



2025

A Defining Year for Business Transformation and Corporate Reputation

GOLIN

The pace of business change is set to reach unprecedented levels in 2025, testing corporate reputations like never before. As companies navigate complex internal and external shifts, from fractured media platforms and AI integration across businesses at scale to geopolitical concerns and shifting views on DEI and sustainability commitments, their ability to maintain stakeholder trust and protect their reputation will determine market leadership.

Golin has identified ten critical trends that will shape how companies build, protect and evolve their reputations in this transformative business landscape and what leaders need to know to stay ahead.

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Industry Lines Blur Even Further as Global Business Transforms

Traditional industry boundaries continue to blur as new competitors emerge, with technology companies moving into healthcare, retailers becoming financial services providers and manufacturers transforming into digital platforms. It is expected that deal markets will open up, creating fresh opportunities for growth and consolidation across sectors. Meanwhile, ongoing geopolitical tensions, evolving trade policies and regional conflicts are forcing companies to rethink their global operations. Tensions between major powers, trade restrictions and supply chain vulnerabilities exposed during recent crises are reshaping business decisions. In response, organizations are regionalizing their production strategies, diversifying supplier networks and building more resilient supply chains—often bringing operations closer to end markets to protect against disruption and ensure business continuity.

KEY TAKEAWAY

In 2025, companies will be focused on seizing new market opportunities while building operational and change resilience. Organizations that can adapt quickly to changing market dynamics—while bringing their stakeholders along—and maintain strong reputational and risk management strategies, will be best positioned to thrive in this transformed business landscape.



02

AI Transparency Becomes a Critical Corporate Reputation Driver

As AI adoption accelerates across industries, 2025 will mark a turning point where a company's approach to AI becomes inextricably linked to its reputation. [According to McKinsey's State of AI research, 65% of organizations were already regularly using AI - nearly double from the previous year.](#) This means virtually every company has become an "AI company"—whether they've embraced this identity or not. Yet, most organizations haven't architected clear narratives around their AI usage, creating both vulnerability and opportunity.

Moreover, while businesses are focused on implementation, consumer concerns around AI continue to increase with only one in four saying they trust organizations to use AI responsibly and fear that it will hurt the customer experience, [according to Qualtrics](#). This trust deficit is further complicated by an evolving patchwork of AI regulations across regions, countries and even cities—each with their own requirements for responsible AI use and disclosure. Companies must now navigate everything from local guidelines to major regulatory frameworks like the EU AI Act, set to take effect in 2026. Forward-thinking organizations recognize that stakeholders increasingly view responsible AI deployment as a proxy for corporate values, innovation capabilities and risk management acumen.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Companies in 2025 face a critical task of telling their AI story effectively— and accurately—to their diverse stakeholder groups. This means explaining how they use AI responsibly, showing real business results and addressing concerns about risks, while navigating varying regulatory requirements and increased scrutiny from regulators like the SEC around AI-related claims. Organizations must also demonstrate their readiness for upcoming regulations like the EU AI Act. This dynamic mirrors the evolution we've seen with ESG and sustainability communications in the last decade, where stakeholder expectations for transparency and responsibility have become non-negotiable. How organizations handle AI deployment and communication will become a key measure of their trustworthiness among stakeholders.

03



A Cooling Job Market Reshapes Employee-Employer Dynamics

[The job market is cooling heading into 2025](#) as companies navigate the aftermath of 2024's restructuring and cost-cutting. Amid economic uncertainty, organizations are grappling with the challenges posed by inflationary pressures, fluctuating demand, and the need to stay competitive. Additionally, the rapid integration of AI into business operations is reshaping workforce dynamics, introducing both opportunities and concerns for employees. Meanwhile, a resurgence in return-to-office mandates is adding to the discomfort of workers who had grown accustomed to remote or hybrid arrangements. This combination of factors has led to growing unease among employees, creating a tense environment for companies trying to maintain productivity and engagement.

[Gallup reports](#) a worrying trend: employee satisfaction is at an all-time low, with a significant number of workers reporting disengagement, burnout, and disillusionment with their roles. Despite this, the slowing job market presents a paradox — workers may feel trapped in their current positions due to a lack of viable alternatives, deepening the sense of frustration and discontent. This sense of being “stuck” leads to decreased productivity, as employees become disengaged, resist change, and show reluctance to invest in company goals. Ironically, these are the very traits that businesses can least afford at a time when transformation and innovation are critical for staying competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For companies looking to succeed in 2025, it will be essential to refocus their efforts on connecting daily tasks to a larger sense of purpose. To build a resilient and engaged workforce, businesses must reinforce a strong corporate culture, prioritize employee wellbeing, and offer comprehensive resources and benefits that support both professional and personal growth. Without addressing these fundamental needs, companies risk losing their best talent when the job market inevitably recovers, leaving them vulnerable to turnover and struggling to maintain momentum in an increasingly competitive global economy.

04



DEI Shifts in a Complex Business Environment

The landscape of DEI programs is shifting dramatically, particularly in the US, as political and activist pressures mount, and some state governments roll back diversity initiatives. Companies are also reassessing their own diversity commitments in the face of increased scrutiny. Many organizations find themselves navigating between shareholder demands, employee expectations and varying state regulations that often conflict with established diversity programs. This complex environment is forcing companies to reevaluate how they communicate about and implement diversity initiatives, while still working to create inclusive workplaces that attract and retain diverse talent.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Success in this new environment requires a data-driven approach to understand diverse stakeholder needs, especially among customers and employees. Critical to this evolution is staying current with changing regulations, particularly those affecting talent recruitment and development programs. Lastly, organizations that lean into empowering their employees as ambassadors and storytellers of their brands will be the ones that help build belonging and drive retention.



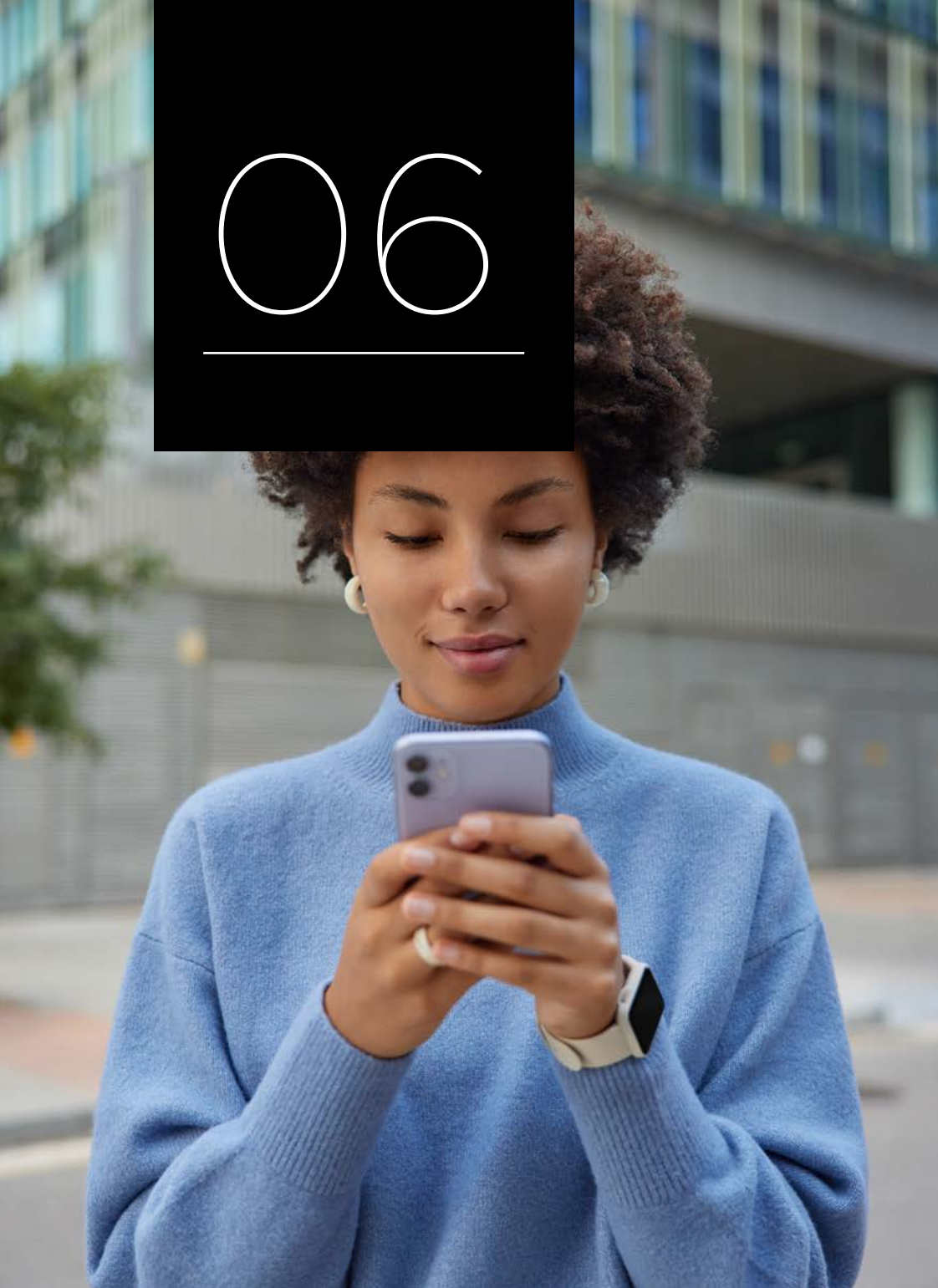
05

Corporate Climate Accountability Enters a New Era

Supply chain complexities, reporting requirements and economic pressures are forcing companies to rethink their approach to environmental goals and circular economy initiatives. Business leaders must now balance ambitious climate targets with practical implementation across geographies with varying regulatory requirements. With increased scrutiny from investors and regulators around decarbonization efforts and renewable energy adoption, companies that lean into established company values and prioritize societal and environmental measures that drive long-term growth will not only meet expectations, but also set a benchmark for corporate leadership in a dynamic global landscape.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Companies should prioritize tangible actions like supply chain emissions reduction, renewable energy integration and waste elimination, while building partnerships that enable transparent reporting and accountability across their sustainability efforts. Those that fail to show measurable progress in their energy transition journey could risk losing investor confidence and market share to more environmentally proactive competitors. Companies should also closely watch how the EU will deliver on its climate change goals while also being a competitive region to do business.



06

The Fractured Social Media Environment Requires a Change in Strategy

In recent years, the social media environment has grown increasingly fractured. Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter in 2022 (and its transformation to X in 2023), Meta's launch of Threads in the summer of 2023, and Twitter-copycat entrants like Bluesky and Mastodon have created a splintered ecosystem. Audiences are now fragmented; no platform has risen to the top.

There is no longer one dominant platform that serves as a centralized place for information and news like Twitter once did. In fact, these formerly global hubs are now seeing more and more regional limitations: [Brazil](#) temporarily banned X and [India](#) has restricted access. Just like [traditional media](#) channels are becoming more polarized and siloed, the same is happening on these [core social channels](#). On top of that, there is uncertainty on whether TikTok will be banned in the US come January, which could further change the social ecosystem.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Modern audience engagement requires a more nuanced approach to channel strategy. Each platform has its own culture and audience behavior patterns, making it crucial to tailor content accordingly. Avoid over-indexing on a single platform and resist the urge to duplicate content across channels. For executive positioning, LinkedIn is emerging as a key platform, with growing engagement and enhanced social features that make it increasingly valuable for business storytelling.



07

AI and Advanced Analytics Revolutionize the Drug Development Paradigm

The pharmaceutical industry is experiencing a fundamental shift in 2025 as AI, machine learning and advanced analytics revolutionize drug discovery and development. Traditional R&D timelines are being dramatically compressed through AI-powered target identification, molecular design and clinical trial optimization. Large language models and computational biology are accelerating the identification of novel drug candidates and predicting their efficacy with unprecedented accuracy. Meanwhile, precision medicine and biomarker discovery are enabling more targeted therapeutic approaches, leading to higher success rates in clinical trials. The industry is also seeing increased collaboration between traditional pharma companies, biotech startups and tech giants, creating new models for drug innovation. This transformation comes as pressure mounts to reduce drug development costs and timelines while improving success rates, particularly for complex diseases with high unmet needs.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Success in 2025's pharmaceutical landscape requires organizations to not only embrace AI and advanced analytics but also effectively communicate how these technologies are transforming drug development. Companies must demonstrate transparency in how AI is being used to accelerate innovation while maintaining safety and efficacy standards. This includes clearly articulating to stakeholders—from investors and regulators to healthcare providers and patients—how computational approaches are validated and integrated with traditional drug development expertise. Organizations that can build trust through transparent communication about their AI-driven processes, while showing tangible improvements in development timelines and success rates, will be best positioned to lead the next wave of therapeutic innovation.




Traditional Journalists Lose Ground to Influencers

The traditional media landscape is experiencing a fundamental shift as news influencers gain ground over journalists. [Recent data from the Reuters Institute shows global trust in traditional media has dropped to 40%, lower than during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#) This shift is particularly pronounced among younger audiences; [Pew Research](#) reveals that nearly 40% of U.S. adults under 30 now regularly get their news from influencers, with only 23% of these influencers having any journalism background.

The 2024 presidential campaign illustrated this transformation. When President Trump appeared on Joe Rogan’s podcast, it generated nearly 40 million views—surpassing the potential reach of multiple Fox News, CNN and MSNBC appearances combined. Similarly, Vice President Harris’s appearance on “Call Her Daddy” reached more young women than CBS’ “60 Minutes” and ABC’s “The View” combined. These appearances didn’t just attract viewers; they created their own news cycles that traditional media had to follow. While traditional media isn’t dead, the trajectory is clear: younger audiences increasingly turn to influencers rather than journalists for their news consumption, with news influencers—predominantly male by a two-to-one margin—becoming powerful voices in shaping public discourse.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Today’s media landscape requires a broader approach to storytelling and engagement. Companies should treat news-focused influencers as journalists by including them in media events and offering similar access to company news and leadership. Include podcasts in executive visibility plans to share deeper stories about a company’s vision and strategy, going beyond traditional news coverage. Finally, create social-ready visual assets—from short videos to graphics—that help both influencers and journalists tell stories effectively across platforms. This multi-channel approach reflects how modern audiences consume information and makes a story more accessible to different demographics. Success in this evolving media environment means being flexible and willing to experiment with new formats while maintaining consistent messaging across all channels.



09

Investor Communications Evolve in an Activist Era

Investor communications is transforming as activism rises and stakeholder expectations shift. Traditional quarterly earnings calls and annual reports are no longer sufficient as investors demand more frequent, transparent engagement on everything from operational strategy to ESG metrics. With increased retail investor participation and the rise of digital platforms, companies must adapt their investor relations approach to reach both institutional and individual investors effectively.

The surge in activist campaigns, coupled with growing influence from proxy advisors and institutional investors, is forcing companies to proactively address potential vulnerabilities in their business strategy, governance and sustainability practices. Companies face pressure to demonstrate long-term value creation while managing short-term performance expectations, especially during their business transformation journey.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Companies need to modernize their investor relations function to meet evolving stakeholder demands. This means developing more dynamic, digital-first communication strategies, increasing transparency around transformation initiatives, and building stronger narratives around long-term value creation. Organizations that fail to adapt their investor engagement approach risk facing increased activist pressure and losing shareholder support during critical business decisions.

10



A New Administration Removes Red Tape and Introduces Tariffs

The Trump administration is promising a new era for farmers, with expectations of reduced environmental regulations that could impact agricultural practices. This could potentially increase production efficiency but would challenge farmers to adapt to a new way of working. Plans to fight trade barriers and increase tariffs may lead to trade disputes affecting agricultural exports. Stricter immigration policies could result in labor shortages—raising costs for farmers and consumers. The administration may continue direct payment programs to support farmers, and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (if confirmed) is expected to significantly influence agriculture policy, focusing on health and food policy. These possible new actions aren't just centered in one market; several G20 countries are enacting export restrictions, particularly on food and fertilizers. Security, supply chain disruption and impact of climate change on the yield of food products are cited as top reasons for the uptick in measures.

Beyond specific food and farming practices, the focus on domestic issues is wreaking havoc on international co-operation and 'bloc' decision making. Domestic debt problems in France have forced a vote of no confidence in the now ex-Prime Minister Michel Barnier, with similar issues also breaking down the German coalition. And it's not just continental Europe; China is a few months into an economic stimulus package aimed at stabilizing the economy and rebuilding confidence.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Businesses should be prepared to navigate these shifts, particularly in terms of regulatory changes, trade disputes, labor market impacts and policy influences. Staying informed, educating stakeholders, developing strategies to manage potential trade disputes and shortages, and ensuring business are prepared to respond effectively are all ways communication professionals can help businesses thrive during uncertain times.



**2025: A DEFINING YEAR FOR
BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AND
CORPORATE REPUTATION**

As we look toward 2025, business transformation and corporate reputation are now inseparable. Success will depend on companies' ability to navigate change while maintaining stakeholder trust—from AI adoption and sustainability commitments to employee engagement and evolving media dynamics. The organizations that thrive will be those that can demonstrate authentic leadership and transparent communication while adapting to this rapidly changing landscape.

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