

Public Relations Pros Share 2026 PR Trends

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, January 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- To capture the fastest-changing trends, [PR Consultants Group](#) experts across the country have shared the 2026 PR trends they are watching and how smart teams should respond. PR Consultants Group is a nationwide network of senior communications and marketing pros across all major US markets.



Key Takeaways for 2026 PR Planning

- Expect leaner teams and larger AI tool budgets, with more pressure to prove outcomes
- PR is becoming the front door for how AI systems explain your brand
- Messaging needs to work for humans and algorithms
- Earned media and media relationships are gaining value again because third-party validation is harder to fake
- Press releases are not dead, they are evolving into citation-friendly, search-friendly assets
- Storytelling and human angles are the antidote to generic AI content
- High-tech only works with high-touch relationship building

Always On PR

"In 2026, Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) will deliver tangible ROI for PR beyond impressions and top-of-funnel metrics. Earned content, always-on media relations, repurposed messaging and the return of the news release (but re-tooled to drive citations) will make PR a must-have rather than a nice-to-have in the marketing mix." - Kris Naidl, APR, [Laughlin Constable Public Relations](#) (Chicago, Illinois)

What this means: PR programs will look less like a burst calendar and more like a steady drumbeat. Consistent, repurposeable messaging increases the odds your brand gets cited, referenced and remembered.

Smaller Teams, Bigger AI Budgets In 2026 PR

"I believe the top PR trend for 2026 will be budgeting. Leaders will trim headcount and shift more dollars to AI software and tools, expecting equal or better outcomes from lean teams trained to orchestrate tech. The agencies that win will pair a few strong strategists with a smart AI stack while moving fees from hours to outcomes. Let AI handle versions and research while humans own judgment, tone and relationships. Use tools for scale, not for the soul of the story." - Jo Trizilia, TrizCom Public Relations (Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas)

What this means: AI becomes a line item, not a side experiment. The teams that stay valuable will document what humans do best: setting the strategy, finding the angle, protecting reputation, coaching spokespeople and earning coverage that actually moves decisions.

PR Defines the Conclusions AI Makes About You

"AI systems now synthesize your entire public footprint into instant judgments. That makes PR the primary driver of how your brand is explained and understood. The companies stuck counting clicks are falling behind; the ones curating strong, consistent signals are controlling the conclusions being drawn about them." - Elizabeth Edwards, Volume PR & Engagement Science Lab (Denver, Colorado)

What this means: Your "public footprint" is now a product. It is made of earned media, owned content, executive presence, third-party reviews, partner mentions and consistency across channels. AI systems stitch that together and serve a verdict.

Algorithm-compatible Messaging

"Brands will need to create messaging that is not only audience-relevant but also algorithm-compatible." - Leigh Fazzinia, Fazzina & Co. Communications Consulting (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

What this means: It is not enough to write well. Your content also needs to be easy to interpret, with clear positioning, consistent terms, tight summaries, FAQ-style sections and proof points that can be lifted accurately.

An AI Reset Is Coming for PR leaders

"AI done the right way will become more accepted in 2026, much like the way it's OK to use spell-check and conduct research online vs. the library. Some communicators will continue to dismiss AI after poor results, but that's because of their weak prompts. Acceptance of answers generated by AI searches will continue as well. Sifting through a list of blue links will be seen as old school. The self-proclaimed AI gurus will keep trying – and missing. One week they claim it's Reddit, next it's a particular wire service. The latest guesses on the magic solution to what AI systems reference will prove unreliable. The solution is to feed the AI machine with credible earned media content." - Jeffrey Davis, J. Davis Public Relations, LLC (Baltimore, Maryland)

What this means: AI becomes normal, but sloppy AI becomes a liability. The winning move is not chasing hacks. It is building credible inputs.

The New Public Affairs Playbook In Washington

"The role of traditional public affairs in policymaking has fundamentally changed. The old, reliable playbook relied on volume and visibility – loud megaphones, full-court presses, public events, press conferences, television ads and front-page newspaper placements designed to build broad public consensus. Today's playbook is far more targeted. Influence now flows through reaching a narrow set of decision-makers and the trusted voices in their immediate orbit, often on niche platforms far removed from mass audiences. In this environment, a well-placed op-ed in a low-circulation, insider email newsletter can carry more impact than a front-page story in The Washington Post. This represents a profound shift in how policy influence is built and measured. Whether it proves to be a temporary feature of the current administration or a permanent evolution driven by a fragmented media landscape remains to be seen. But the implications for public affairs strategy are already unmistakable." - Mike Burita, Burita Media Solutions (Washington, DC)

What this means: For public affairs teams , this means shifting from broad, high-visibility campaigns to precision strategies that quietly influence a small circle of key decision-makers and their trusted insiders.

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