

Views and experiences of women in the communications industry

THE FEMALE INFLUENCE





To celebrate International Women's Day on 8th March, we're sharing some of our thoughts on what it's like to be a Woman in Communications.

Forty-three years since the United Nations began celebrating this date in 1975, 2018's celebration feels turbo-charged, coming as it does in the midst of the high-profile, global #metoo and #TimesUp campaigns.

Our small sample of stories represents a range of roles and experiences across the agency. They reveal our unique and individual perspective on our careers past, present and future.

Enjoy!

KIRSTY MAXEY CO-CEO

It's never been a better time to be a woman. Over the last 30 years, I've seen real progress. Back then, the business world was still male-dominated, and you had to "act like one of the boys" to get on. But today young women are braver, driven, resilient, strong and fearless. They are leading the way, and at Teamspirit we are proud to say that half of our board is female. But we still find that men are much more likely to ask for what they want, while women are more likely to simply move on and find something else, if they think they are not appreciated. So we have to work harder to keep them and understand how we can support them in developing their careers.



But who are the women leaders that we look up to in marketing, who have created revolutionary brands, great marketing campaigns and a new standard for leadership in marketing?

Here are some of the ones that have influenced me:

- **Vivienne Westwood** was one of the first iconic designers that really had an impact on me in the 70s and challenged my idea of what a woman should look like. She never stands still and is always reinventing herself and her iconic English fashion brand.
- Another is **Anita Roddick**, who not only established a wildly successful brand, but also changed the way companies with green initiatives operate. The Body Shop paved the way for companies to do business in a way that cares for both their consumers and the environment.

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- I fell in love with **Geena Davis** in *Thelma & Louise*, and now she's founded the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, which works with companies such as Google and JWT to provide hard data on the gender gap in film, television and various other media. "If we don't show that women and girls take up half the space in the world and do half of the interesting and important and fun things, we're literally teaching kids that girls are not as important as boys from the beginning," says Davis.
- More recently the COO of Facebook, **Sheryl Sandberg**, inspired a generation of women to "lean in" to their careers and other aspects of life while overcoming obstacles that could hold them back. She said, "In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders."
- And in financial services, **Helena Morrissey** sets out in her book, *A Good Time to be a Girl*, a way to reinvent the game – not at the expense of men, but in ways that are right for the digital age that we live in. more my clients believe.

Without these industry leaders, advertising and business operations might have looked very different. Today, we celebrate everything female leaders have accomplished to change the way we see business, advertising and the world. I believe that today women can be anything, but certainly they should not be underestimated.

NATALIE ORRIDGE

GROUP INNOVATION DIRECTOR

“Difference is seen to be not only positive, but necessary for success”

As with most people, I'm struck each year by the acceleration of time. It is almost unbelievable that 12 months have passed since an extraordinary moment in political life, the Women's March, when millions globally came together to protest for women's rights. We're now in a new era of gender politics that has forced focus on how we as a society create space for everyone to flourish, equally in all walks of life.



This has huge implications for my profession. Having worked in PR for more than 17 years, I've grown up professionally when the status quo was to ignore gender. Discussing women's rights was almost frowned upon as admitting vulnerability. In my day-to-day role of building awareness for clients, the assumption was that men and women would respond similarly to the campaigns we created. Products, services and company behaviour were (at best) gender-neutral, (at worse) about male drivers of behaviour because it was assumed men controlled money.

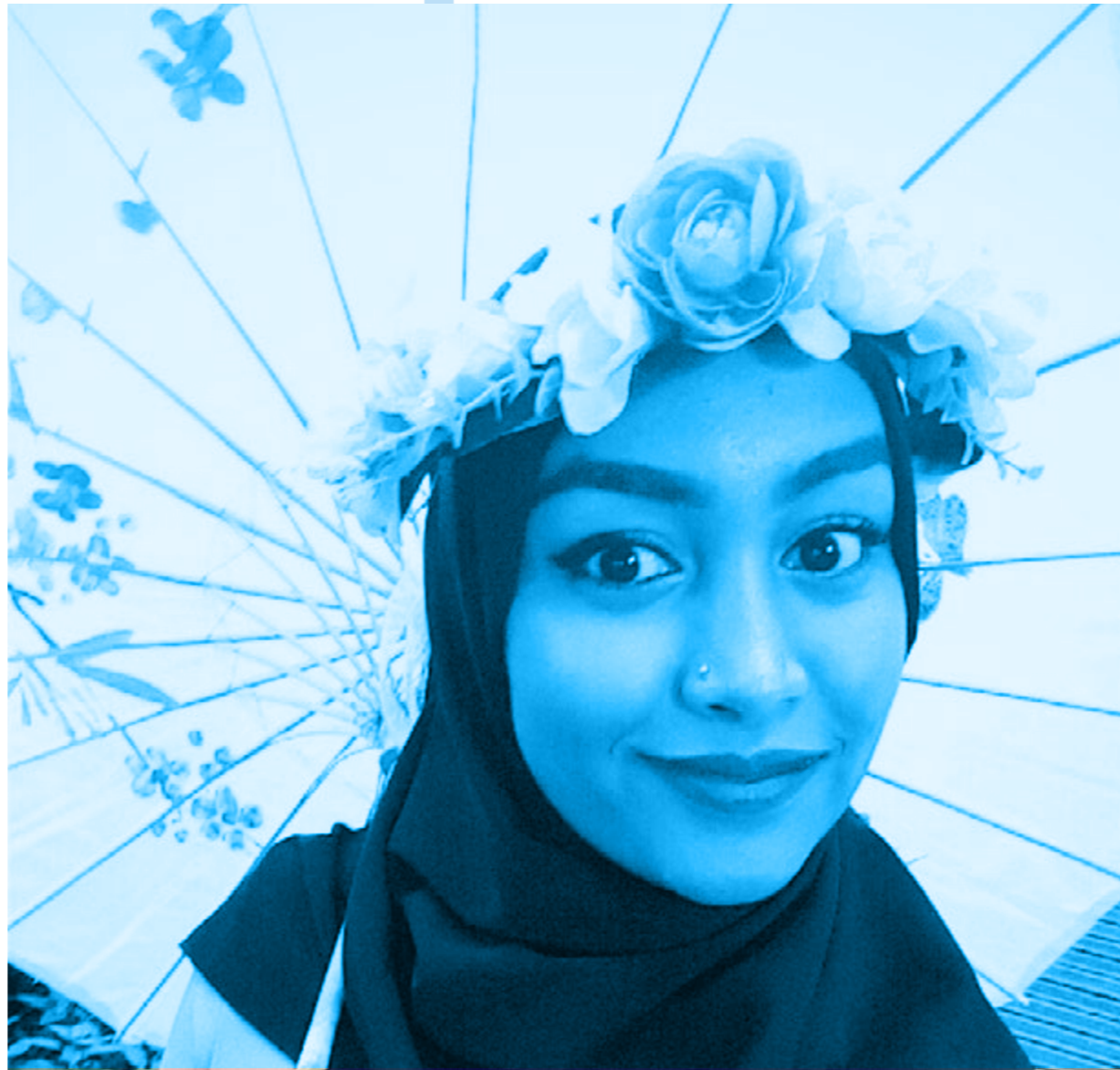
I fast forward to today and daily conversations have changed. We know that for our PR to inspire, we have to understand and reflect

the rich diversity of the men, women, old and young people we speak to. And this begins by creating an environment for my team and clients to feel able to recognise and champion their own identity, including gender.

It demonstrates the societal shift that has taken place, where difference is seen to be not only positive, but necessary for success. It begins with gender, but is so very much more than that. This fills me with optimism for the future – and above all for my niece, who will enter a workplace that presents equal opportunities for her and her brother.

MASSUMA RAHMAN

SENIOR DIGITAL PROJECT MANAGER



I was born into the era of technology: old enough to understand its positive societal impact, yet young enough to see where it can still improve.

I was fascinated by technology from an early age, and I was encouraged by family and teachers to turn my interest into a potential career. It wasn't until university that I became aware of the gender split within the sector: as a BSc Computer Science graduate my course was male-dominated at both a student and a faculty level.

In 1985, 35% of Computer Science students were female, but by 2015 this dropped to just 17%. Over the decades, you might have expected gender parity within the

field to increase, as it has in technology and business. Yet the opposite is true.

Research shows that only **one quarter of the digital sector are female**, and it's predicted that the number of women in digital may fall further in the future. This lack of gender diversity is a social issue, but one that entails serious economic ramifications. According to this study, gender bias costs

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the economy about £2.6 billion a year. This comes despite the fact that Britain needs up to 1.2 million new digital workers to replace workers leaving the sector, and to support its inevitable growth.

I believe it's important that all companies are passionate about equality – not just of gender, but age, race, religion, experience and other factors too. Within the digital and technology sector, with our focus on accessibility and customer empowerment, this is arguably even more important. If there are no representatives of different customer types within the companies, how can we truly understand and meet their needs?

I'm lucky enough to have been encouraged to excel in the field as a woman and ethnic minority. I've never felt restricted with my opportunities, but I know not everyone is as fortunate. To anyone who wants to succeed in this sector, my advice would be to persevere, to learn as much as you can, and to surround yourself with people who not only encourage you, but help you realise your potential.

SAMANTHA SILE HEAD OF SOCIAL

Working in social media is a delicate balance of being on top of the latest developments in an erratic industry, and organising the snakes-and-ladders development of reactive content. As a preferred profession for many women and my chosen career, I really enjoy marketing, and as long as I'm visualising calmness and not suffering from imposter syndrome that day, I can do it all, no worries.

But do I have enough of a focus on the next stage of my career, or am I always caught up in the work on my desk?

According to UK company Axonn, which surveyed 288 marketers in 2017, its snapshot of our industry shows that while “women are still more likely than men to be in manager or head of roles (41% vs 33%), men are twice as likely to be CEO or MD”.

Women still seem more likely to rise to manager/head of level and then plateau.

If you've plateaued and are not quite sure why, consider the natural biases we are all affected by:

- 1.** Conservatism bias – people were slow to accept Earth is round, so if you have a sound argument, don't give up on it.
- 2.** Ostrich effect – don't let a “fearful economic environment” stop upper management from recognising your ambitions and planning pathways to your promotion. It may never be “the right time” if you wait.



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- 3.** Zero-risk bias – sociologists have found we love certainty, even if it's counterproductive. Ensure you work on eliminating any of the perceived risks associated with your promotion.
- 4.** Available heuristic – people often overestimate the importance of one piece of information. What is the one thing your line manager keeps referring to? Find out in case you need to challenge it.

- 5.** Anchoring bias – people are over-reliant on the first piece of information they hear. What's your opening idea?
- 6.** Confirmation bias – we tend to listen to information that confirms our preconceptions. How you phrase your expectations needs to fit within your audience's understanding.
- 7.** Blind-spot bias – failing to recognise your own cognitive biases is a bias in itself. Really consider your own beliefs before attempting to change others'.

International Women's Day is a day to recognise and share women's stories. Those who try a new tactic, bring a new energy, and ask for more influence in the world around us. Challenge a bias.

SANDY DOWNS

PR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

I am consistently reminded of the tireless activism of those who have come before me, when I step back and appreciate how lucky I am to be in the position I'm in. As a young queer woman, new not only to the world of communications but to the world of employment, the transition from comfortable student to woman in work has been remarkably smooth.



This is an agency of amazing people, with a 50% female board and company-wide gender pay parity. There is an impressive absence of the sexist “banter” I was braced to face, and conversations about diversity are not just frequent but amazingly proactive and discerning. The value of different backgrounds and identities is truly appreciated here, and first-hand experience is treated with respect,

“**Being in communications places us perfectly to amplify the voices of those who aren’t being heard.**”

be that experience of being a woman or having used an app or invested in a LISA.

However, outside our communications bubble, the financial services world more broadly has inspired an incessant bombardment of news articles about sexism, from cavernous pay gaps to concealed sexual harassment on a devastating scale. It’s no surprise that women’s equality is still the key topic of conversation, and it’s one that is reaching its peak on a global scale, as evidenced by the ground-breaking #metoo movement.

Locally though, the conversation is evolving. Racism, ableism, queerphobia and transphobia are rife regardless of sector, but the movements are far younger in their timelines than feminism. I believe that being in communications places us perfectly to amplify the voices of those who aren’t being heard, especially given the nature of our roles as storytellers.

I see my role going forward as building on the unshakeable foundations laid so far. I hope to be part of an intersectional movement which will enable these causes to flourish in the way that feminism has, and as such I see my activist role as a woman in communications as far from over – instead, it is a new beginning.

ROSE LEWIS LEAD UX & UI

Women are the largest underserved market in business, unconscious male bias that has been ingrained for centuries means that there are massive opportunities for disruption in every industry simply by taking the female viewpoint and yet the start-up community is still dominated by men.

In my specialism of UX (which is at the centre of pretty much all tech start-ups) I feel that women have a natural advantage. Our tendency towards greater empathy is a massive boon to the role. The biggest challenge to any UX project is to be able to see through other people's eyes and understand their pain points. You can't begin to solve the problem until you can understand it from different perspectives.

So why is it that start-ups are so lacking in women? Of course there's always more that companies can do to ensure that they provide the best possible environment for women to

“Unconscious male bias that has been ingrained for centuries means that there are massive opportunities for disruption.”



thrive and be heard but I think that there's also a massive confidence issue that needs to be addressed.

Women on the whole need to get to grips with their tendency to give in to imposter syndrome. We need to understand that everyone's making things up as they go along, problem solving on the fly and throwing half-formed ideas out to see what sticks – and that's great! We don't need all the answers, we just need the confidence to know that we'll figure it out.

Personally, I love starting a project with no clue how I will solve it but the knowledge that I've solved plenty before and I'll do it again. With enough inputs I trust my brain to do its thing and spit out something useful.

But that doesn't mean that I don't suffer from imposter syndrome. Standing in front of clients explaining a solution, I'm still stunned when they pay attention, nod in agreement and believe in me. It's a self-perpetuating thing, the more it happens the more I believe that it will happen again; the more I am able to push through the doubt and present with confidence; the more confidence I show in my solutions the more my clients believe.

Maybe there's a way to address the way we write job specs to encourage women to have a go when they only have half the "required" skills, in the same way that we know men are more likely to do. Maybe we need confidence building seminars and workshops. Or maybe we just need to screw up our courage and take that first step...

FIONA COOPER

GROUP BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING DIRECTOR



I love what I do, which I feel is frankly amazing after 25 years. Marketing, and in particular the agency side where I have predominately worked, continues to offer a highly engaging, varied career path, where marketing's influence on business strategy has become ever more central. It has always felt open to women as a career and a meritocracy, certainly in contrast to other professions that friends and family have followed.

“we could do a lot worse than to put “be kind” into practice in the workplace”

That's not to say that it's all been easy. Thankfully the past decade has banished both the lone female board member and her survivalist protectionism, to be replaced with a more balanced board mix and a far more collaborative and supportive management style. And as marketing is a barometer of trends, from relaxed dress codes to flexible working practices to imagery and language, I fully expect this more inclusive management style to continue to cascade to other sectors.

I've also become a mother who works in marketing. I now have two important roles – work and the children. It makes me bring a different perspective to my working role, which I think has made me more nurturing and supportive of the greater common good. It also means I'm short on time and keen to get to the point.

As a mother of both a girl and a boy, I also feel a responsibility to build a workplace and communications that are inclusive and celebrate all our differences. I reckon we could do a lot worse than to put their school value of “be kind” into practice in the workplace and new product development.

“**Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is youer than you.**”

– Dr Seuss

These honest and personal stories provide a snapshot of our time.

The need for ongoing role models to inspire confidence in the younger generation remains. And at Teamspirit we're proud to accept that it's all our responsibility.

Together we need to make the path ahead inclusive... for all.

