AI FOR PR CONFERENCE 2026

Turn AI into impact for PR and corporate communications

18 June, London

HOSTED BY COMMUNiCATE

Artificial intelligence is already reshaping PR and corporate communications in how teams work day to day. This programme is designed to help you understand what is changing and what to do about it.

From governance and risk through to content, measurement and AI-driven visibility, the sessions that follow are grounded in real-world experience, giving you practical insight you can take back into your organisation.

TIME	AGENDA
08:00	**Registration and breakfast** Collect your lanyard and programme. Tea, coffee and breakfast served upon arrival.
08:45	**Opening address by Shaheen Sayed** Shaheen is the UK Government's AI Champion for the professional and business services sector and global chief commercial officer for reinvention services at Accenture. Appointed by the chancellor to accelerate AI adoption across one of the UK's key growth sectors, she sits at the intersection of government policy, industry transformation and real-world implementation. **Shaheen Sayed**, Chief commercial officer, Accenture
09:00	**AI and public relations: Opportunity or threat?** We start the day by confronting the defining question facing contemporary corporate communications and public relations practice: is AI a strategic management opportunity that elevates public relations to the boardroom, enabling practice to work more effectively and efficiently, or an existential threat that hollows out the talent pipeline and erodes public trust? **Ben Verinder**, AI for PR editor **Stephen Waddington**, AI for PR editor

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09:20	**Risks and the professional advisory opportunity** AI presents a minefield of technical, operational and systemic risks that land squarely at the public relations function's door, from hallucinations and algorithmic bias to cognitive offloading and environmental issues. This panel explores how practitioners can step up as ethical guardians and governance advisors to help organisations navigate the complex terrain where innovation meets accountability. **Farzana Baduel**, President, CIPR **Prof Dr Anne Gregory**, Emeritus professor of corporate communication, Huddersfield Business School **Dr Swati Virmani**, Head of academic, De Montfort University, London Campus
09:55	**A framework for future work: Scaling enterprise AI** Every PR team, agency and in-house, is wrestling with AI. But as we move from experimentation to enterprise-wide integration, how do we ensure AI use enhances, rather than erodes, confidence and reputation? Burson's Allison Spray cuts through the noise to reveal strategies for human-centric AI enablement. She'll share learnings from Burson's own 'FutureWork' programme, as well as considerations for others looking to build operational intelligence, drive AI use in workflows and shift from experiments to advantage. **Allison Spray**, EMEA chief data and intelligence officer, Burson
10:15	**AI in Action: Goverance, implementation and real-world lessons** Amy Mollett, Serena Mitchell and Tom Kirkup, come together for a practical, real-world exploration of how organisations are implementing and governing AI. When it comes to embedding AI in a public sector environment, implementation is fraught with challenges and risks. In this panel, speakers bring clarity to the opaque, from what belongs in AI policy to how to embed guidance that teams will genuinely adopt. Expect a timely discussion about introducing AI in high-pressure sectors, and practical advice for in-house teams making sense of a new technology. **Tom Kirkup**, Head of communications, South Norfolk and Broadland District Councils **Serena Mitchell**, Communications manager – Business School, University of Sussex **Amy Mollett**, Head of social media, University of Cambridge
10:55	**Coffee break**

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11:10	**Policy Clinic: Your AI policy questions answered** Submit your AI policy dilemmas and watch our expert panel tackle them live. Whether you're wrestling with how granular your disclosure requirements should be, what to do when suppliers won't reveal their AI use, how to balance productivity gains against the talent pipeline, or how to reconcile your organisation's environmental commitments with the realities of AI infrastructure, this interactive session offers practical, real-world guidance that you can take back to your team. **Antony Mayfield**, CEO, Brilliant Noise **Amy Mollett**, Head of social media, University of Cambridge
11:45	**The case for being human: How AI is reshaping the journalist-PR relationship** AI is transforming how journalists filter pitches, research stories, and manage their inboxes – and PR professionals are deploying the same tools to automate outreach at scale. But does more automation mean better communication? Chris Stokel-Walker draws on his own experience as an early AI adopter, and author of the book How AI Ate the World, to explore where AI helps, where it hinders, and why the human element matters more than ever in the relationship between journalists and PRs. **Chris Stokel-Walker**, Journalist
12:05	**Using AI within content creation** As generative AI transforms how comms teams create and share stories, Gay Flashman will be joined by industry voices from leading creative agencies at the forefront of AI-powered content, sharing insights into what's working now – and what's next. The panel will explore how AI can spark ideas, experiment with formats and accelerate production, while human expertise ensures stories remain authentic, engaging and strategically compelling. Rather than positioning AI as a replacement for creative judgment, this panel reframes it as an augmentative partner – one that accelerates production while heightening the need for strategic thinking, ethical oversight and authentic storytelling. **Gay Flashman**, Communications strategist and founder, Formative **Martin MacConnol**, Agency founder, Wardour **David Sheldrick**, CEO, SEED
12:45	**Lunch and book signing**

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13:25	**Marketing to machines: The new PR Imperative** With 89% of B2B buyers and 77% of B2C consumers using generative AI to inform their purchase decisions, brand visibility has fundamentally changed. In this new landscape, earned media now drives over 90% of the AI-powered answers your audience sees. Learn how to benchmark your AI visibility against competitors, build a Tier 1 GenAI media list, optimise owned, earned and social channels, and understand the growing importance of press releases and platforms like Reddit. Most importantly, discover how to protect your brand's narrative before competitors shape it for you. Every day you wait, someone else tells your story. Start now. **Jonny Bentwood**, Global president, data and analytics, Golin
13:50	**How to make sense of the technology and vendor landscape** With new AI tools launching weekly and vendors making increasingly bold claims about what their platforms can deliver, practitioners face a bewildering landscape of choice and risk. This discussion will cut through the noise to help you map tools to tasks, assess solutions and build vendor relationships that actually serve your team's needs. **Andrew Bruce Smith**, Director, Escherman **Will Julian-Vicary**, Chief technology officer, Clarity
14:25	**How AI is transforming the planning and measurement of communications** Artificial intelligence is changing how communications teams plan, deliver and evaluate their work, but it's not a silver bullet. In this session, you'll explore how AI is being used in real-world PR and communications practice, and where its limitations still lie. Drawing on practical experience, the session will challenge the idea of AI as a universal solution, offering guidance on how to select the right technologies and approaches for specific objectives. Attendees will also gain insight into the critical questions they should be asking of their media intelligence and measurement tools, and how rapidly evolving technologies are shaping practice, including the development of the AMEC Barcelona Principles. **Paul Hender**, Partner, CommsClarity Consulting
15:00	**Coffee and refreshments break**

15:15	**Data Malarkey Live** *Data Malarkey* is the podcast about using data – and now AI – smarter. Hosted by Master Data Storyteller, Sam Knowles, the show explores how leaders and leading thinkers are applying data, AI, and emerging technologies to sharpen decision-making, strengthen communications, and drive marketing effectiveness. After interviewing VW's Director of CX, Nick Ratcliffe, live at *DataComms 2025*, Sam returns to the stage for another live recording at this year's conference, this time with Pete Markey, an award-winning marketing lead at the forefront of AI in PR and comms. **Sam Knowles**, Chief data storyteller and Data Malarkey Host, Insight Agents **Pete Markey**, Award-winning marketing lead
16:00	**AI Fight Club** Three battles. Six contenders. No hiding behind PowerPoint. This is not a panel. This is not a polite fireside chat. This is AI Fight Club. Six senior figures. Three head-to-head debates. One central question in each round. No slides. No notes. No hedging. Each battle pits two sharply opposed viewpoints against each other – governance vs growth, automation vs creativity, transparency vs competitive advantage. Think Fight Club meets 8 Mile but with AI leaders arguing over the future of comms. **Richard Bagnall**, Co-founder and partner, CommsClarity Consulting **Jonny Bentwood**, Global president of data and analytics, Golin **Carolyn Esser**, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Darktrace **Darryl Sparey**, Co-founder, Hard Numbers **Sarah Waddington**, CEO at PRCA, PRCA

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16:45	**The future we choose: Public relations in the age of AI** Public relations practice stands at a crossroads, with junior roles disappearing, the talent pipeline under threat, and the very nature of expertise being renegotiated. This closing session challenges delegates to move beyond tactical tool adoption and embrace capability transformation, ethical leadership and a renewed focus on what makes us irreplaceably human. The practitioners who thrive will be those who start planning for the strategic, creative and advisory roles that only humans can fill.
17:05	**Thank you and closing address**

AI FOR PR WORKSHOP 2026

Optional AI workshop for
senior communications practitioners
19 June, Park Plaza London Riverbank

Stephen Waddington and Ben Verinder, co-editors of AI for Public Relations (Kogan Page, 2026), will deliver a half-day in-person workshop on Friday 19 June, following the AI for PR conference. The intensive programme is aimed at senior public relations and communications practitioners.

Discussion-led, evidence-based, designed to produce specific decisions and outputs and not general awareness. Participants leave with the language and critical frameworks to lead AI conversations at board level.

The half-day covers four tightly sequenced sessions:
1. The state of AI adoption and its governance gap
2. How AI is reshaping organisational reputation through the machine layer
3. How to assess and manage the reputational risks of your own AI use
4. How to embed AI responsibly using a structured adoption framework

Every participant receives a workbook containing session slides, worksheets and references to all material covered, alongside completed output tools from the day and an AI-powered research assistant.

Full workshop details available at *www.communicatemagazine.com/conference/ai-for-pr-conference-2026*

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