

Elements of magic



By [Bridget von Holdt](#)

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If I had a magic wand, with one exaggerated wave I would place a skilled PR professional to sit on the right hand side of every CEO in the country. The reason that I say this is because PR is such a persuasive factor in opinion building that no person, group or business can do without it...

Today, PR is not just a tool to simply launch products - it is much more than that, it's about reputation, relationships, working ethically, telling it as it is, and telling it now.

As practitioners we see ourselves as the good fairy rather than the bad witch, because like it or not there is certainly an element of magic to what we do each and every day. Observe how quickly companies move forward when they use PR properly.

For the last four years, together with industry players, I have been working relentlessly to legislate this industry in terms of education and continued professional development. I believe this will enable PR professionals to sustain and increase their competitive position. This will help prevent 'fly-by-nights' who have managed to damage the reputation of PR in this country.



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The current state of ethics in PR depends heavily on codes held by the professional associations such as PRISA. Membership in these groups is voluntary, so one is not required to belong to an association in order to practice - which is why legislation is so important, not just for practitioners, but also for NGOs, educators, business and government communicators.

Transformation is also a topical issue within the marketing, advertising and marketing sectors. The Marketing, Advertising and Communication (MAC) Charter is a legal blueprint for transformation in the industry and I have dedicated the last seven years to collaborating with industry and government stakeholders on behalf of the PR profession. The updated B-BBEE Codes also required that we updated the MAC Charter, which is about to be tabled in time for the launch of these new B-BBEE Codes.

The ultimate deed for my wand would be to solve the mystery of PR or campaign measurement. There has been a worldwide move for a more effective mechanism. ROI in PR is not about 'space' value, but about impacting a target audience, messaging and meeting the set of objectives. Most companies tend to have departments that measure what is driving their sales. Bringing PR into that mix is the aim, and can be accomplished.

The annual PRISM Awards that honours PR in South Africa is in its 18th year and has grown in stature. PRISMs have earned their place as the 'Oscars' of South African PR. The excitement and buzz around consultancies, NGOs, educational institutions and companies wanting to enter the Awards was extraordinary this year - there was a sense of frenzy to win as many consultants and practitioners realise the impact of a win on building a reputation.

My final wish is that practitioners take themselves seriously - and not see themselves playing second fiddle to the advertising industry. It's a huge responsibility, but if we can position ourselves in the boardroom we can make a powerful difference.

No matter how small or big you are - a one-man band or part of a multinational - the power that we wield is monumental.

Magic, one might say.

Bridget's experience in PR spans over 20 years. She has been awarded the PRISA President's Award, Stevie International Business Award 2011, Best in Biz Awards 2011 and Ivan O'Brien Leadership Award 2012 and was voted top 10 most influential PR practitioners in South Africa by The Annual 2009/10.

ABOUT BRIDGET VON HOLDT

Bridget von Holdt is the Business Director at BCWAfrica. Bridget's experience in public relations spans over 30 years and is a registered APR. A revered name in South African Public Relations and communication circles and a recipient of the PRISM Lifetime Achievement Award in 2018, Bridget is known for her vision to see beyond the conventional in the communication industry.

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