

Global Perspective With Local Insight

An Interview with Brad Staples, Chief Executive Officer, APCO Worldwide

EDITORS' NOTE Brad Staples is an internationally recognized expert on the geopolitical forces shaping markets. As Chief Executive Officer, he leads APCO's business and more than 1,200 employees who are based in more than 30 markets around the world. Staples has spent decades building APCO's business and developing client service teams around the world, having previously served as President International and Chair of Global Development. Staples first joined APCO in 1996, where he



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helped lead the firm's European business in Brussels before going on to head the EMEA region. Throughout his career at APCO, he has devised and conducted reputation and communication programs for multinational companies and interest groups across a broad range of industries and policy areas. He has developed public affairs campaigns and led investment promotion, information and reputation assignments for numerous corporations, governments, and political leaders. Staples also built APCO's global antitrust and competition practice. Working in close collaboration with leading law firms and investment banks, he has managed global client M&A and antitrust communication campaigns and has assisted multinational companies from many industry and service sectors in achieving their communication objectives around major cases. Prior to joining APCO, Staples worked in a consultancy in London and was managing director of an EU affairs consultancy in Brussels. He holds a BA degree in politics and government.

FIRM BRIEF What began 40 years ago, with one woman's vision and bold action, APCO (apcoworldwide.com) has grown into an independent, majority women-owned firm of more than 1,200 employees working in 80 markets around the world. As strategic advisors, creators and communicators, APCO works closely with some of the world's leading corporations, foundations and governments, helping them navigate and thrive in an increasingly complex, and at times, divisive world. As a long-recognized leader in public affairs, clients engage APCO for advice and action on cultural, social, and economic demands through its suite of integrated services in a multitude of sectors. The firm's work and expertise are grounded in counsel and brought to life through implementing compelling

solutions in the areas of financial markets, competitive growth, and political and societal issues; protecting license to operate; building reputations; and helping organizations adapt during times of great change.

How do you define APCO's purpose?

In a world where geopolitics can shift overnight, defining purpose isn't just timely – it's essential. At APCO, our purpose has always been clear: to help our clients make sense of complexity and enable them to achieve meaningful impact. Today, with the world more interconnected – and unpredictable – than ever, a local issue can ricochet across continents in a matter of hours. That's where we come in. We help clients navigate these dynamics with confidence, turning disruption into opportunity and delivering value not only to their organizations, but to society at large. We're not just advisors. We bring together the right people, ideas, and insights to spark collaboration and drive innovation. That's what enables us to create comprehensive solutions for the complex challenges our clients face – and to do it in a way that makes a real difference.

Will you provide an overview of APCO's services and capabilities?

APCO is a global advisory and advocacy firm that helps clients navigate the intersection of business, media, society, and policy. Our

services span strategic communications, public affairs, government relations, stakeholder engagement, crisis and reputation management, sustainability, digital strategy, and more. In 2024, we deepened our capabilities through a series of strategic acquisitions. These included Gagen MacDonald, known for its human-centered approach to organizational transformation; Camarco, a specialist in financial communications; Strategic Advice in Italy; and NGC International Advisory in the Gulf, focused on regulatory affairs. Together, they enhance our ability to deliver end-to-end, high-impact solutions across markets and sectors.

We're also guided by an outstanding International Advisory Council – comprised of former diplomats, senior policymakers, and business leaders – whose insights help inform the work we do. And within APCO, our Employee Resource Groups and global alumni community reinforce a culture of collaboration, curiosity, and innovation.

Ultimately, our strength lies not just in what we do, but in how we do it – with agility, collaboration, and a deep understanding of the complex world our clients operate in.

What have been the keys to APCO's industry leadership, and how do you describe the APCO difference?

At APCO, clients and partners often point to our ability to build meaningful, long-term relationships as a defining strength. I agree – but it's not just the relationships themselves. It's the way we build them: across geographies,

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industries, and perspectives, always anchored in trust and a shared understanding of purpose. With offices in over 30 markets and experience working in more than 80 countries across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, we combine global perspective with local insight. Whether we're advising on geopolitical risk, guiding transformation, or managing complex reputational issues, we operate as one cohesive team – not a collection of offices, but a connected, global firm.

What sets us apart is our ability to integrate our capabilities into a unified, strategic offering. We don't deliver standalone services – we shape tailored, end-to-end solutions built on deep expertise and decades of experience. In a complex world, our strength lies in bringing insight, creativity, and execution together – to solve problems, build resilience, and create lasting value. That's what defines the APCO difference.

Will you discuss APCO's commitment to research and thought leadership?

Clients come to us with complex questions, often in fast-moving contexts. In those moments, credible insight is essential. That's why research and thought leadership have long been central to how we work at APCO. We maintain a strong presence at key summits and international gatherings, not simply to observe, but to engage – and to listen. Our teams on the ground provide context-specific analysis, helping clients make sense of developments as they unfold.

We also invest heavily in our APCO Insight team, which draws on a wide range of research methodologies to help clients understand stakeholder dynamics and anticipate change. The aim is always to support more confident, informed decision-making.

We see thought leadership not as a showcase, but as a service. Our responsibility is to offer clarity – especially when the path forward is uncertain. That's what our clients expect, and what we strive to deliver.

Will you highlight APCO's global footprint?

As I mentioned, APCO's strength lies in its ability to combine global reach with local insight. With more than 1,200 colleagues from Washington to Dubai, Brussels to Singapore – we're embedded in the world's major political, financial, business, and media centers. This presence isn't just geographic – it's strategic. Being on the ground in these diverse regions allows us to stay close to the issues that matter – and to the people shaping them. It gives us the ability to anticipate change, not just react to it, and to support our clients with intelligence that is timely, relevant, and actionable.

Crucially, we operate as one global team. That integration is fundamental to how we serve clients: with shared insight, common purpose, and a unified approach to problem-solving. It's what allows us to deliver solutions that are both locally attuned and globally informed.

How important is it for APCO to build a diverse workforce to mirror the diversity of its clients and the communities it serves?

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It's essential. We operate in a complex, interconnected world where no single perspective is ever enough. To advise our clients well – and to remain relevant – we need to reflect the diversity of the people and communities they serve. At APCO, we see diversity not just as a value, but as a capability. We draw on a broad range of cultural, professional, and personal experiences. That breadth of perspective is key to how we approach our work – from stakeholder engagement in emerging markets to navigating sensitive issues in global boardrooms. This diversity strengthens our thinking, sharpens our problem-solving, and helps us adapt quickly to change. It also reinforces our ability to act globally while understanding local nuance – a mindset we often describe as “glocal.” But ultimately, this isn't about policy – it's about performance. A diverse and inclusive culture makes us a better partner to our clients and a better organization overall.

What do you see as APCO's responsibility to be engaged in its communities and a force for good in society?

At APCO, we've always believed that the work we do should contribute to positive change – not just for our clients, but for the communities they're part of. That sense of responsibility is embedded in how we approach our work and in the partnerships we choose to build.

Over the years, we've had the opportunity to support a number of organizations working to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. That's included working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to strengthen local impact in India, supporting the Womanity Foundation in its fight to achieve gender equity by serving as their official media and communications partner, and assisting the Climate Emergency Fund in its advocacy efforts to reduce carbon emissions in the U.S.

These are very different causes, but what connects them is a shared commitment to impact – and a recognition that progress requires both focus and collaboration. As a global firm, we have a responsibility to use our capabilities in service of that kind of work whenever we can.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?

When I stepped into the role of CEO, it was immediately clear to me that our most important asset is – and always has been – our people. The strength of APCO lies in the breadth and depth of talent across the organization, and in our ability to align that talent with the evolving needs of our clients and the world around us. For me, leadership is about putting the right individuals in the right roles, and then creating the conditions for them to succeed – with clarity, trust, and purpose. That's not a static exercise; it requires constant attention, especially in a global firm operating across such a wide range of issues, sectors, and geographies.

I've found that the best leadership often comes from listening closely, staying curious, and being willing to adjust course. That mindset has allowed us to remain responsive to change – and, more importantly, to help our clients do the same. Leadership today isn't about having all the answers; it's about making space for good judgment, diverse thinking, and shared responsibility.

What do you tell young people about the type of career opportunities the industry offers?

I often tell younger colleagues or interns that consulting offers a front-row seat to the issues shaping the world – and an opportunity to play an active role in responding to them. At APCO, particularly early in your career, you're not sitting on the sidelines. You're contributing to projects that have real impact, across sectors and geographies. It's a fast-learning environment. You're exposed to different industries, cultures, and ways of thinking. And that exposure – if you lean into it – builds a skill set that's both broad and deep. You learn to ask better questions, to analyze complex situations quickly, and to communicate with clarity under pressure.

What I find most rewarding is how quickly our young professionals grow into trusted advisors – not just because of what they know, but because of how they listen, adapt, and collaborate. For anyone looking to stretch themselves intellectually and professionally, it's a uniquely rich and rewarding path. ●