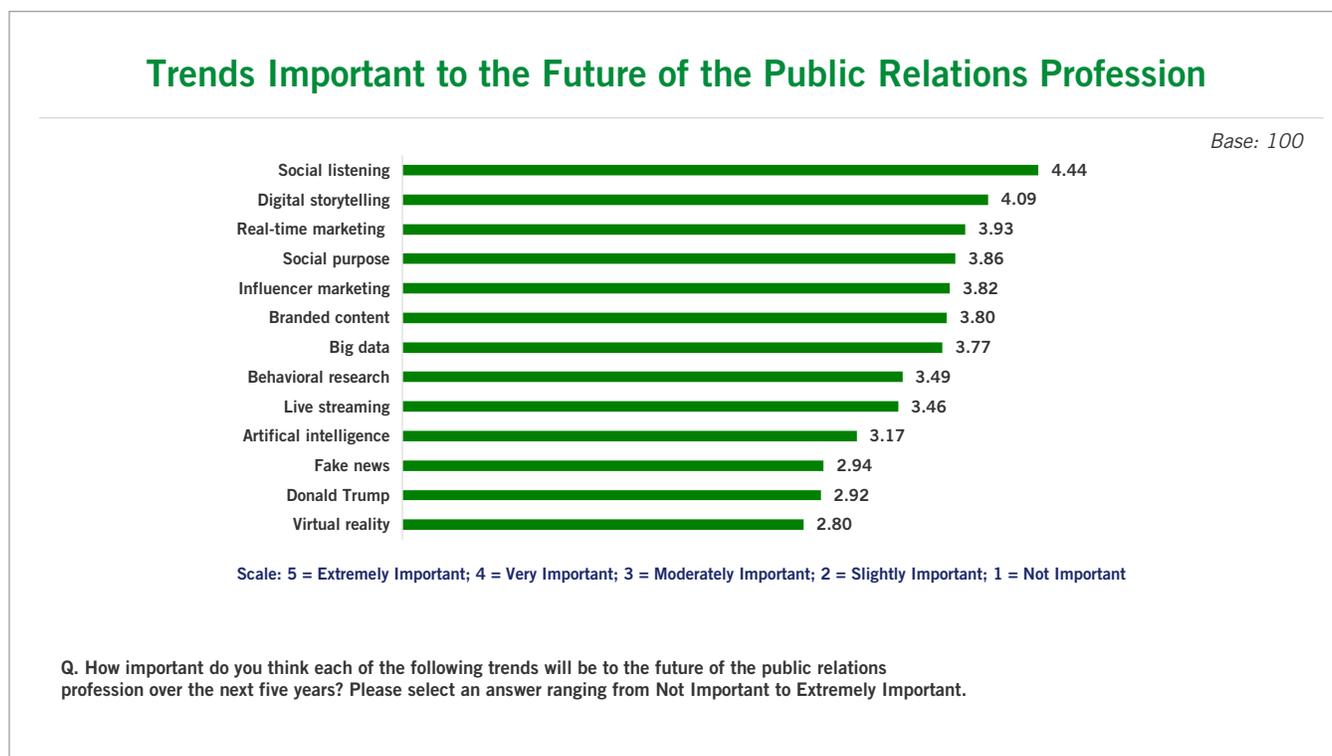
DETAILED FINDINGS

Trends Important to the Future of the Public Relations Profession

Digital trends are most important to the future of public relations, according to ANA members. The specific top-rated trends are:

- Social listening
- Digital storytelling
- Real-time marketing

It is important to note that these top three trends are interlinked: “I heard something” (social listening), “I need to tell a story about it” (digital storytelling), and “I need to do it fast” (real-time marketing).

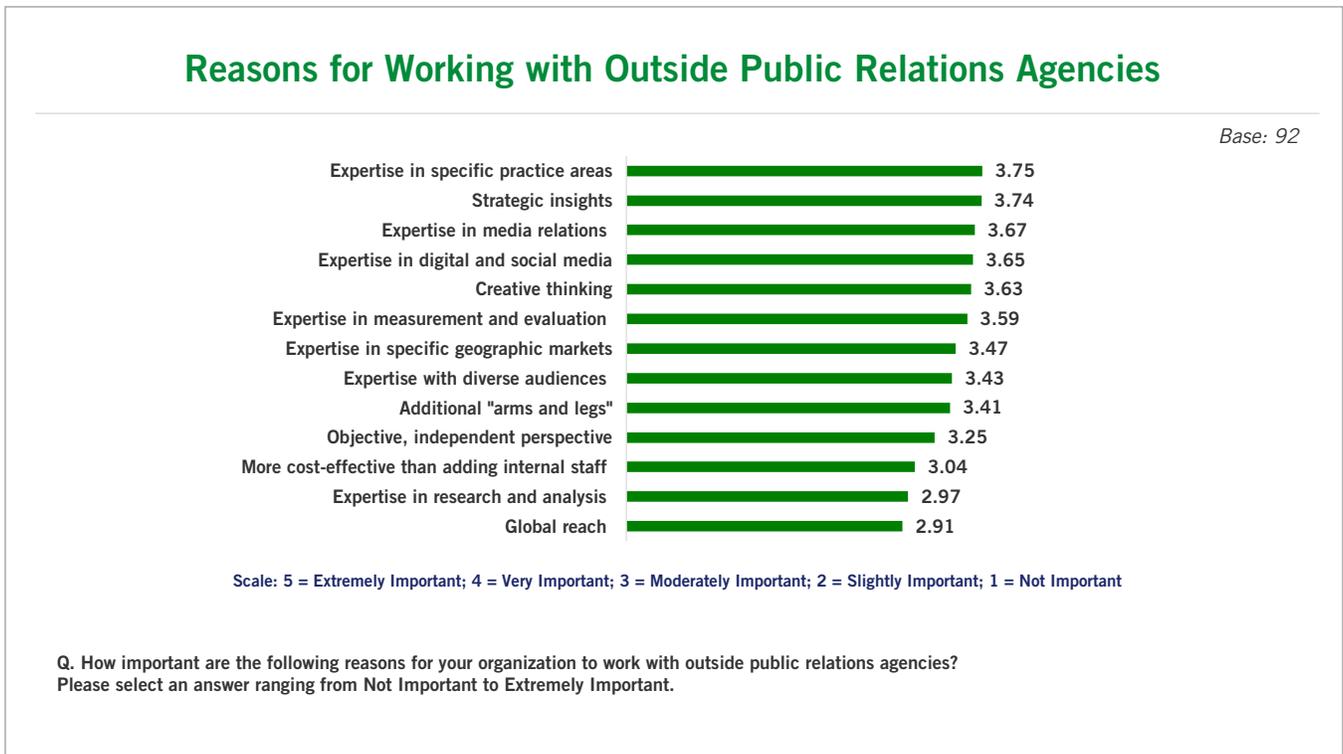


DETAILED FINDINGS

Reasons for Working with Outside Public Relations Agencies

Reasons for working with outside public relations agencies address the fundamentals. The top five reasons, from a menu of 13 options, are:

- Expertise in specific practice areas
- Strategic insights
- Expertise in media relations
- Expertise in digital and social media
- Creative thinking

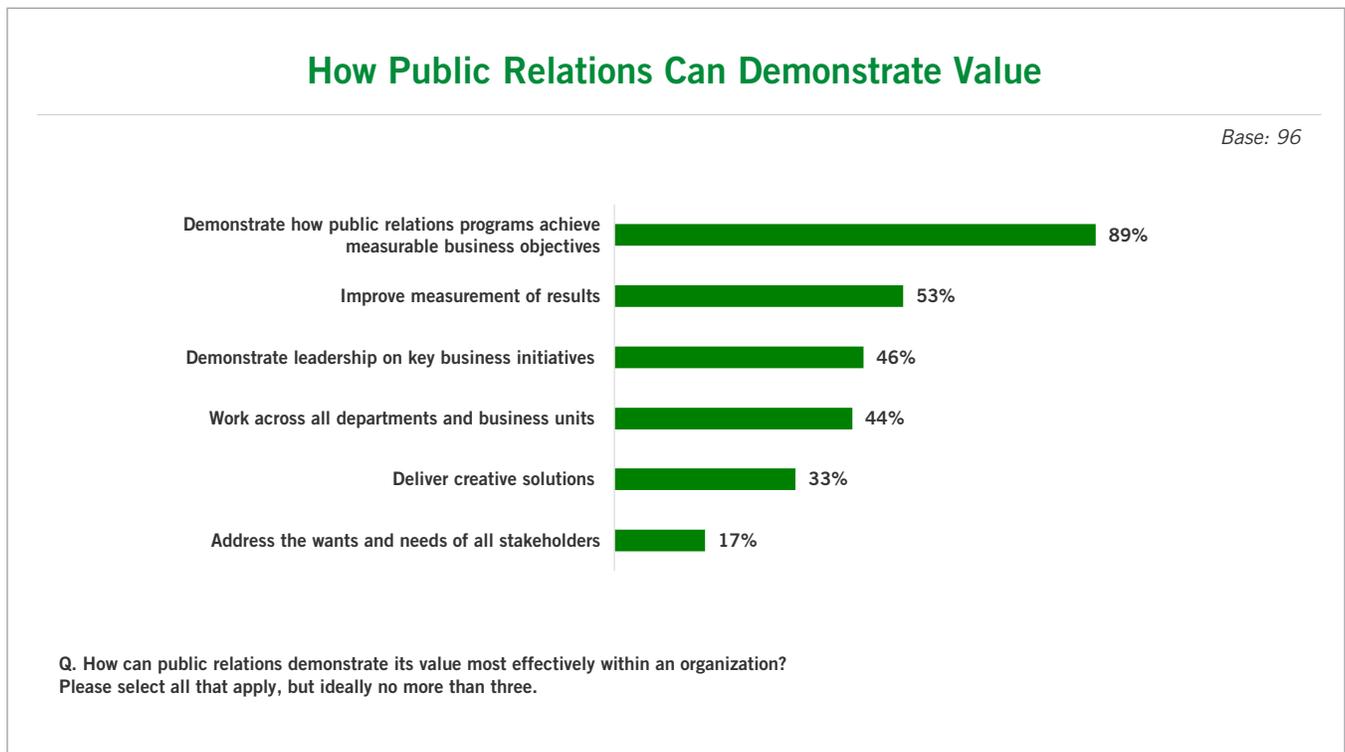


DETAILED FINDINGS

How Public Relations Can Demonstrate Value

It's all about results! Public relations can demonstrate its value most effectively by:

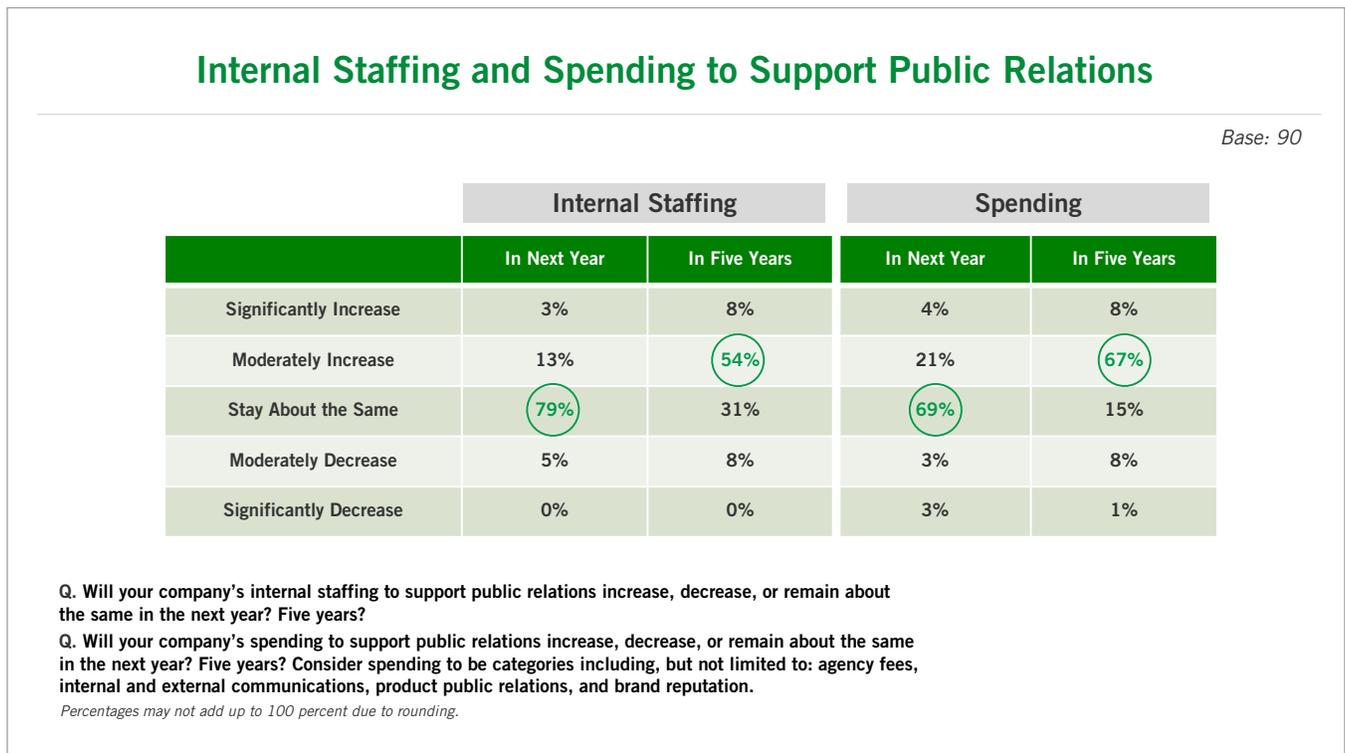
- Demonstrating how public relations programs achieve measurable business results
- Improving measurement of results



DETAILED FINDINGS

Internal Staffing and Spending to Support Public Relations

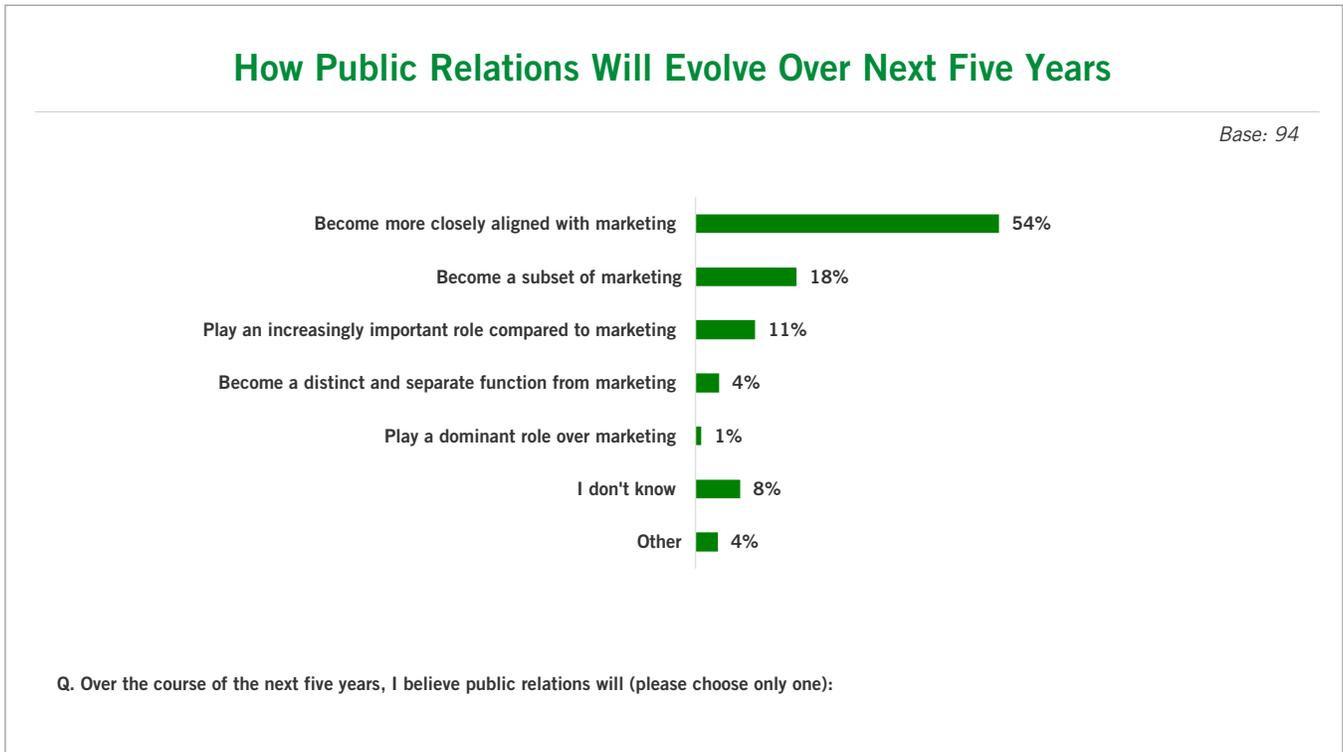
Internal staffing and spending are internal resources that support public relations. ANA members expect both internal staffing and spending to stay about the same in the next year and both to moderately increase in five years.



DETAILED FINDINGS

How Public Relations Will Evolve Over Next Five Years

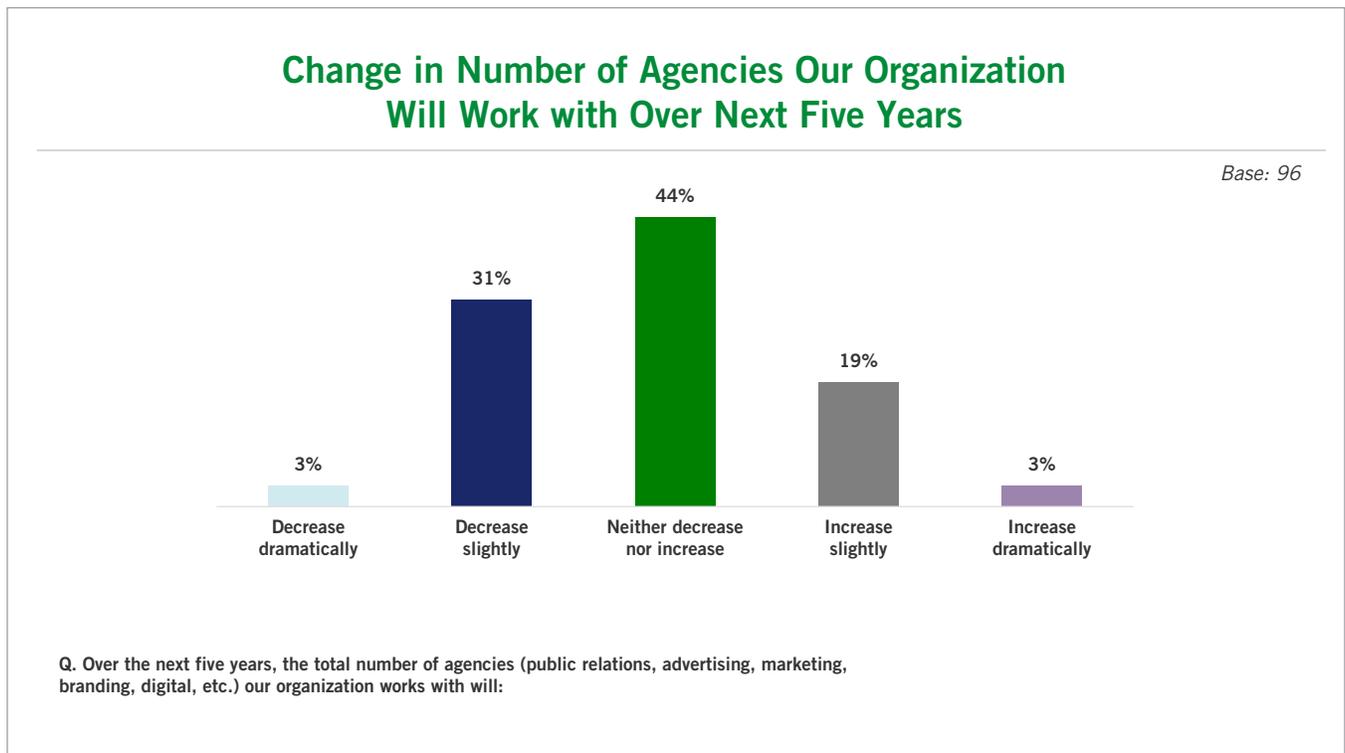
Public relations is converging with marketing. According to 54 percent of ANA members, public relations will evolve over the next five years by becoming more closely aligned with marketing. In fact, 72 percent of respondents answered that public relations will either become more closely aligned with marketing or become a subset of marketing.



DETAILED FINDINGS

Change in Number of Agencies Our Organization Will Work with Over Next Five Years

Finally, ANA members believe that the number of total agencies (public relations, advertising, marketing, branding, digital, etc.) their organization will work with over the next five years will either stay the same or decrease slightly.



ABOUT THE ANA

The ANA (Association of National Advertisers) makes a difference for individuals, brands, and the industry by advancing the interests of marketers and promoting and protecting the well-being of the marketing community. Founded in 1910, the ANA provides leadership that advances marketing excellence and shapes the future of the industry. The ANA's membership includes more than 1,000 companies with 15,000 brands that collectively spend or support more than \$250 billion in marketing and advertising annually. The membership is comprised of more than 700 client-side marketers and nearly 300 associate members, which include leading agencies, law firms, suppliers, consultants, and vendors. Further enriching the ecosystem is the work of the nonprofit Advertising Educational Foundation (AEF), an ANA subsidiary, which has the mission of enhancing the understanding of advertising and marketing within the academic and marketing communities.

ABOUT THE USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism is a national leader in education and scholarship in the fields of communication, journalism, public diplomacy, and public relations. With an enrollment of more than 2,200 students, USC Annenberg offers doctoral, master's, and bachelor's degree programs, as well as continuing development programs for working professionals across a broad scope of academic inquiry. The school's comprehensive curriculum emphasizes the core skills of leadership, innovation, service, and entrepreneurship, and draws upon the resources of a networked university located in the media capital of the world.

The mission of the USC Center for Public Relations at the Annenberg School is to connect corporations, agencies, academics, and students to define the future of the industry and to develop those who will shape it. Their 2017 Global Communications Report, combines perspectives from ANA members, public relations executives, and students. That full report is available at annenberg.usc.edu/GCR17.



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