



**2026**

**Predictions**



The Weber  
Shandwick  
Collective

# As a new year unfolds, we're poised to blaze a fresh trail in a changing landscape.

## What's ahead:



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From economic fluctuations to geopolitical uncertainties and widening cultural gaps across both generational and political spheres: our experts predict that 2026 will kick off a transformative era for our industry, and the changes we anticipate over the next five years will redefine our work more than it has in the last five decades.

## We're built for uncharted territory.

With our industry leadership, depth of expertise and legacy of innovation, we are uniquely equipped to handle this shift.

We're guided by our North Star: work that drives relevance, reputation and results. Our core capabilities are designed to help clients succeed in this new era with enhanced offerings to mitigate risks, navigate narratives and seize opportunities.

Weber I/O is decoding the implications for the future. Weber Advisory is guiding clients through myriad cultural evolutions. Weber Create is sparking human connections through earned media and creative.

And the engine that is accelerating our capabilities? Our industry-first agentic operating system, HALO, powered by a collaboration with Google, which is harnessing the potential of AI and decades of our strategic knowledge in communications to solve complex challenges.

But most importantly, the brightest creative minds in the industry are driving these initiatives, crafting choreographed strategies, activations and executions, and following their compasses beyond the edge of the map.

Our experts predict that 2026 will challenge AI to prove its worth, reward honest corporate storytelling and deepen audience fragmentation and personalization.

## We all have our own compass. Where does yours point?

# AI & The Future of the Industry

**Weber I/O**, a unique capability that unites thousands of employees worldwide under one bold mission: to ignite growth where code meets culture.



# Susan Howe

CEO, The Weber  
Shandwick Collective

## How will the agency-client relationship evolve in 2026 as AI continues to advance?

2026 will not be any less complex than 2025. I believe agencies and client partners have never been more aligned in what they need from one another: clarity, creativity and confidence in a world moving very fast. Clients are under tremendous pressure to prove measurable value, drive innovation and deliver efficiently. Agencies must also drive all three while protecting the craft, counsel and human insight that make partnerships thrive.

AI will push the relationship toward deeper strategic collaboration. That's why we've built HALO, our agentic operating platform designed to help clients navigate with greater precision. HALO supercharges scenario modeling, cultural intelligence, rapid creative development, automation of resource-intensive workflows and agentic crisis communications. But its greatest value is what it gives people back: the time

and space for judgment, interrogation and invention.

While AI excels at recognizing and amplifying patterns, human creatives are natural at breaking them. Our innovation in agentic AI isn't about replacing what agencies do; it's about enabling smarter decisions, sharper narratives and faster paths to outcomes.

The evolution is clear: agencies won't be defined by tasks we execute, but by the decisions we help clients make. The relationship becomes more predictive, more focused on operating at the intersection of brand building and brand protection, where our industry's value has always been. AI will accelerate the work, but human creativity, trust and transparency will guide it.



# Joe Kingsbury

President, AI Transformation Services

**The edge in 2026 won't be having AI – it'll be optimizing the workflow by orchestrating humans and machines.**

AI isn't a shiny new tool anymore; it's the infrastructure for marketing and communications work. Since everyone is using the same base models, there's no tech advantage from simply adopting the tools – tomorrow's competitive edge will come from how you integrate AI into your workflow and teach it to think like both your brand and target audience, shaping it with proprietary data and insights.

I predict we'll soon see a major shift in what "human-in-the-loop" actually means. Effective leaders will differentiate by designing intentional checkpoints where human judgement matters most – brand nuance, creative instinct, ethical execution – and let machines handle precision and scale. The goal isn't to minimize human involvement or relegate it to compliance; it's to free our people from mundane tasks and position them at the opportunities to create differentiation.

In short, 2026 will be the year we move from adoption to orchestration, where the real advantage comes from how people, data and tech collaborate with a system that continuously learns and improves.

## How will AI most tangibly shape the marcomms industry in 2026?

**The edge in 2026 won't be having AI – it'll be optimizing the workflow by orchestrating humans and machines."**



# Michael Connery

Global Head of AI Acceleration

## With so much change and innovation happening, what is the marcomms industry's biggest opportunity in 2026?

The 2026 opportunity is in reinvention, not replication.

Every major tech shift begins the same way: We use new tools to mimic the old. The first websites were basically brochures converted to HTML. Mobile was just the web rendered small.

Generative AI is no different. The current drive toward efficiency – the same content, but more and faster – follows the standard pathways of all major tech shifts.

There is nothing wrong with efficiency, but the true impact of generative AI will emerge when we stop asking how to do the old things faster and start exploring what's newly possible.

What if audience research wasn't a quarterly event, but a constant feedback loop? Synthetic personas and lightweight message testing can turn audience insights into a daily creative input.

What if crisis planning were a standing capability? AI can help pressure-test decisions in real time, across reputation, policy and business outcomes.

What if LLMs weren't just tools, but audiences? They're already telling stories about your brand. If your narrative isn't part of their answer, you're not in the conversation.

What if cultural intelligence became embedded in every brief and brainstorm? Generative tools can make trend signals instantly accessible.

Bottom line: Take what used to be expensive, occasional and centralized and make it continuous, accessible and essential.

Replication is improving the process. Reinvention will change the game.

**We also asked  
our leaders how  
advances in  
AI will impact  
varying industries.**

Here's what they  
had to say...



# Jesse Wolfersberger

Executive Vice President,  
Analytics

## How will advances in AI impact Healthcare in 2026?

**The edge in 2026 isn't having AI – it's orchestrating humans, data and machines to create differentiation.**

I've never seen a single episode of "NCIS" or "Chicago Fire" – but that doesn't change the fact that they're two of the highest-rated shows on TV.

Believe it or not, I'm making a point about AI adoption. If you're reading this, you have almost certainly started integrating AI into your workflow – but you are not the norm.

Nationally, only 48.7% of adults are using generative AI in non-work settings (and only 37.4% for work settings)<sup>1</sup>. That's about where Internet adoption was in 1999, when the biggest search engine in the world was Yahoo!. If history repeats itself, as it is wont to, 2026 will be when AI starts to hit the middle of the adoption curve.

This is critical for health because millions of people are about to realize that AI is WebMD on steroids. It can offer a diagnosis,

a treatment and even recommend specific products by name.

People absolutely should not use these tools as a substitute for visiting a doctor – but that doesn't change the fact that AI is about to become the de facto PCP for many Americans. Even folks who have great insurance and disposable income will find it hard to beat the immediacy of asking ChatGPT which cold medicine will get them back on their feet the fastest. Already, one in six adults use AI for health questions at least once a month<sup>2</sup>. That number will only grow.

The AI tidal wave you and I have been riding is about to hit the mainland. Luckily, that means we are the best positioned to understand how AI sees your brand and products, seed the models, combat misinformation and meet consumers where they're headed. We may not be caught up on "NCIS" – but we'll be ready when AI becomes America's most-visited clinic.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2025/nov/state-generative-ai-adoption-2025>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kff.org/public-opinion/kff-health-misinformation-tracking-poll-artificial-intelligence-and-health-information/>



# Robyn Adelson

Chief Strategy Officer,  
North America

Brands – or, I should say, the brands that will succeed – will take AI as an opportunity to reinvent how they connect with their audiences. Think about the history of the internet, or any technology: the people who differentiated themselves didn't just insert that tech into their existing business models, they invented new ways for people to interact with products and each other.

I've seen great success in how AI helps us navigate extremely complex situations – like the kind we've been encountering everywhere these days! – by taking the guesswork out of understanding how messages will land. When you can see sophisticated forecasts of how ideas might resonate, shift or backfire long before they hit the market, you're able to challenge assumptions and reveal new angles or untapped spaces that will make your work more relevant.

Look around at brands today: the ones that are nimble, that are preparing themselves to take smart risks and rethink processes. The brands that succeed in 2026 will be the ones that use AI to think ahead to tackle problems in ways we couldn't before. It'll be exciting to see where we go together.

## How will advances in AI impact consumer brands in 2026?

“The brands that succeed in 2026 will be the ones **that use AI to think ahead to tackle problems in ways we couldn't before.**”



# Caitlin Stewart

San Francisco Technology Practice Lead, North America Growth Lead for Technology

## How will advances in AI impact the technology industry in 2026?

Leaders across this sector recognize that we are in an era of fundamental transformation, and existing business models are unlikely to survive the decade. In 2026, we'll begin to see the formation of the models that will replace them, models grounded in tangible value and measurable outcomes rather than traditional subscription or fee-based pricing.

In response to the growing pressure to prove AI investments deliver real returns, I also expect companies to increasingly price AI services based on demonstrated ROI and performance metrics. Due to the massive capital requirements for AI infrastructure, I also anticipate more companies exploring less conventional deal structures, including strategic partnerships, sovereign AI initiatives and public-private collaborations.

Physical AI will emerge as a critical growth area in 2026, with autonomous systems, robotics and embodied AI moving from pilot programs to production deployment across consumer and enterprise applications. The next computing paradigm requires fundamentally different infrastructure, so spatial computing investments will also accelerate as tech organizations bet boldly on a post-smartphone world.

**The industry's trajectory is clear:** 2026 will be defined by continued significant capital deployment, architectural innovation and the courage to reimagine business models for an AI-first future.

# Business & Culture

**Weber Advisory**, a modern approach to corporate and public affairs, guiding C-suite leaders at the intersection of business and culture. Bolstered by a Global Senior Advisor Council of elite strategists, Weber Advisory equips leaders to act decisively and strategically.



# Jim O'Leary

North America CEO and  
Global President, The Weber  
Shandwick Collective

## How will the stakeholder economy evolve in 2026?

The past year has been unforgiving for business leaders: geopolitical challenges, tariffs, economic volatility, regulatory shifts and deepening cultural divides. It's been relentless. The boards and management teams we work with have had to recalibrate at every turn.

One significant shift is where problems originate. Corporate challenges once stayed firmly within the business realm but now issues that start in popular culture quickly become business problems.

Cultural and political issues can create reputational risk, shareholder risk and more pressure for the CEOs we work with.

We've never needed real-time data, clarity and strategic judgment more. In 2026, that pressure will only intensify,

which means boards and management teams need better ways to navigate it.

AI has become essential – not as a replacement for judgment, but as an accelerant for risk management. Agentic AI systems can help organizations move faster, think more strategically and manage risk with greater scale and precision – surfacing patterns, testing scenarios and flagging emerging issues before they escalate.

In a stakeholder economy where change is the only constant, 2026 will be the year companies get more comfortable leaning into AI to accelerate and enable human-led efforts.

Change won't slow down. But our ability to manage it will speed up.



# Kate Bullinger

CEO, United Minds

United Minds is TWSC's entity focused on business transformation.

## How will communications leaders need to **evolve** their functions to redefine influence and impact in an increasingly AI-driven workplace in 2026 and beyond?

As we look to 2026 and beyond, communications leaders must redefine influence – shifting from prioritizing message volume or speed to orchestrating engagement and safeguarding reputation in real time.

This evolution is driven by AI, moving communications from content delivery to strategic impact.

Effectively deployed, AI already enhances efficiency and precision, enabling real-time connectivity and engagement.

Looking ahead, intelligent systems will support hyper-personalization and predictive engagement, empowering teams to anticipate stakeholder needs and deliver dynamic, tailored interactions across channels.

For CCOs, these advancements position communications as a critical enterprise intelligence hub, integrating behavioral insights, predictive analytics and

governance to proactively manage risks. Success will demand a strong commitment to ethical oversight to maintain credibility in a world where algorithms amplify narratives at scale.

Leaders must also adapt their functions to align with AI-enhanced workflows and evolving strategic priorities.

Equally vital is the evolution of talent. While technical skills are essential, human judgment, cultural intelligence and the ability to navigate complex stakeholder dynamics remain irreplaceable. Metrics must also evolve, shifting from basic engagement metrics like clicks to focus on resilience, reputation and stakeholder trust.

The leaders who embrace AI's potential will go beyond reaction, using it to amplify the human voice. By fostering trust, accountability and clarity, they will create communications functions that thrive in an AI-driven workplace.



# Ben Branham

New York Corporate Affairs  
Practice Lead

## How will the role of the CEO evolve in 2026?

In 2026, CEOs will be defined by how they navigate the continuous, high-stakes balancing act between the converging imperatives of technological agility and stakeholder trust. That means balancing two roles:

- *Chief Strategist for AI-Adoption*, the advocate who also sets guardrails
- *Chief Values Officer*, translating corporate reputation and mission into measurable, sustainable business practices.

In practice, that will mean prioritizing the following:

### **1. Augmenting AI with Leadership (not just vice versa)**

The CEO must ensure that AI deployment is governed by human judgment and ethical oversight. To avoid enormous compliance risks, deploying technology to simplify operations and decision-making must complement simultaneous investment in the workforce and clear policies on data use.

### **2. Operationalizing Authenticity**

A credible human-centered narrative is essential for attracting talent, but performative purpose –

where stated values clash with operational reality – kills trust. The CEO must accurately align external objectives with internal culture, bringing transparency to business models. Credibility begets agility: employees and partners are more willing to follow a leader if they believe in the organization's core fairness and mission.

### **3. Driving Resilience**

Amid economic volatility, the CEO must harmonize between long-term planning and accelerated, risk-informed decision-making. Nimble reactions to market shifts mustn't erode core stability. CEOs succeed by cultivating organizational resilience – simplifying processes and decentralizing authority to allow for faster, local action – where technology can model economic scenarios and predict risks.

Ultimately, it's no longer sufficient for a CEO to be an impeccable operator or an inspiring visionary. They have to lead by recognizing that technology, vision, value and culture are interdependent levers that must be balanced hourly to stay aloft – and win.



# Mike Rosich

Global CEO, Current Group

*Current Group is TWSC's entity comprised of Current Global and DNA Communications.*

## What will healthcare companies need in order to sustain reputation in 2026?

Reputation in 2026 will depend on strong communication that helps stakeholders see your values, innovations and commitments holistically.

More than just delivering great products and services, healthcare companies need to communicate who they are and what they stand for.

It starts with telling a clear, consistent, yet adaptable story that people can connect with – whether they're patients, doctors, policymakers or investors – and which can be tailored to reach each and every nuanced audience.

With new scientific advancements and life-changing treatments on the way, that story needs to balance the here and now with the hope and potential of the future. People want to see how these innovations are making a tangible, immediate impact and understand the long-term potential, building both trust and enthusiasm.

Equally critical is where and how these stories are told. Effective communication will depend on choosing the right platforms and voices to deliver messages that resonate and cut through an increasingly saturated media landscape.

Ultimately, reputation in 2026 will be forged as much by action as by communication. More than ever, audiences will hold healthcare companies accountable for living their stated values through meaningful, visible actions and commitments. What you do will define how stakeholders perceive who you are.

“It starts with telling **a clear, consistent, yet adaptable story** that people can connect with.”



# Paul Massey

President, South & co-lead Weber Advisory, Americas

## How will C-Suite leaders reframe responsible business in a "beyond ESG" era?

The term ESG – Environment, Social, and Governance – may be facing political turbulence, but the work behind sustainability remains a critical cornerstone of corporate reputation, resilience and impact.

What does this mean for us? Delivering on corporate purpose promises has, perhaps, never been harder. But it's just as important as ever to show up with hope and purpose and follow through in moments that matter. Globally, pressure is growing for leaders to provide solutions to the complex challenges that are shaping the future. Stakeholders – customers, employees, investors, policymakers and value chain partners – are keen to understand how companies are advancing responsible business priorities and solving real problems.

The way forward is rooted in timeless principles that have always powered good performance: vision for responsible business backed by pragmatism and accountability. Companies must navigate societal conflict, adapt to the future of work, enhance efficiency through tech innovation and stay ahead of evolving ESG regulations. To achieve a real impact in this complex landscape, responsible business can't just be confined to a function, but a mindset across the organization.

When purpose is embedded across corporate strategy like a clear North star, it becomes easier to weather disruptions. Effective responsible business strategies see every challenge – whether it's talent shortages, AI, energy transitions, or other disruptions – through an impact lens. These challenges are sustainability tests, and how a company meets them signals to stakeholders and markets whether it is ready for the future of ESG. And organizational clarity builds trust, sparks innovation, protects resilience and creates connections between people and a shared mission they can believe in.

In this era of transformation, the businesses that thrive will be those that embrace change with optimism, purpose and a vision for long-term value for both their organizations and the world.



**When purpose is embedded across corporate strategy like a clear North star, it becomes easier to weather disruptions."**



# Leslie Patton

Executive Vice President,  
Media Relations Strategy,  
Corporate Advisory

In 2026, companies won't have the luxury of staying neutral. In an increasingly polarized world, taking sides – intentionally or otherwise – will define corporate reputation and impact business outcomes.

The expectation for corporations to weigh in on contentious political and societal issues is growing. Action, inaction and even silence can shape how stakeholders perceive a brand in an environment where consumers increasingly crave accountability. Just one year into the new administration's agenda and priorities, this bifurcated environment will only intensify in 2026.

What's at stake isn't just what companies say, but what they don't say. Staying silent in key moments can damage trust and business performance. To navigate this landscape, companies must actively engage across their entire ecosystem, from consumers to policymakers to employees.

Meanwhile, combating misinformation will also be critical. Success will require companies to take ownership of their narratives, using the right tone, channels and strategies to build credibility and cut through growing skepticism.

In this high-stakes environment, accountability and purposeful communication will be non-negotiable. Knowing what you stand for and sticking to it will be crucial.

## What new factors will companies need to consider in sustaining corporate reputation in 2026?



## Mike Dubke

Senior Advisor  
Former White House  
Communications Director  
for President Trump



## Ashley Etienne

Senior Advisor  
Former Communications  
Director for Vice  
President Kamala Harris

# How will companies and leaders manage evolving expectations to engage in hot-button societal issues in 2026?

The era of the "Statement CEO" is effectively over. In 2026, the efficacy of carving out a political position for your C-Suite will have faded, replaced by a much starker reality: if you live by the press release, you die by the press release.

Leaders in 2026 won't be asking, "What should we say?" but, "Why are we even in this room?" The most successful companies will prioritize competence and manage societal engagement through the lens of risk management and core business necessity rather than activism.

Here is the new playbook:

- **Ruthless Relevance:** Unless an issue directly impacts your supply chain, your workforce's ability to operate or your customer's ability to buy, don't engage. Wandering into culture wars without a business case isn't worth the risk.
- **The Virtue Signaling Tightrope:** Shareholders are tired of execs chiming in on hot-button issues in a transparent bid for relevance, and customers aren't buying the platitudes. In 2026, "neutrality" isn't cowardice; it's a fiduciary duty.
- **Radical Transparency, Not Posturing:** If you do engage, don't brand it. Just do it. If you're fixing your carbon footprint because it saves money, say that. Authenticity creates trust; sermonizing creates targets.

The bottom line? Stop trying to be the devastatingly clever pundit. Be the boringly profitable executive in the boardroom. Rise above the outrage cycle and prioritize keeping the lights on and the shareholders happy.

Going into the 2026 midterm elections, companies will face rising expectations to engage on societal issues as ideological volatility intensifies. Affordability especially is no longer just an economic concern – it has become a defining societal issue, shaping perceptions of fairness, opportunity and corporate responsibility.

A rising wave of political populism and anti-corporate sentiment is shaping the public mood, driven by perceptions of deepening inequality and a growing conviction that the American Dream has slipped out of reach. Concerns over corporate consolidation, perceived excess profits and worker displacement from the rapid advances in AI mean that companies are increasingly becoming a direct target of public frustration.

Recent elections showed that cost-of-living concerns resonate more than traditional wedge issues, and companies will be expected to demonstrate how they contribute to economic stability. At the same time, rising boycott activity reflects growing intolerance for brands perceived as ideologically misaligned. In this climate, even routine corporate decisions can be recast as political statements.

To manage expectations, leaders must align engagement with core business relevance – not partisan signaling – and act early to show tangible contributions to affordability, access, opportunity and resilience. Those who set values proactively and demonstrate consistent, measurable impact will be best positioned to sustain trust in a volatile election-year landscape.



# Shannon Susko

Senior Advisor

## How do you see the role of communications evolving in shaping the success of mergers & acquisitions in 2026?

2025 started with high hopes for robust dealmaking, but geopolitical uncertainty, economic volatility, high interest rates and tariffs tempered expectations in the first half. With second-half tailwinds, including improved fundamentals, monetary easing, unprecedented levels of PE dry powder, strong corporate balance sheets and greater clarity on policy implications (One Big Beautiful Bill Act), momentum returned. Deal values are up 36% over 2024, and transactions valued at \$1+B account for nearly 30% of activity by the end of Q3.

While economic uncertainty and valuation gaps persist, there's cautious optimism that continued momentum and pent-up demand may drive meaningful deal volumes in early 2026.

And while there's no shortage of debate over how strong 2026's landscape for deals will be, there is one certainty: AI will have a profound and lasting impact across M&A.

AI offers operational and strategic benefit across a transaction – from streamlined target identification to more efficient due diligence,

scenario planning, risk analysis and valuation modeling. In fact, there are lots of opportunities for human-led, AI-supported efficiencies and delivering actionable insights across the deal lifecycle. Financial communications teams will gain the ability to craft more precise, tailored stakeholder messaging by testing against personas and gathering real-time feedback, offering enhanced integration planning and refined deal rationale.

**According to Deloitte's [2025 M&A Generative AI Study](#), 86% of respondents are using generative AI in M&A, with 65% adopting it in the past year.** AI's potential as a force multiplier, freeing teams for higher-value strategic work, is undeniable. As companies, advisors and consultancies increasingly adopt AI tools in dealmaking, the benefits will grow exponentially.

While uncertainty in the M&A landscape remains, leveraging AI in communications for 2026 will be critical to success.

Source: [https://www.ey.com/en\\_us/newsroom/2025/10/dealmakers-shift-from-recovery-to-resilient-growth-driven-by-strategic-ai-driven-transformation#:~:text=The%20Deal%20Barometer%20projects%20that,an%208%25%20increase%20in%202025.](https://www.ey.com/en_us/newsroom/2025/10/dealmakers-shift-from-recovery-to-resilient-growth-driven-by-strategic-ai-driven-transformation#:~:text=The%20Deal%20Barometer%20projects%20that,an%208%25%20increase%20in%202025.)



# Barnaby Fry

Executive Vice President, Head of Issues and Crisis, EMEA

## How will an **America First** agenda continue to impact crisis preparedness in 2026?

The ongoing influence of the America First agenda will continue to challenge and provide opportunities for organizations as they plan for and navigate issues and crises on the global stage.

As we step into 2026, uncertainty and rising costs remain significant obstacles. These challenges stem from the aggressive application and sudden withdrawal of tariffs, as well as an unpredictable and rapidly changing regulatory and tax environment for companies operating in the United States.

Businesses are investing significant time and resources into building supply chain resilience and restructuring their corporate frameworks. However, they face the risk of policy shifts targeting their sectors, often enacted abruptly, alongside backlash from other key markets over perceived favoritism toward U.S. interests.

Recent instances, such as the Swiss business delegation securing better deals directly with the Oval Office than their government could negotiate, highlight the growing practice of business-led diplomacy. While such efforts may reduce tariffs, they do not shield brands from heightened scrutiny or misinformation emanating from American regulators.

The perception of America as a stable and lucrative haven for global businesses has been deeply eroded. The lack of transparency surrounding executive power has undermined the predictability once highly valued by investors.

Despite these risks, businesses are slow to prepare for and address the challenges, largely out of fear of drawing attention to themselves. Many remain silent, hoping to avoid scrutiny, and often scale back previous commitments to critical global initiatives. This hesitation, however, exposes companies to legal challenges, operational disruptions and brand boycotts – both in the U.S. and other markets.

The willingness of the presidency to intervene unpredictably, and with a business-focused agenda, generates headline news globally. Brands must be prepared to respond transparently and make an impact on a global scale.

In 2026, finding balance in corporate and crisis communications will continue to feel like walking a tightrope. The most successful organizations will be those that proactively assess critical risks and develop strategies for effectively navigating the complexities of an America First environment.

**We also took  
a look at how  
corporate  
reputation will  
shift globally.**

Here's what our  
regional leaders  
had to say...



# Carolyn Devanayagam

Head of Weber Advisory APAC &  
Managing Director Singapore

## How do you predict corporate narratives will shift across APAC in 2026?

In 2026, the stories companies tell in APAC will be deeply influenced by the mix of geopolitics and culture. Businesses will need to address rising uncertainty in the region while showing they have a clear purpose, a sense of responsibility and the resilience to adapt.

We're going to see a shift toward stories that focus on trust, transparency and authentic leadership. Employees will play a huge role in driving this change, pushing companies to be honest about their decisions and values. It won't be enough to stay neutral anymore – people will expect real, thoughtful action.

The most effective businesses will use technology like AI alongside deep cultural understanding to pick up on subtle shifts, stay ahead of risks and communicate clearly and consistently across this incredibly diverse region.

# Taking a global look at corporate reputation



# Amanda Berenstein

CEO Mexico and LATAM Regional Client Leader

## How do you predict corporate narratives will shift across LATAM in 2026?

In 2026, Latin America will face political uncertainty, modest growth and shifting social expectations. The USMCA review and elections in Brazil and Colombia will shape economic and political dynamics, while nearshoring boosts investment in Mexico and Central America, dependent on infrastructure and stability. Not to mention, the FIFA World Cup will drive growth in tourism and retail in Mexico.

Younger consumers prioritize sustainability, digital experiences and authenticity, while tight budgets keep “Treatonomics” – small indulgences – relevant. Governments push for data ethics, and consumers demand circular economy practices. Success will require operational resilience and culturally authentic strategies that reflect creativity, community and adaptability.

## Taking a global look at corporate reputation



# Consumers & Creativity

**Weber Create**, where earned-first creative and media drive influence and trust, building brands and reputations amidst a constantly evolving cultural and commercial backdrop.



# Karen Pugliese

Global President, The Weber  
Shandwick Collective

## How will brands and business breakthrough in an increasingly complex landscape?

The brand relevance conundrum continues within a progressively messy media ecosystem. Brands are morphing to navigate radical fragmentation and hyper-personalization that's driven by the rise of diverse streaming platforms, niche social apps, retail media networks and interactive technology. But beware generational divides in audiences – they will scatter across countless digital spaces, as influence continues to shift from traditional mass media to trusted creators with authentic voices and their locked-in communities.

To win in this new environment, brands must deepen their understanding of their audience with smarter data analytics and social listening that looks beyond traditional demographics to uncover individualized passions and behaviors. Fostering long-term partnerships with influential creators and becoming embedded in communities will build brand trust and expand reach where audiences are most engaged. And these diversified, omnichannel approaches to

maintaining a presence on streaming, retail media, social platforms, podcasts and experiential campaigns will help to ensure sustained relevance and continuity across audience journeys. AI-driven personalization will be de rigeur, fostering both micro-targeted messaging and adaptive content that reflect individual interests. At last, measurement strategies will evolve to focus on long-term engagement and relationship-building, rather than single-channel metrics.

But wait – there's more.

Brands must also adapt to stricter privacy standards, prioritizing first-party data and transparency to earn genuine trust. Creators and micro-influencers will continue to become core PR and marketing channels, and retail media investments will surge. Brands that move at the speed of culture will sustain relevance in a media ecosystem defined by rapid change and audience control, by staying flexible, creative and attuned to the heightened generational behaviors of their target audience.



# Tom Beckman

Global Chief Creative Officer

## How can we **expect the brand voice to evolve in 2026?**

“Authentic” is one of the most common words in brand books – honesty has become a differentiator. Which is ironic, of course, since in a brand book it could typically read as performative – an attempt to behave in a way that comes across as authentic.

Over time, people may form authentic relationships with brands, but that has little to do with the brand and more to do with an individual’s personal history. If tragedy plus time equals comedy, commercialism plus time equals culture.

In the 1960s, DDB shaped the modern era of marketing by introducing a rarely seen element – the truth. And I hope and believe that our industry will recommit to this element in the coming year. And not just because of ethical concerns, but because of commercial concerns.

Experts predict that in 2026, around 90 percent of all social media content will be AI-generated. Depending on how you count, the number is already over 70 percent, so we are at a tipping point in terms of being able to differentiate how information is being manufactured.

Historically, branding and marketing were expected to be inflated, while facts, news and opinions were expected to be balanced. But in a time when opinions, facts, media and social content are inflated to the point of being artificial, brands have the opportunity to rewrite their books, redefining how we understand both authenticity and artifice, returning to their original meanings.

We’re potentially entering an era of radical honesty in marketing, where brands will earn attention by telling their audiences the unfiltered truth about their products. And suddenly, the commercial break can serve as a refreshing oasis of honesty in a world of competing agendas.

“Brands have the opportunity to rewrite their books, **redefining how we understand both authenticity and artifice**, returning to their original meanings.”



# Jamie Dowd

President, New York and Health Americas

## How will creative evolve in the healthcare industry in 2026?

Healthcare sits squarely at the muddled center of mainstream culture, shaping how we love, work, age, parent and understand ourselves. At the same time, it is more regulated, more scrutinized and more complex than any other industry, making creativity vital with every cultural shift.

Here are the evolutions we expect to see:

- **A surge of wide-ranging new voices.** Creator culture will move decisively into healthcare, inviting patients, advocates, healthcare professionals and caregivers to share their lived experiences and cultural perspectives to foster connection and empowerment. This opens the door to work that feels more in sync with the forces shaping health today. But it also means our work has to look different from what it has before in order to break through.

- **Turning complexity into clarity.** Creativity is the best way to translate overwhelming scientific and systemic complexity into accessible and actionable understanding. It's never been more critical to look at things from different perspectives and try to break the patterns society has been stuck in.
- **Using regulation as a creative superpower.** The constraints inherent to healthcare have always been a crutch, but this year, they'll force sharper thinking and more meaningful expression. A tighter box can produce stronger creative ideas that do more with less, turning regulations into our 2026 advantage.

While some may shy away, this is what makes us at Weber Shandwick excited. That pressure creates an opportunity to open the door to a new generation of never-before-seen ideas that move the industry forward.



# Phil Hakim

CEO, Flipside Group London

Flipside is TWSC's entity focused on digital transformation.

## How will the digital landscape continue to evolve in 2026?

Our digital landscape is being defined by the adoption of AI – how we use it to make ourselves a more efficient agency for our clients, and how we develop their content, platforms and campaigns that can adapt in real-time.

Generative AI tooling dominated 2025. Next year will be defined by agentic AI that acts autonomously within established workflows and is empowered to make decisions with or without human input.

Despite the widespread adoption of AI tools and investment in robust technical infrastructure, most organizations haven't fully realized their full agentic power to achieve significant systemic value.

The competitive advantage won't come from having access to AI – everyone will have that. It's in how elegantly we integrate our people's institutional knowledge and capabilities with multiple distinct systems and data sources to power our creative process. Agentic AI will fundamentally become the way we do business. But to realize that ambition, we need to focus on:

- **Evolving creation into orchestration.** We'll shift from using AI as a content generator to deploying AI agents that manage entire campaign workflows. From initial research and strategy development through to execution and optimization, this will enable our people to focus on higher-value strategic work that truly moves audiences.
- **Transforming talent.** The agency role is evolving from content creation to "agent management" – molding professionals who can elegantly train, direct and quality-control AI systems while focusing on human-developed strategy and relationship building.
- **Establishing governance and transparency.** As agents become more autonomous, agencies face new questions about disclosure, creative ownership and maintaining human oversight. Early movers are developing "AI governance frameworks" as a competitive differentiator.

Embracing this transformation with gusto and thoughtful implementation will define what modern marketing excellence looks like for years to come.



# Chanel Lake

Senior Vice President,  
Influencer Strategy

## How will the role of influencers continue to evolve in 2026?

Where creators craft and communities engage, culture thrives. Creator-led communities that are “opt-in” channels will pop off in 2026. Influencers will reinforce that culture is supercharged when you hone in on a dialed-in community, building resonance via shared values and interests. And by culture, I’m not talking about “pop culture” or “mainstream” – those who know culture understand that the definition runs deeper than surface-level hype.

“Brand first,” who? We will see more brands try to flock to creator-curated channels, community experiences and novel IP (especially in the written word). When those brands slap on a logo or thoughtlessly wedge their reasons to believe into the community ethos (above the fold), it will have an adverse impact. Where’s the storytelling? I want to experience an emotional connection to something that is relevant to me, and creators will reinforce that storytelling tactic across media.

Creator-led and community-first experiences will be the name of the game. It’s all about intentionality, paying attention to the small details and pouring care and respect back into the digital followers who’ve given them a platform. Creators will dominate storytelling in ways we haven’t seen before. We’ve been wading in the creator age, but now we are surfing the curator wave.



# Vitor Elman

Chief Creative Officer,  
Cappuccino Sao Paulo

Cappuccino is TWSC's entity focused on digital marketing and technology.

## How do you see **creative technology** reshaping the way organizations tell their stories in 2026?

In 2026, creativity and technology will finally merge into one operating system that amplifies imagination instead of replacing it. AI will no longer be the story, it will be as omnipresent as air: invisible, essential and often painfully average.

AI's default setting is mediocrity; the real creative edge will come from curation, taste and intention. From the human ability to choose, connect and give meaning, we will shift from production to building living systems where stories evolve through data, co-creation and cultural resonance.

“Generative creativity will challenge ideas and **bring back the cognitive power of ingenuity**, allowing us to prototype.”

Generative creativity will challenge ideas and bring back the cognitive power of ingenuity, allowing us to prototype more, fail more, learn more and create better campaigns.

The most innovative brands won't just tell stories; they'll build adaptive worlds that evolve through people – user-generated content and collective communities – redefining what a brand can be. But the biggest transformation won't be technological; it will be cultural. Organizations must evolve from the inside out, learning to use AI with intention: from interns to the C-suite, from users to builders.

Automation without changing our culture will only accelerate the chaos. The next revolution will rise from the collaboration between human sensibility and artificial intelligence. Real progress won't be about how fast we create, but about how our people move us forward and how deeply our creations can move culture.



# Rachel Hughes

Head of Cultural Strategy, UK

## What can we expect from the Gen Z consumer in 2026?

Gen Z came of age amid the “TikTokification” of culture, where fleeting micro-trends pass faster than you can say “Tomato Girl Summer.” They lead us through everything from aesthetic cores (“Coastal Grandma” anyone?) to trending pickle combinations. You didn’t have to like it all, but there was certainty in the air – a consensus over what’s hot and what’s not – and to some that was comforting.

Then the “Vibeless Summer of 2025” dismantled the dominant mood into a fragmented trend outlook. Brands should pay attention to three dichotomies that will persist in 2026:

- **Nihilism vs. optimism.** Gen Zers proliferated doomscrolling and adopted nihilistic humour to cope with the out-of-their-control omniscrisis. At the same time, they also embraced “hope core” and are intentionally fostering optimism, even calling for a “meme reset” to resurrect simpler times and cleanse our collective palettes. Brands can tap into both by knowing the right time and place to do it.

- **Digital first vs. IRL.** Gen Zers grew up to expect hyper convenience, but they are also nostalgic for the analog era. The duality here is that they sometimes desire a seamless digital experience, but also want to be reminded of the humanity and connection that can spark from inconvenience. Brands that can execute the real-life experiences they crave with expediency will be on a winning streak in 2026.
- **Cautious vs. emotional spending.** Gen Zers haven’t experienced a period of financial stability in their lifetime, so they may be more frugal than previous generations. However, they are also sentimental spenders, investing in little luxuries that bring them joy (one word: Labubu). Brands that demonstrate value and help Gen Z feel good about their choices will earn their admiration.

As we emerge from this paradigm shift, brands that can harness this duality for Gen Z will capture their attention in 2026.



# Let's connect!

For more information, please visit  
[www.webershandwick.com](http://www.webershandwick.com) or email  
[wsconnect@webershandwick.com](mailto:wsconnect@webershandwick.com)



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