

Two superhero silhouettes are standing on large, overlapping circles. The figure on the left is on a larger circle and is in a classic superhero pose with one hand on its hip. The figure on the right is on a smaller circle and is also in a superhero pose. The background is a solid red color with a repeating pattern of white wavy lines.

WELCOME TO THE YEAR OF BRAVADO

bravado \ brə-ˈvā-(,)dō \ noun
: a swaggering show of courage

DOUBLE *Forte*

JANUARY 2025

INTRO

A recent opinion piece in the New York Times described the news media as, “increasingly fragmented, experiencing convulsions driven in part by social media, cord cutting and generative artificial intelligence,” and facing “declining trust from the American people.”

While it’s a natural conclusion that the erosion in trust is a direct byproduct of the last two presidential election cycles, the overall state of affairs has been a long time coming. Ten years ago, a Microsoft study found that the average human attention span, thanks to bite-size content on platforms like X (then Twitter), had decreased from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds by 2015, forcing news outlets to use sensational headlines to grab attention quickly.

(And yes, while “being the goldfish” with a 10-second memory might help you maneuver through a potentially volatile situation, the micro-attention span presents

significant challenges to companies, people, organizations, agencies, and brands trying to reach people with important-to-them information. (*Gratuitous Ted Lasso reference.*)

Five years later, a study in Digital Journalism found that articles with emotionally charged language were more likely to be shared on social media. Remember all those “You Won’t Believe the Shocking Truth About...” headlines?

Next came the algorithms. Oh, those algorithms. While different platforms have different algorithmic “recipes,” most tend to favor bold and controversial topics. And with 73 percent of adults in the U.S. receiving their news through social media, according to Pew Research, we’re in essence being groomed to respond to the sensational.

INTRO *continued*

Then came Gen Z. A 2022 Reuters Institute report found that younger audiences prefer visually engaging and entertainment-focused news formats, which often prioritize bold narratives over nuanced reporting.

Exacerbating all of these conditions is the shrinking newsroom, something we've covered in the past. According to Pew, the number of newsroom employees in the U.S. fell by 26 percent from 2008 to 2020, and we know from our work that full-time editorial staff has further shrunk since 2021, leaving fewer journalists competing with sensational social media for attention to get their news through the noise.

When you combine all of these trends with the fact that our just-inaugurated Communicator in Chief is prone to provocative statements, wields social media to consistently shape news priorities, and somehow stays ahead of a 24/7 news cycle, we are entering The Year of Bravado. Fasten your seatbelts, warm up your keyboards, and sharpen your proverbial pencils, it's going to be a bold year.



JUST KEEP MOVING

2025 will be the year when being bold, decisive, and authentic will separate strong brands from forgettable ones. How do we maneuver in this heightened, “noisy” environment? How do we navigate the bravado to capture headlines, connect with audiences, and confidently steer through challenges?

To be clear, we’re not advocating for sensationalism or spam – honest, transparent, and value-driven communication is **always** the best approach – we’re talking style. How and when and where you communicate may be as, if not more, important, than what you say.

In an era of rapid change and constant communication, the worst thing a brand can do is stand still. Perfection is no longer on the menu; progress is. Indecision will be a brand’s greatest enemy in 2025, whether via a delayed

response, a failure to connect, or a reluctance to take a stand (even if taking no stand is your stand.) Hesitation and over-polished perfection will be liabilities. Moving forward is the only option.

That means:

- **Grabbing attention:** Boldness will cut through noise. And, as long as it’s backed up by facts, should stay above the fray.
- **Building trust:** Authenticity, even when messy, will resonate more than overly crafted “corporate” messaging. Timeliness matters just as much - a day late and a dollar short will increase your burden, not alleviate it.
- **Driving momentum:** Decisive action will spur progress; over-analysis will lead to paralysis.

THE YEAR OF BRAVADO PLAYBOOK

How to Capture Headlines

Lead with Powerful Narratives

Narrative has never been so important. Media consumers are not looking for news; they are seeking information and something else. It could be connection. It could be an emotion. It could be a call to act. So, if you want to appear on your audiences' screens, tell a compelling story. Show them how you relate to them. Share something inspirational, provide security or relief, or outline a solution. Do this through:

- Storylines that challenge industry norms or address universal or controversial topics.
- Positioning your brand as their partner – willing to tell truths, take risks, evoke emotion, even spark debate.
- *Example:* Don't announce a new feature or product. Solve a problem. Disrupt a model. Start a movement.

Cultivate Bold Spokespeople

- Consider who the face of your brand is. We live in a celebrity-driven culture. Eschew it or embrace it. Your choice, but hint: the latter is what today's consumer gravitates toward. Choose charismatic spokespeople who first, embody your brand's values, and second, are willing to be visible.
- Train spokespeople to handle tough questions with confidence and authenticity. Thriving in the Year of Bravado doesn't mean speaking off the cuff, or obfuscating, or answering questions with more questions. Media training is more important than ever. But gone are the days of evasion and corporate speak. Instead, train your spokespeople to connect!
- *Example:* Cultivate a consumer champion who will host "Ask Me Anything" sessions.

THE YEAR OF BRAVADO PLAYBOOK *continued*

How to Capture Headlines continued

Use Data to Back Bold Claims

- We've always been fans of data-driven communication, and we're doubling down on that now. This is the year to invest in proprietary research or market studies that provide newsworthy insights.
- *Example:* Use polling on social platforms to elicit real-time, conversational feedback, then augment it with longitudinal studies.



How to Connect With Your Audience

Speak Their Language

- Use conversational, relatable tones instead of corporate jargon.
- Tailor messages to reflect the values and priorities of your audience.
- *Example:* Lead with a benefit instead of a sales point. "Each bottle represents a shared story, a friendship revisited, a future memory. And yes, it scored 96 points!."



THE YEAR OF BRAVADO PLAYBOOK *continued*

How to Connect With Your Audience continued

Take a Stand

- Align your brand with causes that exemplify your values and matter to your customers.
- Be prepared to back up your stance with action, not just words.
- *Example:* A food brand commits to reducing food waste and shares strategies for its customers to get involved.

Pull Back the Curtain

- Back to storytelling and celebrity obsessions, today's consumers love to go behind the scenes and see how things are made. Share your process – product development, manufacturing, even shipping and

packaging. Do this, even if it reveals challenges or missteps. Transparency builds credibility, and loyalty.

- *Example:* Go live from a product development meeting and ask followers to weigh in on decisions.

Acknowledge and Act Quickly

- The worst thing you can do in a crisis is delay your response. Even if all the facts aren't available, acknowledge the situation and commit to action.
- *Example:* A cybersecurity company facing a data breach might immediately issue a statement outlining initial steps taken and promising updates.

THE YEAR OF BRAVADO PLAYBOOK *continued*

How to Navigate Challenges with Confidence

Own Your Mistakes

- Admit when you're wrong and explain how you're fixing the issue. Audiences value honesty over spin.
- *Example:* A retailer might apologize for a flawed product and offer refunds or replacements proactively.

Turn Crises into Opportunities

- Use crises to reinforce your brand's values and commitment to improvement.
- *Example:* A travel company facing criticism for environmental impact might announce a new sustainability initiative in response.



THE BOTTOMLINE

To be clear, we're not suggesting you embrace unearned bravado, but we do encourage you to accept it. As we've long said, rocks are hard, and water is wet. It is what it is. Attention spans are fleeting, and airtime is limited. Go bold. Be brave. But most of all, stay true to your brand. And to guide you through the year, here is your:

Year of Bravado Checklist:

To ensure your brand thrives in The Year of Bravado, regularly ask yourself:

- Are we moving forward? Avoid analysis paralysis. Act. Evaluate. Iterate.
- Are we embracing imperfection? Prioritize authenticity over perfection. Share the journey, not just the finished product.
- Are we making bold statements? Is what we're about to say going to resonate with who it needs to?
- Are we connecting emotionally? Are our customers and followers responding to us? If not, we are likely speaking at them; not to them.
- Are we responding in time? If not, it's time to revisit your crisis response plan!

STAY
↑
**TRUE TO
BRAND**

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