

POWER PROFILE

REWRITING THE RULES

FleishmanHillard's APAC president Lynne Anne Davis is taking the lead in a PR world where the playbook is changing, writes **John Cremer**

HIGH FLYERS

The essence of PR is to put across a clear corporate message, whether in the normal course of business or in times of trial and crisis. But, as Lynne Anne Davis explains, the skills and strategies needed to do that effectively are undergoing a fundamental transformation.

"Traditional ways of communication and crisis management are outdated; command and control is dead," says the president and senior partner, Asia Pacific, for international PR firm FleishmanHillard.

The biggest game-changer, of course, is the power of social media, which has forced companies to see the world through different eyes. In many cases, that means totally revising their "playbook" when it comes to informing, explaining, persuading and generally engaging with the world at large.

"Our clients need to be 'on point', so we put together conversation hints for them to listen, manage and respond to issues in real time," Davis says.

Another key factor is recognising the need for the broader corporate message to appeal on an emotional level. These days, the "audience" sees companies as having a responsibility not to simply churn out profits, but to contribute positively to society.

"It is proven that brands with purpose outperform the stock market and drive bigger dividends," Davis says.

After a somewhat itinerant childhood, during which her father's job as an engineer saw the family living in Canada, Britain and various parts of the US, Davis opted to study journalism at the University of Missouri.

Graduating in 1987, she joined an advertising firm on the junior-most rung of the client account team. However, wanting to write and have more involvement in driving creative strategies, she jumped at the chance two years later to switch into PR and join FleishmanHillard in St Louis.

"I decided pretty early on I wanted to work in an agency surrounded by or immersed in creativity, with a diversity of clients and where ideas were flowing," she says. "In general, I believe it is good to be ambitious and aspirational and to take all the steps necessary to reach your goals."

Seven years on and, by then, itching for a move, she volunteered for a transfer. Ex-

pecting to end up in Washington DC or Texas, the company's counter-offer took her by surprise. They wanted someone in Hong Kong, who knew the organisation and could teach others to pull the right levers and tap new resources. Davis arrived in 1997 and has never looked back.

Settling in was relatively easy thanks to her teenage years adapting to new homes in new towns and being the new face in the school lunchroom.

"That experience is extremely character building and opens you up to a brand of fearlessness," she says. "It developed a very deep sense of empathy, which helps me to walk in other people's shoes and see life through their eyes, whether dealing with clients or employees."

She now oversees 18 offices and three brands in 10 countries – including China, India, and Indonesia – and takes particular pride in the fact that more than half of the firm's leaders are women and working mothers.

"The combination of gender diversity and local management is a key thing for us and helps in understanding the government, public attitudes and regulatory environment in each market."

Juggling everything to achieve a sensible work-life balance can be tough, but Davis says the support of an efficient team and a close-knit family make it possible.

"I've had to let go of perfectionist tendencies, and I'm a huge believer in focusing on the moment you are in. At home, that means I focus on the children entirely and only do conference calls after they have gone to bed. If I visit one of our markets, I'm there to talk to people, to be in the trenches."

"Of course, the constant flow of communication never stops. I used to deal with email like playing tennis, but now I treat it like a fast-flowing river and just pick out the 'big fish' – otherwise it would be the only thing I did."

For the full story visit www.cpjobs.com/hk/highflyers



Photo: Laurence Leung

POINTING THE WAY IN PR

Lynne Anne Davis gives five top tips for public relations people.

Get in now "The power of PR in Asia has never been greater and demand for it has never been stronger. That makes it an excellent time to enter the industry."

Know the market "To build a career, you need to be a good communicator and have strong writing skills, high situational awareness, curiosity and the ability to stay on top of trends."

Use both brains "Employers now look for individuals with both left- and right-brain abilities which, historically, wasn't always the case in the sector. They want people with a diversity of skills and life experience, ranging from an interest in literature to expertise in research and analytics."

Recognise impacts "In any situation, it is important to come to the table with a perspective or point of view and be able to understand the implications. For this, it helps to be active on social media or to have blogs."

Be alert "Always have your antennae up to detect where needs or contradictions may arise."

NEWS BIT



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CASE STUDY

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