

Breakfast Roundtable: Insights into Poland

08.30am, 21 January 2020
Marx Room, Quo Vadis Club
Soho, London



Meeting Notes

Attendee List

First name	Last name	Position	Company
Andrzej	Kreżel	Counsellor, Head of the Economic Section	Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London
Charlotte	Rogers	Features Editor	Marketing Week
Jess	Smith	Producer	Joint London
Jill	Heller	New Business Manager	Creative Culture
Julian	Boulding	President	Thenetworkone
Karolina	Króliczek	Founder	PR Insight
Laura	Forcetti	Global Marketing Sourcing Manager	WFA
Matylda	Setlak	Managing Director	All4Comms
Mélanie	Chevalier	Founder and CEO	Creative Culture
Michael	Dembimski	Senior Polish Expert	British Chamber of Commerce
Paul	Duncanson	Non-Executive Director Managing Director	Creative Culture Creativebrief
Raj	Thambirajah	Strategy Director	Iris
Rob	Morbin	General Manager	ICCO
Scott	Lyth	Area Manager	Halewood International
Steve	Miller	Membership & Commercial Director	PRCA & ICCO

Introductions

To open the event, Paul Duncanson (PD) first welcomed all attendees and introduced the concept of our roundtables. He then asked for everyone to briefly introduce themselves.

PD invited Andrzej Krężel (AK), Head of Economics at the Embassy of the Polish Republic in London, to briefly introduce the political, economic, and social situation in Poland. He opened with questions that framed the topics of discussion for the rest of the roundtable: how can we market in Poland? What appeals to Poles, and how much do generational differences matter?

PD then invited Karolina Króliczek (KK), the Founder of London-based London to Warsaw/UK to Poland public relations agency PR Insight, and Matylda Setlak (MS), Managing Director of All4Comms, a full service Polish comms agency, to share some of their knowledge about the Polish communications industry, particularly with regards to what they see as trending for Poles both living at home and abroad.

General Discussion Points

Politics, Economics, History

Poland is a parliamentary republic. General elections took place last year. Left-leaning political groups, right-wing conservatives (leaning towards more nationalistic in their beliefs), and a smaller number of alt-right conservatives have some representation in Parliament. The nation is bigger in geographic size than Great Britain with a population of 38.5 million.

Poland was one of the most powerful European nations in the 16th-17th centuries, but in 1795, occupied, it ceased to exist as a sovereign nation. In 1918, Poland briefly became sovereign until the second world war, when it was occupied on both the East by Soviet Russia and the West by Nazi Germany. Following Germany's defeat in 1945, Poland was occupied by Soviet Russia until 1993, when the last Russian soldier left Poland, which is when the country began its upward growth.

Since regaining its full sovereignty, Poland has essentially maintained nearly three decades of uninterrupted economic growth – even throughout the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. However, the nation still represents only 0.925% of the global economy, whereas the UK represents 4.6%. In 1999, Poland joined NATO and in 2004, it became a member of the European Union. Since then especially, Poland has experienced a huge leap in terms of economic development and is still growing. In terms of political economy, the country has very strong economic bonds and trades with the UK, but Brexit is a topic that Poles are watching closely as relations with the UK may shift.

Polish culture

Culturally, Poles tend to be sensitive in responding to political and religious content in advertising across industries. The typical Polish advert is more reserved than one that you might find in the UK, where brands often take clear stances on social issues such as LGBTQ+ rights. Additionally, there is a cultural clash between millennials in Poland, who tend to be more mobile and speak English more, with older Poles (40+) who have lived under communism.

Localism, or the process of favouring local product and brands, is strong in Poland. This spans across all product types and industries. In daily life, for instance, many Poles tend to shop at local markets, which are both affordable and where product is sourced locally. Disposable income, however, may influence the purchase behaviour. As consumers shift to more luxurious products, foreign brands come into play.

Eco-friendly and green initiatives are very popular in Poland right now, but that is not the only quality Poles seek when purchasing a new product. They tend to need confirmation by a trusted source that the product is reliable. Negative comments on social media are common which some of our roundtable experts noted is related to a cultural attitude of straightforwardness and straight talking. While this might discourage brands, this is a fairly regular step to go through before the brand can prove its value to the consumers.

Shifts in cultural attitudes and consumer behaviour are happening in Poland because many younger Poles take time to live and work abroad. A small percentage (10-15%) return, but generally these Poles (who speak Polish and carry their Polish upbringing with them) are staying abroad. With this, though, has come a general shift in attitude towards the West: while in the past, the West and its products were thought to simply 'be better', Polish pride is now common, and people want to support locally produced brands.

Main advertising channels

Internet sales are booming in Poland, especially in consumers under 40 who speak English and use smartphones. In bigger cities like Warsaw and Krakow, technological advancement is prevalent, but roundtable experts note that it would be a mistake to think of rural areas in Poland as underdeveloped.

The main channels of advertising are similar to those in the UK: digital, television, radio, and print. However, there is a gap in access to media intelligence in Poland that prevents the market from keeping up with the rapid advancements in digital media in the UK. Additionally, Poland takes a more traditional approach towards public relations, using tried-and-true methods like press releases to communicate messages to the public. In fact, PR agencies in Poland can operate more like press agencies (KK). Print publications have been closing in Poland in recent years to their lack of profitability, and streaming comms on tablets and mobile is increasingly popular for all ages.

Poland has media that is both state owned and privately owned, which can impact the types of content shared via those platforms. State television is funded by license fees and adverts, so costs of reaching people via advert slots are much lower than in the UK. However, the concept of state-owned media can bring about questions of trust in consumers.

Use of social media

The same social media platforms that are popular in the UK are also popular in Poland: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube dominate the landscape. However, their uses vary both depending on the brand and the consumer. Twitter is seen as more of a professional/ B2B outlet in Poland. Additionally, influencers are still in their infancy but increasingly popular on all platforms.

It is worth noting that alcohol brands cannot be advertised across channels, including social media in Poland, and beer can only be advertised on television after 9 p.m.

Doing business in Poland

The historic competitive advantages of working in Poland are the high quality of labour that is relatively cheap. However, today with very low unemployment and a rapidly growing economy Poland is no longer a cheap labour market. At the present, Poland's unemployment rate is the lowest in the EU, which is remarkable as when it first joined, its unemployment rate was the highest.

Younger Polish people, especially 17 and under, want their careers to have purpose and are no longer just accepting jobs for the stability and money. Recruiting and retaining Poles is becoming harder and harder and the cost of labour is rapidly increasing.

If entering the market, it is a good idea to look at mergers and acquisitions, as the children of Polish business owners are not necessarily continuing to upkeep their family businesses.

The tradition of shaking hands was discussed in relation to general business culture. It is professional to shake hands with business people and make eye contact.

Tips for brands

Mélanie Chevalier concluded the meeting by asking roundtable attendees to share some do's and don'ts when it comes to operating and communicating in Poland.

Do:

- Highlight the values of family, friendship, peace, and health
- Be honest
- Be eco-friendly
- Pay attention to the gap between older people and millennials: remember that the younger Polish people are more similar to familiar consumers in the UK but older people grew up under communism and have a very different outlook
- Take into account demographic and geographic stratification

Don't:

- Highlight sexuality in adverts
- Make assumptions about rural areas – they are very digitally savvy

The meeting concluded at 10.30am.