Bridging the Gap Between Hype and Reality:

The Crucial Role of Strategic Communications for AI Companies

V2 Communications' audit uncovers media priorities in AI

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2023 will forever be known as the year AI went mainstream.

The pace of AI investment and innovation was astonishing. It was a long time coming: the father of computer science Alan Turing did, of course, birth AI in 1950 when he asked if machines could think. But it took the introduction of generative AI (GenAI), large language models (LLMs), and ChatGPT to capture the imagination of worldwide consumers and business users.

> **"**I would call this an inflection point. 2023 is, in history, hopefully going to be remembered for the profound changes of the technology as well as the public awakening. It also shows how messy this technology is.**"**
>
> Fei-Fei Li, AI scientist

Companies, pundits, and users alike started their AI exploration journeys, trying to better understand what it is and the impact it can have—positive and/or negative. Many pilots showcased the hope and potential AI could bring to a wide range of issues and business sectors. We saw AI being applied within hospitals to reduce physician burnout; predict where and when wildfires might spring up; and boost worker productivity and business efficiency.

90% of CEOs are waiting for GenAI to move past the hype *(BCG)*

Media and pundit conversations are now pointing out the AI hype vs. reality. For all the excitement companies put behind recent AI acquisitions and innovations to showcase commitment to long-term growth for investors and solving sizable problems for customers, adoption remains nascent and the promised business benefits are yet to be fully realized.

Because the world is watching and waiting for AI to deliver, it's critical for brands to communicate progress in meeting their AI claims. Adoption, examples, proof of results—these will be key to distinguishing a brand in an increasingly crowded market. Strategic, integrated communications is critical to bridging the gap between hype and reality as well as building trust with stakeholders and audiences.

AI Dominates – In Davos and Beyond

The world is talking about AI—not only in technology and business conversations, but mainstream conversations, too. The risks AI poses to major global events has become a common headline when covering 2024 topics, including upcoming elections in the U.S., Russia, and India (among many others); Trump's trial on charges of election interference; wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as heating tensions in the Middle East; and the Summer Olympics in Paris.

According to data from MuckRack, in 2023 there were nearly 200,000 media stories related to AI's interference in the U.S. election. We're on pace to see even more of these conversations in 2024.

AI was also a driving force at the 2024 World Economic Forum in Davos earlier this year.

Reporters covering the event noted conversations about AI occurred formally and informally throughout the ski town. The same could be said about where tech and business media focused their broadcast and print coverage. Axios summarized the event well, writing that there is a divided optimism for AI. That article, and the broader coverage, is what V2 expects will set the tone for AI conversations in the year ahead.

V2 conducted a media audit of AI conversations at Davos to drill into the specific AI topics media are focused on and asking business leaders about in interviews, analyzing over 200 stories across business, broadcast, and tech media in the U.S. and U.K. We found that AI was brought up in interviews, regardless of whether the spokesperson represented an AI company.

In Davos, the media was focused on covering:

The Impact of Emerging Tech on Society

→ AI brings immediate fear; but it will also bring profound good, too
→ Unlike other innovation cycles, there has never been so much awareness of this new tech

AI Regulation and Oversight

→ The need for government-regulated AI, particularly within industry sectors
→ How companies are self-regulating (e.g., explaining to customers what their AI algorithms are doing and how they're storing data)
→ How the tech industry is creating safety protocols and establishing trust principles in relation to developing AI software
→ Mounting concerns over the trustworthiness, uses, and potential information bias of AI

The Impact of AI on the Workforce

Jobs and corporate culture

→ Big tech layoffs as a result of companies investing in AI
→ How company leadership needs to fix morale and cultural issues as result of AI entering the workforce

Corporate AI strategy

→ How all companies are trying to figure out their AI strategy right now, and how AI can drive growth
→ How AI presents a change management issue with employees
→ There will be no perfect AI strategy—and that it's the move to action, and not waiting around, that's key to getting ahead of competitors
→ How AI can solve for the some of the current challenges businesses are facing due to the economic environment

Reporters we work with closely—including those at Fast Company, The New York Times, VentureBeat, and InformationWeek—echo what emerged from Davos. These are the issues they're interested in covering—and expect company executives to have perspective on:

→ How AI products are creating real value through success metrics

→ AI governance and bias, including how companies are:

- o Building safety into the development process of AI

- o Training models (e.g., what data is being used, and how, and if there is bias)

→ How companies of all sizes, especially enterprises, are using GenAI and other forms of AI

→ AI regulation efforts in the U.S. and abroad

→ AI's role in helping and hurting sustainability (e.g., energy consumption issues)

→ The basic end-user experience of a GenAI tool (e.g., how to use it, what questions get the best responses, etc.)

The media we spoke with tend to cover bigger AI issues and trend pieces rather than vendor products and announcements. That said, they're interested in learning about hot AI startups and new products.

Communication's Role in Going from All Talk to Action

Companies, especially those offering AI solutions, need to be prepared to move past the buzz and discuss the reality of how their technology is impacting users. Strategic, integrated communication is critical for bridging the gap between rumbles and reality, building trust with audiences, and standing out in a noisy market. Doing so requires:

Setting the framework with strong messaging

Companies need to build AI messaging that is accurate and defensible, backed with proof points. They need to build trust in their AI, and to do so, specificity is key—for example: what are the security features, how is governance built into the technology, and how is AI being used by customers or integrated with partners. Companies should also have messaging prepared for how they are using AI in their own organization.

Finding customers who can tell your story for you

Communications professionals know the power of a customer testimonial. This is especially critical for AI-driven companies. As industry dialogue moves from hype to reality, it's important that companies find customer champions who can explain not only how they are using an AI solution, but also the value and outcomes they've experienced as a result. As more deployments and use cases get attention, journalists will no longer report on vague-isms around being "more productive," so it is critical a brand finds customers who can exemplify exactly how their organization has used and benefited from AI via defined success metrics.

Building a pipeline of news that showcases product superiority

Issuing product news regularly is an important way to show company momentum and innovation in a crowded field of AI companies, and creates natural touchpoints for executives to meet and build relationships with reporters and influencers. Product news also signals to the market that the company is constantly innovating, which can help with sales and analyst relations.

Forging analyst relationships

Analyst relations is key for AI companies as they navigate unchartered territory and create new categories and/or differentiate themselves to stand out in a crowded market. Analysts offer objective opinions that serve as validation points for investors, the media, customers, prospects, and other stakeholders, and are major players in a company's sphere of influence.

Becoming a voice in important, relevant industry conversations

With the exception of a handful of Big Tech players, media is more interested in covering AI trends and issues—from deepfakes to regulation—than it is vendors and their products. The key to breaking through the noise is having pre-defined thought leadership and unique points of view on the topics that media are covering—and act fast when issues response opportunities arise.

Nailing the Media Interview

Based on V2's media audit and deep experience working with reporters covering the space, AI companies should be prepared to deliver compelling key messages in response to the following questions:

- What does your company/product/AI do? Can you offer specific product use cases?
- Can you provide success metrics on the value your AI has provided to customers/a customer?
- What measures do you have in place to guard against AI bias?
- What policies/measures do you have in place to ensure AI is used ethically within your organization?
- What data was used to train your AI model?
- What's the underlying LLM in your company/product?
- How accurate are the answers your AI generates?
- What's your own company's AI strategy and how is it using AI?
- Do you think AI will replace jobs? Does your company have plans to replace workers with AI?
- How are you thinking about sustainability when it comes to your AI deployments? Are you doing anything to offset the carbon footprint it may cause?
- How would your AI potentially have negative environmental impacts?

AI impacts all business functions and industries, and has become a board and C-level imperative. Even companies that don't sell an AI product need to be able to discuss how they're using AI to drive business growth. In fact, boards and employees are putting CEOs on notice that they expect clear leadership around AI.

AI companies need strategically planned and thoughtfully executed integrated communications to stand out from the noise. V2 Communications partners with AI companies to shape their markets, make them market leaders, and help them reach their business goals. Get in touch with V2 to learn how we can move your business forward.

BIG BOLD BETTER
THINKING MOVES OUTCOMES

V2 Communications is the integrated communications firm for technology companies in the B2B, healthcare, and climate industries, from startups to publicly traded companies. Our clients want to have an outsized impact on business, humanity, or the planet through their innovations. They want to be iconic brands, and V2 creates integrated communications strategies that shape their markets and make them market leaders.

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