

Gulf Business

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SUNIL JOHN

CEO, Asda'a Burson-Marsteller

Transparency. That is the defining characteristic of the era in which we live. It is the great driver of change – here in the Middle East and across the world – and the force that is supporting the growth of my own business: public relations.

From Occupy Wall Street to the events of the Arab Spring, as new technology has become ascendant, transparency has triumphed.

Since the start of the millennium, communications channels have proliferated: today, there are over 150,000 TV stations, 650 million websites and more than 1 billion Facebook users.

We have access to more information and analysis (from more sources) than ever before. Stakeholders everywhere – whether in Mumbai, Shanghai or Dubai – now have an immediate line of sight into the full reality of both business and government.

At a time when word-of-mouth and peer-to-peer influence (including through social media like Facebook and Twitter) has never been greater, individuals now have an unmatched ability to call for action and advocate for change.

Today, like never before, we judge brands and organisations based on everything they say and do.

That is why communications is now seen as a critical function for both public and private-sector organisations – and why the role of public relations consultancies, in particular, has risen to the fore.

Our job is to set the agenda, supporting government and business as they take on major issues and prove performance through transparency. We do this by building mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics – opening new lines of communication and facilitating dialogue.

We are leading new conversations about why companies are in business




“The total value of the PR industry now stands at about \$500 million. Within a decade, the industry will be worth \$1 billion annually in the Middle East alone.”


and what they want to achieve. Based on an evidence-based approach, we are generating real discussion among communities of shared interest, including opinion formers, consumers and social activists.

As governments and companies everywhere focus more keenly on greater transparency and genuine dialogue, the PR sector continues to expand. Today, the PR consultancies generate \$9 billion in annual fee revenues.

Here in the Arab world, the PR sector is expanding especially rapidly. The total value of the industry now stands at about \$500 million. Within a decade, the industry will be worth \$1 billion annually in the Middle East alone.

I believe that next year will be an even better one for the regional PR sector, and for the Middle East. At a time when the global economy is on a healing path, the region we call home continues to outperform, led by the expansionary fiscal policies of the Gulf states. 

FACTFILE

-  Founded in 1999, ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller has 150 consultants across 11 offices.
-  The communications firm operates seven specialised practices: corporate, consumer, healthcare, finance, technology, public affairs, and energy & environment.