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As lobbying evolves into advocacy, public affairs takes on a more critical role in India Inc

By Ajay Khanna, ET CONTRIBUTORS

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Synopsis

Corporate behaviour is very closely scrutinised now, specially when stakeholder management has also witnessed a 360-degree change. More and more companies today have a well-defined public policy or public affairs department that is seen as a strategic function — much more integrated, cutting across all other departments and hierarchies.



The last decade witnessed some healthy shifts in the public affairs and policy advocacy space in India.

A little over two years ago, Covid-19 — a once in a century pandemic — upturned our lives like nothing we have ever seen before. Worse, the deadly virus is yet to run its course.

This disruption, though, had a significant upside. It forced public policy to claim centre stage and simultaneously put the spotlight on the

role of public affairs — as managing Covid required juggling government relations, honing focused communication and information dissemination strategies, leveraging corporate and social responsibility and developing strategic thinking.

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collapsed and the government, [corporate India](#) and consumers were aligned as equal partners in forging a national public policy response to deal with this

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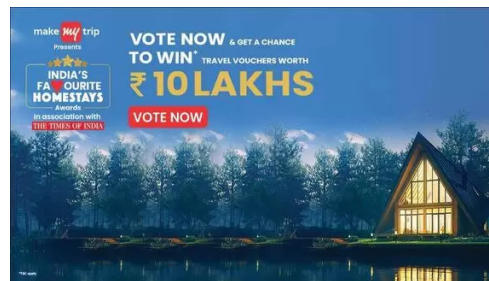


members played a key role in this mission and worked closely with various government bodies and the NITI Aayog.

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In short, national interest is the new glue. What is good for an individual works for companies; and if it works for both these key stakeholders, then national interest is implicitly served. The government, on its part, is very clear: The public sector will no longer hold the commanding heights of the Indian economy and business has a central place in the new scheme of things.

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However, for corporate India, this spot on the national high table comes with a price. Corporate behaviour is very closely scrutinised now, specially when stakeholder management has also witnessed a 360-degree change. More and more companies today have a well-defined public policy or public affairs department that is seen as a strategic function — much more integrated, cutting across all other departments and hierarchies.

Public affairs and policy advocacy require relentless attention and a long-term commitment from both companies and individuals. In other words, companies will have to rejig their internal structures and invest in transparency. Given the prickly history between the two key stakeholders, developing the trust quotient won't be easy.

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The last decade witnessed some healthy shifts in the public affairs and policy advocacy space in India. The changing role of advocacy has led to the

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with the government on an equal footing as partners and stakeholders.

Given the difficult history of “Licence Raj”, lobbying had become a key part of the country’s governance lexicon. However, the dismantling of this regime and the launch of liberalisation has made lobbying redundant. Issues are rarely company specific. Instead, the concerns are industry related and, hence, largely in the domain of public policy. These shifts include the active engagement of companies by governments through open consultations. In this differentiated process of policy making, public affairs individuals have gained an important and a critical role to play.

Now that the focus has shifted to public policy, the government of the day has signalled its comfort to hear out industry bodies or such coalitions. Consequently, public affairs professionals are coalescing to forge a common agenda. This is never easy and requires consummate patience as well as strategic thinking to accommodate company-specific challenges within issues concerning the entire industry.

In other words, public affairs professionals are rapidly recalibrating their skills to be able to string together a narrative, instead of the conventional practice of compiling exhaustive information, to woo support for their cause. Further, it makes more sense to evolve a win-win strategy for all stakeholders, including for the government, to incentivise a buy-in.

As a result, acquiring domain expertise is key in building a credible narrative. Not only does it provide a bridge with those driving public policy change within the government, it also requires public affairs professionals to engage constantly with officials. The collateral gain is that it gradually builds mutual trust.

In order to succeed as public affairs professionals, it is becoming imperative to be proactive with a strategic approach and display readiness to deal with all challenges. This requires envisaging upcoming policies and doing the groundwork much before a situation becomes critical. One can develop white papers, be aware of what’s happening globally and ensure that such papers are floated through coalitions so that the government also starts looking at these for ideas.

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someone with the right expertise. This means that while knowing somebody can help open the doors, knowing and deliberating the content of the conversation is much more critical. Professionals need to have a certain

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technology or domain expertise, so as to influence public policy.

Several companies are today hiring young professionals to enhance and improve their social media presence. These people have the expertise and a penchant for social media management, which the companies want to put to use. Largely, the public affairs function today is getting integrated into various functions within a company, with greater involvement of the top management. The functions of this department could include government relations, corporate communications, regulatory affairs, CSR, branding, reputation management and media relations, among others. This unified function is today taking a massive burden off the shoulders of the owners, boards and CEOs by dealing with external stakeholders in an integrated manner.

It is clear that the role of public affairs professionals is evolving. So far, they have been in the spotlight as a crisis manager, particularly in the aftermath of Covid-19. Ideally, they will need to evolve into risk managers. For this, public affairs professionals will have to be proactive and not reactive.

Ajay Khanna is with [Jubilant NSE 1.25 %](#) Bhartia Group & is Co-Founder of PAFI. The views are personal.

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Insure your car this monsoon to avoid any financial damage due to unexpected circumstances

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Goodbye lobbying, hello advocacy!



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summer. Rains tend to amplify the beauty of any locale and inspire everyone from a solo backpacker to a family traveler to plan a holiday between the months of June to September.

A downpour can make anyone think of going for a long drive or sip on a hot cup

of coffee, but the thought of getting an insurance policy is rather unlikely. But the season which comes with so much hope also has its own set of challenges and with every passing year, the havoc created by rains has been having an alarming impact on our assets.

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If you are planning to hit the backwaters or hill stations for your vacation, you can't miss out on the safety precautions to be taken while visiting either the beaches or the hilly areas during the rainy season since such places are more prone to natural calamity.

For most car drivers, the rainy season is no less than a nightmare. The last thing a car owner might think of is their car breaking down in the middle of the road and other cars splashing your windshield with dirt. So, unless you have fully prepared your car for this season, there are chances your car might have to suffer the wrath of the monsoon season.

Here's a checklist to prepare your car before taking it out in the monsoon rains for a trouble-free drive.

1. Check the tyres: Tyres are one of the most overlooked parts of the car yet are extremely important as they have a major impact on the way a car drives.

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some places, might lead to more use of your wipers and lights which in turn would cause more strain on your car battery. Keep a check on if it needs to be replaced beforehand, to avoid the occurrence of any crisis.

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3. Car lights: Ensure all the lights including the parking lamps, headlamps, tail lamps, brake lights, fog lights, number plate lights and indicators are functioning properly before heading out for a drive.

4. Brakes: Water can damage the internal parts of a vehicle and have an adverse impact on the braking distance of a car. No matter the circumstances or weather, properly functioning brakes are a necessity. However, worn out brakes could further increase braking distances, and there is also a chance of a failure.

5. Wiper Blades: Driving during a rainfall, makes the windshield glass dirty thus affecting visibility. Also, driving through dense clouds or misty weather increases the chances of accidents. Make sure the wiper blades are working properly. You can also carry an extra microfiber cloth to clean the windshield.

6. Keep your car covered: Besides the internal damage, monsoon rains can create enormous damage to the exterior of your car, if not properly covered. It's advisable to keep the car covered at all times to save the time of cleaning the windshield glass repeatedly.

7. Check for leaks and rusting: Considering the climate prevalent through most parts of India, check for any signs of moisture around the windows, sunroof, door sills and carpets. Cars are more prone to rusting during the rainy season, given the higher levels of moisture and variations in temperature.

8. Pre-monsoon service: An ideal approach to keep your car monsoon-ready is to get it professionally cleaned and polished, before the onset of monsoon.

9. Buy comprehensive car insurance policy: A motor insurance policy with suitable add-ons can come in handy for car owners during the monsoon season. Now that monsoons are on a phase-out, it is imperative for vehicle owners to understand the need to safeguard assets against risks of rain.

Third-party liability insurance, mandatory under Motor Vehicles Act 1988, does not provide protection against conditions arising out of heavy rainfall. To protect your car from problems like engine damage due to water clogging, tyre burst, car breakdown, or any other natural calamities, consider buying:

- **Engine Protection Cover:** The engine is one of the most expensive parts of your car, and engine maintenance may be pricey. Chances of engine damage in a water-clogged road are higher in cars with lower ground

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By Deepansh Tanti

- **EMI Protection Cover:** If your vehicle is undergoing repairs in one of the insurer's network garages for over 21 days, you can get the EMI charges covered that you are ought to pay. This will only be possible if the EMI payment is due in the time frame beyond 21 days. Example - 21 days - 1 EMI, 42 days - 2 EMIs. This add-on is only applicable for up to 3 EMIs.
- **NCB Retention Cover:** After accumulating your No Claim Bonus (NCB) percentage over the years, if you make a claim, the percentage drops to nil and you have to start over. When you opt for this add on and make your first claim, your NCB percentage will remain unaffected.
- **Zero Depreciation Cover:** The value of your car reduces as it ages, which may have an impact on your claims. If your car is involved in an accident and you file a claim for it, you may not be able to recover the full cost of the replacement parts because the value of the parts being replaced has depreciated over time. Zero or Nil Depreciation add-on cover prevents the value from depreciating, so you can recover the maximum amount possible from the claim.

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(This article is generated and published by ET Spotlight team. You can get in touch with them on etspotlight@timesinternet.in)

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