

Adapting to the next Trump administration

A second Trump term comes with one advantage for organizations: hindsight. Companies can navigate this complex landscape by learning from past mistakes and positioning themselves by adopting more agile, dynamic strategies tailored to this unique political environment.

By Lauren Tomlinson and Mike Reed

As companies prepare to navigate the public affairs challenges in the second Trump administration, there's one significant advantage staring everyone in the face: hindsight.

In President Trump's first term, many companies, interest groups and associations struggled to communicate around an array of issues—from navigating sudden policy changes and deciphering what a social media post would mean for their business to responding to shifting political dynamics. Now, there's an opportunity to critically assess what strategies worked, what fell short and what necessary adjustments to make.

This time around, companies should better position themselves to avoid previous pitfalls by adopting more dynamic, responsive communications strategies tailored to the unique political environment of a second Trump term. Communicators and CEOs have an opportunity to redefine how they interact with the government and the stakeholders who drive it, ensuring they not only stay ahead of potential policy changes but also play a proactive role in shaping them.

Beyond traditional tactics: a digital-first approach

In the past, corporate America relied heavily on op-eds, press releases and high-profile interviews with traditional outlets to communicate their positions. However, the first Trump administration revealed the limitations of these conventional methods. The media environment is increasingly fragmented, with new and ever-changing outlets and influencers like we saw with both presidential campaigns. To reach your audiences you must go where they are, which is now predominately on social media, non-traditional media platforms and long-form podcasts. Successful companies embrace this change and leverage a more organic approach to engage directly with their stakeholders.

It should be standard practice in this new age for executive leaders to use their personal social media channels to share thought leadership, corporate perspectives and policy stances in real time. This approach humanizes the corporate message and allows companies to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and reach audiences—including policymakers—more directly

and authentically.

For example, CEOs and industry leaders are finding that a well-timed post can generate significant traction among their key stakeholders and journalists, often surpassing the reach of traditional op-eds. This shift towards a more conversational, transparent mode of communication resonates in a time where authenticity is celebrated.

How to communicate: tariff policy as an example

On the issue of tariffs, for instance, many businesses faced disruptions when the first Trump administration threatened and imposed tariffs on certain imported goods. Despite tariffs being a significant, seemingly high-profile issue for the past eight years, data shows that the American people don't really understand how they work or their effects on the U.S. economy.

Further, if your industry is opposed to tariffs, it's clear the communications tactics employed during President Trump's first term failed to move the needle. Much of the messaging from industry until now has not moved the public in large swaths in opposition to tariffs, with constituents and customers simply not buying arguments that tariffs drastically increased costs or provided real harm to Americans.

To communicate to and influence audiences in the Trump 2.0 era, organizations should:

Educate, educate, educate. Spend time and money communicating with your customers and the public on how tariffs actually work and who pays for them. Explain how supply chains have changed over time and why a switch cannot be flipped to move certain supply chains back to the U.S.

Make the message about jobs, not just prices. The argument that prices will drastically increase when tariffs are imposed clearly didn't land with most Americans in President Trump's first term. Talk about the potential for job losses that comes with decreased economic activity that could arrive with certain tariffs in place. Go to school on the messaging that failed to land the past eight years and make the necessary adjustments.

Go local. Focus on influencing elected officials in competitive districts and states who can feel the heat on anti-tariff messaging and outcomes. In a Congress with

record-thin margins, this can be an incredibly effective tactic for the next several years.

Propose alternatives. Understand the goal of policymakers and work collaboratively to achieve that goal. In an election that was won on change and disruption, stakeholders are expecting bold ideas to fix issues that have plagued communities for decades. Don't just be a naysayer, propose alternative policies that will better communities and help policymakers make good on campaign promises.

New era, new avenues for engagement

The evolving media landscape offers companies new avenues for engagement, and increasingly, policymakers and audiences are seeking information from a wide range of sources. This provides corporate leaders an opportunity to use digital platforms to:

Build trust among consumers.

When C-suite leaders share candid and behind-the-scenes content on social media about how policy changes in Washington affect their product, it builds trust among consumers and humanizes the brand.

Communicate directly with decision makers.

More so than ever before, digital solutions offer the ability to tailor and micro-target a message to a small group of key stakeholders. Utilize these tactics through either paid or earned media efforts to reach the audience that matters.

Engage, don't sit back. Companies, interest groups and associations that sit back and hope to hide in the shadows are more and more often not taking the right approach. It's better to be at the table than on the menu. Be proactive in leading with how your product or industry fits in with the world view of the folks currently in the halls of power and how you want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.



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Mike Reed

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gy, diversity, equity and inclusion, facilities management, supply chain management—or any number of issues, again, depending on the company.

This person's responsibilities will vary and could include providing access to certain company information, historical or broader industry context, or technical information to inform communications.

Partnering with the communications team and legal team will make sure the information is used effectively without introducing any risk.

As new threats emerge, it's important to keep this list of experts updated and bring them into crisis communication trainings. AI is a great example: Who on your team can speak to the company's policy and how it came together? How is AI use being monitored and how is the policy being enforced? Who has a good view of the AI-based tools

the company is using? Knowing this information now can minimize the likelihood of a crisis occurring related to AI use and expedite the response if one does.

While we can't predict what specific crises, we'll find ourselves in next year, reflecting on the previous year and updating your team and approach is a crucial step to positioning your company for success.

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MANAGING CORPORATE CRISES IN '25

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may face compliance and ethical dilemmas when navigating sanctions or managing supply chains in politically sensitive areas. Each industry and each business may face different risks and challenges associated with geopolitical events.

Corporate leaders are now expected to have a voice on political or social issues, especially those that have broad societal implications. However, expressing opinions on such issues can also open the door to backlash from different sides of the debate,

leading to reputational risks, consumer boycotts and employee unrest.

Navigating the future with foresight

In 2025, the risks of geopolitical instability and the complexities of taking a public stance on sensitive social or political issues will continue to be prominent in the corporate landscape. Business leaders must recognize that their companies' decisions in these areas have the potential to create significant reputational risk, impacting everything from consumer loyalty to employee morale and shareholder confidence.

A successful crisis communications strategy will require companies to carefully

consider the long-term implications of their public positions, weigh the diverse interests of global stakeholders and ensure that their corporate values align with their actions. Transparency, authenticity and consistency will be key in navigating this increasingly polarized and unpredictable world. The companies that manage to strike the right balance between their corporate missions, values and the demands of their stakeholders will emerge not only as resilient organizations but also as influential voices in shaping the future of business leadership.

Phil Denning is a Partner at ICR. ○

PROACTIVE REPUTATION DEFENSE

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Then take defensive action by removing offending posts or revoking the posting privileges of abusers. If possible, perform antagonist mapping and analyze common themes and timeliness of the attacks.

It's also smart to conduct threat actor profiling by researching, identifying and assessing threats posed by online actors, including those who believe they are anonymous.

Collecting and preserving evidence is crucial for any potential legal action. It may be necessary to work with outside counsel, security advisors and public relations firms

to develop strategies to counter these adverse actors and narratives.

All of this may cost a good deal, but consider the money, aggravation and insecurity you can prevent by finding the right partners to put an end to or mitigate your online safety.

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NAVIGATING 2025 WITH CONFIDENCE

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lead and drive the response. Teams must strategize, plan for scenarios, craft messages, manage traditional and social media, monitor public dialogue and anticipate fu-

ture developments to ensure the company recovers as swiftly as possible from difficult situations.

Our CrisisQHorizon process begins with a deep dive planning and discovery period to understand the business, identify potential crisis vulnerabilities and set a course for preparedness.

If your organization hasn't yet invested in crisis preparedness and building a risk-aware culture, now is the best time to start.

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Embracing change

A second Trump administration presents both challenges and opportunities for organizations across America. Companies

can navigate this complex landscape more effectively by learning from past mistakes and embracing a more agile, digital-first approach to engagement. The shift away from traditional media tactics toward more organic, transparent communication not only aligns with the current media environment but also offers a powerful tool for influencing policy and shaping public perception

In a rapidly changing political and media landscape, companies that can pivot their engagement strategies to reflect these new realities will be better positioned to advocate for their interests and contribute to the broader policy discussion in the years ahead.

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