

## Creating Campaigns for Diverse Stakeholders

An Interview with Trisch L. Smith,  
Global Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Edelman

**EDITORS' NOTE** Trisch Smith serves as Edelman's first Global Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. In this role, she strives to drive diversity and foster inclusion to ensure development of innovative solutions that reach and resonate with clients' key audiences and achieve business success. During her 18-year tenure with Edelman, Smith has managed stakeholder outreach, reputation management, community engagement and public affairs campaigns for Fortune 500 corporations, non-profits and associations, including Chevron, Toyota, Starbucks, Girl Scouts of the USA and Walmart, among others. She has also led the firm's award-winning multicultural client services offering. Smith sits on the Board of Directors of Color Comm: Women of Color in Communications, and served on the boards of the National Black Child Development Institute and Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission. Recently, she received the inaugural Adweek and ADCOLOR Champion award and was named the 2018 NAFE P&L Executive of the Year, among other honors. Smith earned a bachelor's degree in communications from Morgan State University in Baltimore and a master's degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Trisch L. Smith

**FIRM BRIEF** With 6,000 people in more than 60 offices, Edelman (edelman.com) is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Since its founding in 1952 by Dan Edelman, the firm has remained an independent, family-run company. Edelman uses its profits to strengthen its business, provide its employees with opportunities to grow, and serve as a responsible citizen of the world. The firm remains committed to its founding values and principles under Richard Edelman's leadership today.

**How critical is the focus on diversity and inclusion for Edelman?**

It is imperative. We recognize that diversity of all types is key for us in making sure that we are creating campaigns that truly reach and resonate with our clients' increasingly diverse stakeholders. Based on work we had done with several clients and in the changing world, it was

clear that we needed to intentionally and strategically diversify our workforce in order to deliver even stronger business results for the firm and our clients.

**Does hiring the best and brightest talent ensure a certain level of diversity or do you need to reach out to different talent pools and partner with diverse organizations in order to make sure you are building a diverse workforce?**

We always want to and always will hire the best and most creative talent of all backgrounds to deliver the most innovative and creative results. To ensure this, we need to partner with a host of diverse groups and organizations and recruit at numerous schools to help in this process. When you look at the diversity of our work in terms of how the industry has evolved, we need different types of skillsets and expertise. So, for us, it's about cultivating relationships throughout various communities so that we can make sure we are getting the best talent from all backgrounds.

**How important is internal communication in telling Edelman's D&I story in order to engage employees in these efforts?**

Internal communications is key in making sure people understand what the commitment is, how the organization is living it and each employee's role in helping to achieve our goals. We have found that our employee networks have been a great conduit for information sharing. We also have an internal network through our workplace platform through which we communicate and provide regular updates on our D&I programming. All of our employee networks have their own pages on which they communicate about their regular events, activities and findings. We are definitely trying to ensure that we communicate more consistently so that employees are updated and can get involved.

**How critical is it to have engagement and commitment from the C-Suite and management team in supporting Edelman's D&I efforts?**

Senior leadership must be involved and actively live our commitment. We have top senior leaders who are executive

sponsors of all of our employee networks. They help lead those groups and serve as a voice and ally at the highest levels of the company.

While this support is important for employees to see, this also provides an opportunity for our senior leaders to gain insights as well. It is a shared experience and is mutually beneficial.

Senior support is absolutely critical in driving this work and ensuring that it is a priority at all times.

**Is the impact of D&I on business outcomes and the importance of having diverse experiences and thoughts around the table when making business decisions well understood?**

D&I has become a focus and priority among many organizations across industries and sectors. Historically, the importance has been better understood by companies who have a direct consumer product or service. There have been numerous articles about the value, and a great deal of research has been done demonstrating the ROI of having a diverse and inclusive workplace. Edelman's Trust Barometer shows that employees and customers have an increased expectation of employers to take a stand on important matters such as D&I.

As a global communications company, we recognize that we are best equipped to develop campaigns that will truly be effective in reaching an increasingly diverse world if we have greater diversity at the table – and not just a seat at the table, but that everyone has a voice that is welcomed and heard at the table.

**How do you define what differentiates Edelman?**

Building off the family values and independence on which the firm was established allows us to chart our own course. For example, we were one of the first firms to create a multicultural PR practice more than 20 years ago. When I look at what sets us apart and how we have grown, I think the entrepreneurial spirit and client-centric focus that Dan Edelman founded the company upon still remains core to who we are today. We are continuing that legacy through seeking innovative professionals who are pushing the envelope in global communications. Diversity is central to that endeavor. ●