

# In Conversation with Adam Shapiro and Renée Soto

**Adam Shapiro, ReeveMark's Head of Digital, recently sat down with Renée Soto to discuss the past, present, and future of effective digital communications. Adam's practice has been at the forefront of strategic communications over the last 15 years as digital strategies have come to dominate the industry.**

Adam joins ReeveMark with a wealth of knowledge earned during a diverse and storied career. He shares insights about the innovative work he has done in a variety of sectors. Hallmarks of his career include investor engagement campaigns with some of the world's most important organizations, including Qualcomm (Broadcom), ExxonMobil (Engine One), Pfizer, GNC, and RiteAid.

Adam has been key in transforming thought leadership, digital reputation and stakeholder engagement programs at Danaher, Avaya and Univision. His robust public affairs skillset comes from extensive experience in advising companies like Mylan, where he was a crucial component in their effort to navigate and influence critical rule changes to significant US Federal programs.

His work in domestic and foreign digital campaign strategy has brought him to a number of delicate political scenarios, where he advised leaders on important communications matters. From the 2014 presidential elections in Brazil to guiding opposition leaders in Ukraine during #euromaidan, Adam is no stranger to communicating complex issues in sensitive contexts.

Working with advocacy groups, unions, and trade associations, Adam has proved himself invaluable to the campaign programs of well-established organizations such as the ACLU, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), and the US Olympic Committee.

Continue reading as Adam and Renée take a dive deep into the complexities of shareholder engagement, the challenges of reputational management, and best practices that can help overcome challenges in litigation and crisis communications.



**Adam Shapiro**

Adam has been at the forefront of strategic digital communications for over 15 years and has orchestrated pivotal digital campaigns.



**Renée Soto**

Renée is a Founding Partner of ReeveMark and has been a trusted advisor to clients facing complex legal and business challenges for nearly two decades.

**Renée:** *Hello. I'm Renee Soto, one of the founding partners at Reevemark. I'm here with my partner Adam Shapiro, who is head of our digital practice. He joined the firm earlier this year. Adam, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background and what brought you to Reevemark?*

**Adam:** Thanks, Renée. My background – and I'm dating myself a little bit – I started in digital communications when AOL was still a thing. Over the last decade or so I moved into political communications and campaigns. Eventually, I transitioned into corporate communications about a decade ago. I'm really excited to join the team at Reevemark, particularly as we think about what specialized digital services really mean for our clients and how we deliver that at a level that is really specific to the problems our clients face today.

**Renée:** *Let's take a step back. Can you define what you mean by "digital communications"? Isn't everything digital nowadays?*

**Adam:** Everything is digital. Everything is integrated. When you think about digital communications, you shouldn't define that, in my view, by any one channel. Those channels are constantly moving, they're constantly evolving. How we communicate online is constantly changing, both for the type of clients and work that we do and generally from a society perspective. So, when you think about how to define digital communications, it's really about how you tell integrated and well-measured stories at a level that provides outcomes for our clients and also the type of work that we do writ large. That has very little to do with a specific social media channel and a lot more to do with



how you make sure the story we're telling resonates with the people who matter most.

**Renée:** *A lot of the work that we do at Reevemark is in the category of "special situations". It can be litigation communications, crisis, or shareholder activism. Can you give a few specific examples of how digital communications is part of that type of work?*

**Adam:** Absolutely. When we think about digital communications in a crisis or a reputational situation, there are issues that might be specific to a client or specific to a situation but there are a couple of common areas that are almost always true. One is having a really good understanding of the situational awareness of both the client and also the conversation writ large – digitally or otherwise. What is the sentiment? How is that conversation shifting? What is our position in that conversation? Two, what does our infrastructure look like online? Many times you may have something important to say but you have no way to say it. That part is equally important. Last, and just as effective, is what do we have to say and where can we actually say it? Meaning, how can we break down those stories to make sure that they're effective and authentic?

Particularly as we think about things like generative AI and crisis communications, it's really important that we are, and by

transitive property, our clients are authentic communicators and that we're speaking not just as quickly as possible but also in the most authentic manner possible.

**Renée:** *I also understand that some of the digital tools we have can help companies connect with their retail shareholders both in the normal course and during proxy solicitation. Could you talk about that a little bit?*

**Adam:** Yes. This is a topic that's very near and dear to my heart. When I left campaigns and elections and consulting on digital marketing, proxy contests and retail shareholder engagement was a natural area that I gravitated toward. When you think about the kind of tools and the work we do and how we provide to retail shareholders there are really several layers in which that operates. First – and this area, I would argue, is absolutely a paradigm shift – for years we focused almost exclusively on transactional relationships with retail shareholders from the perspective of our clients. Meaning, if somebody has more shares or less shares we're going to prioritize our time with them or not at all. That's starting to shift in really measurable and meaningful ways. What I mean by that is trying to establish a

really specific relationship with those retail shareholders.

So, where our services are differentiated is in helping clients understand who their retail shareholders are; what they want to hear from you; and, just as importantly, what they care about.

Oftentimes it can surprise organizations in terms of what shareholders want to hear from them and how to speak to that authentically. That's number one.

Number two is helping you identify where and how to engage these folks.

A lot of times this happens too quickly during an urgent moment where there's a contest or there's a really big crisis. That's still important and you need to get out in front of that, but nobody likes the friend that only talks to them when they need something. It's really important to have that conversation twelve months of the year as opposed to just when you need to speak to them. That part sometimes gets overlooked. We focus too much on how do I provide the right incentive? Do I have to offer these people free popcorn or gift cards or some sort of financial incentive to speak to me?

More often than not, that's just not necessary. They want to actually have access. They want to have a relationship. The same way you would treat institutions. As long as we're meeting that expectation you will be more successful than not when you're engaging your retail shareholders

**Renée:** *That's great. Thank you. Let's shift gears to talk about social media for a minute. What part of a company's overall communication strategy should social media be?*

“

**Oftentimes it can surprise organizations in terms of what [retail shareholders] want to hear from them and how to speak to that authentically.**

”

**Adam:** It's a great question. We tend to put social media into a box, particularly when it comes to more specialized reputational needs. Meaning, there's a crisis response or there's a reputational need for a specific CEO or leader and social media gets treated like an extension of a press release. That is usually an area that we try to avoid. The emphasis often becomes on the 'media' and not the 'social' part of social media. It's supposed to be a two-way conversation. You want to go to where the conversation is, not to where you want it to be. When we speak to social media with our clients it's about going to the conversation as it exists today rather than creating some sort of field of dreams. If you build it, they will not come. You need to go to them.

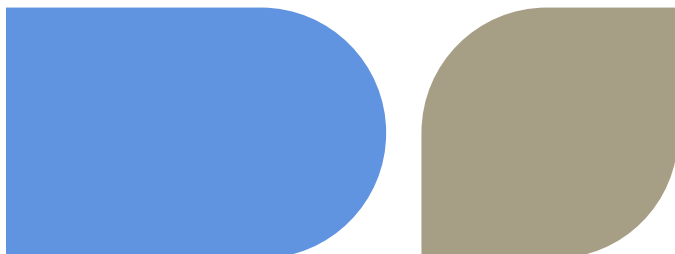
**Renée:** *That makes total sense. I want to ask a question that we get from clients a lot, which is how do you measure the success of a digital campaign? Which metrics are important, and which are less important?*

**Adam:** The honest answer is you need to measure this in offline outcomes, not on any one specific online metric. Although, there are really important proxies, which we'll talk about in a second, of what you should be measuring online. Any good digital campaign or digital initiative should be tied to an offline outcome. That is our job. Our job is to pursue an offline objective for our clients, whether it's a reputational outcome, a business

“  
**When we speak to social media with our clients it's about going to the conversation as it exists today rather than creating some sort of field of dreams. If you build it, they will not come. You need to go to them.**  
”

outcome, or a strategic outcome. That's, ultimately, the goal of any digital campaign.

It's really about how well are we engaging the audiences that matter. Not just in terms of whether we're reaching them, although that certainly is a factor, and how often we're reaching them, but also, how are we measurably moving the needle in terms of their perception? Are they more aware of our clients' thought leadership? Are they more aware of our position in a proxy contest? Are they more aware of our response in a crisis and how are they perceiving that response? Those are the measurements we care about because they tie back to a real tangible outcome. Less so about more traditional metrics that we're all familiar with, whether that's website clicks, click-through rates or any other advertising metrics that people are broadly familiar with. They're important, but ultimately we care about metrics that tie back to an outcome.



**Renée:** *Another question that we get from clients a lot is how can I take the earned media coverage that Reevemark helps to generate and amplify it through my own social channels or other channels.*

**Adam:** Oftentimes the best way to answer that is on what not to do first, then discuss what you should do. What you shouldn't do is treat your own channels as an extension of a press release or an extension of that news. Meaning, you get this great piece of coverage, it's really favorable or it's really effective and it really drives home what we're trying to position a company or a leader about and then we simply post it into the ether.

While that's helpful, it's not necessarily that effective. You want to think about how do we take that earned piece of content and create a story out of it. How do we use it to engage in an existing conversation that people are already talking about. Often, just like with the company example I gave earlier, we take the social out of social media. We need to be very cognizant of the fact that these are platforms where people are supposed to be talking to each other, not necessarily just printing releases. That part is very important when we consider social strategies for our clients.

**Renée:** *Adam, as the Head of Reevemark's digital practice I'm interested in your view on how our digital capabilities are differentiated from those of other firms.*

**Adam:** That's why I joined Reevemark in the first place. There is a notion that the communications industry needs to coalesce around a subset of services and approaches that are one-size-fits-all. Fit a reputational crisis in a litigation situation as easily as a public affairs campaign as easily as marketing a consumer product. I disagree with that notion. In this specific moment, we need highly specialized services to meet highly specialized challenges that our clients face every day.

When we speak about what differentiates us it's really creating customized digital solutions for clients that come to us for what we're best at. That might be litigation. That might be a merger. That might be a reputational situation. That might be a crisis. It could be a proxy contest. But when you work with Reevemark and our digital solutions they're going to be very specific and tailored to those problems and address them in a way that's not just best-in-class, but differentiated in how we actually solve the problem in the first place.

“

**When we speak about what differentiates us it's really creating customized digital solutions for clients that come to us for what we're best at.**

”

“

**How do you integrate generative AI into teams, into client work, into what our clients do from a storytelling perspective, and to do it in a way where we're not telling generative AI stories, we're telling human-driven stories that are accelerated through AI?**

”

**Renée:** *Alright, Adam, what is the top digital communications trend that we should all be watching?*

**Adam:** The one we're all thinking about, which is generative AI, and in a few ways. One, which would be the most obvious, is from a technological standpoint. Everything that generative AI can do to tell quicker more efficient stories to our clients and, ultimately, to our stakeholders. What often gets overlooked is two important factors. One, that as fast as the technology has grown it hasn't created this big "killer app" moment for strategic communications where it's suddenly, overnight integrated into everything we do. That will happen but it may happen differently than people had initially predicted. Part of that is because we tend to focus less on the operational needs of that aspect.

How do you integrate generative AI into teams, into client work, into what our

clients do from a storytelling perspective, and to do it in a way where we're not telling generative AI stories, we're telling human-driven stories that are accelerated through AI? To get to that point we really need to focus on how to operationalize it, not just the technology itself. When we think about the next five years it's really about AI transformation similar to the way we spoke about digital transformation for the last decade. There will be a real focus on operational execution. The reason that hasn't created a groundswell of change yet is because currently we can offer a faster, quicker product but not necessarily a better one. We need to get to the point where we're providing value for clients from a storytelling perspective for this to take root in a real, scalable way.

**Renée:** *In our business which, I feel, relies so much on the nuanced judgement of experienced professionals do you think generative AI is going to be a non-starter, a game-changer, or somewhere in the middle?*

**Adam:** Eventually a game-changer. Right now we're somewhere in the middle. The reason we're somewhere in the middle is because it doesn't do everything for all people. Everything that we deal with in our area of strategic communications is really specific. It's highly regulatory, it requires a high degree of industry knowledge. When you try to apply that to generative AI models today you're not going to necessarily get a superior product. Now, will that change eventually? Sure. Will there always be a need for historical expertise and deep understanding of that industry, particularly from a regulatory and from a communications aspect? 100 percent.

If we're in a position where we're telling

AI stories first and human stories second we're just going to provide a bad experience for clients, and a bad experience for the stakeholders they care about, whether that's shareholders, investors, or anyone in between. We need to avoid that at all costs and really focus on telling human-driven stories that maybe are accelerated and made better through AI but ultimately start with a human story.

**Renée:** *Thank you, Adam. It's been really great talking to you. Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share before we wrap up?*

**Adam:** Thanks, Renée. The most important thing I want to leave this conversation from is that the direction we're taking Reevemark's digital services is really exciting. This is probably the most exciting time to be in strategic communications, not just because there are fantastic new tools available to us today that there weren't yesterday, but also because the industry has matured enough that we now require and need someone to apply really specific solutions to the problems that our clients have had for years and really haven't had a solution to address it.

What I mean by that is creating really specific digital solutions for what we do in litigation, how we address challenges in proxy contests, how do we help clients protect their reputations, not just online but writ large. For me, the next five years for us is really defined on how do we solve those challenges. How do we meet that moment and provide a product and a service that is really specific and isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to every challenge or reputational need our clients have. I would encourage everybody who may be watching this video to stay tuned, to continue to read

our updates on what we're providing and bringing to the industry because we have a couple exciting things in the pipeline that we're excited to share soon.

**Renée:** *Thanks, Adam. We're really happy to have you here.*

**Adam:** Same here. Thank you.

**Renée:** *Thanks again.*