# Philip Jansen signals transformative leadership as WPP faces critical challenges at AGM



Change is palpable within WPP as Philip Jansen, the new chair, embarks on his first annual general meeting (AGM) since stepping into the role. The former chief executive of BT Group warmly greeted shareholders arriving at WPP’s Rose Court offices in London, a rare move reflecting his desire for transparency and approachability. This openness contrasts sharply with the traditional reticence often exhibited by FTSE 100 board members, signalling Jansen's intention to foster a more engaging atmosphere as he assumes control.

His predecessor, Roberto Quarta, who held the chairmanship for nearly nine years, faced considerable challenges throughout his tenure, including the controversial exit of Martin Sorrell, the company's long-standing chief executive. Under Quarta, WPP reportedly became "significantly a stronger company," but lagged behind competitors in terms of revenue growth and stock performance. Jansen, however, acknowledged that the current landscape is fraught with difficulties, stating the need for structural reinforcements within key divisions such as Group M, which is undergoing a strategic overhaul that will purportedly include significant redundancies.

During the meeting, WPP's CEO Mark Read outlined three primary objectives: enhancing the use of WPP Open—a technological and AI-driven platform—streamlining Group M, and bolstering their business acquisition successes. Yet, he candidly admitted that the company's recent financial performance has not met expectations, with reported revenue declines of 2.7% in the first quarter. This downturn prompted concerns among shareholders about WPP's market standing, especially in comparison to its rivals like Publicis Groupe, which has forecasted growth rates of 4% to 5% for the upcoming period.

The financial context is concerning; one shareholder starkly highlighted the inadequacies in WPP's total shareholder return (TSR) performance, noting that an investment of £100 in January 2015 had depreciated to £95 by the end of 2024, compared to a surge in the FTSE 100 to £185. Jansen responded to such critiques with a promise of addressing these shortcomings, asserting that the management team is acutely aware of the past decade's failures and is committed to establishing a framework for sustainable growth.

Yet, the challenges are not merely financial. The advertising landscape is evolving rapidly, with Jansen himself acknowledging that WPP must adapt to a marketing environment increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence and changing client behaviours. Recent procurement strategies to encompass data analytics have started to take shape, highlighted by WPP's acquisition of the data firm InfoSum. This pivot is necessary not only for retaining existing clients like Coca-Cola but also for positioning WPP competitively against emerging and agile digital-first agencies.

The mood at this year's AGM, while cordial, suggested a shift among shareholders who, although not in outright revolt, appeared increasingly aware of the need for strategic revamping. Despite support figures hovering around 99.95% for Read’s leadership, echoed by major institutional investors like Harris Associates who foresee potential rebounds as restructuring takes effect, the atmosphere contained an undercurrent of expectation for tangible progress.

As the meeting concluded, a mix of cautious optimism and heightened scrutiny enveloped WPP and its leadership. Jansen’s one-word characterisation of the atmosphere—"testing"—captured a sentiment where stakeholders are prepared to support transformation but are equally waiting for evidence of a viable path forward.

In an era marked by industry disruption, Jansen's leadership will be pivotal not only in reassuring investors but also in navigating WPP through the evolving challenges of the advertising market.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a7c3c271-c82d-4de7-a719-60a31a026ef5)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/ad-group-wpp-lines-up-former-bt-boss-philip-jansen-its-new-chair-ft-reports-2024-07-29/), [[5]](https://www.campaignlive.com/article/wpp-names-ex-bt-chief-philip-jansen-chair-roberto-quarta-steps-down/1882604)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[6]](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20240730944199/en/WPP-Appoints-Philip-Jansen-as-Non-Executive-Chair-of-the-Board), [[7]](https://www.odwyerpr.com/story/public/21622/2024-07-30/ex-bt-group-ceo-chair-wpp.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a7c3c271-c82d-4de7-a719-60a31a026ef5), [[4]](https://www.cityam.com/287497-nearly-30-per-cent-wpp-investors-revolt-over-sir-martin/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/ad-group-wpp-lines-up-former-bt-boss-philip-jansen-its-new-chair-ft-reports-2024-07-29/), [[4]](https://www.cityam.com/287497-nearly-30-per-cent-wpp-investors-revolt-over-sir-martin/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/ad-group-wpp-lines-up-former-bt-boss-philip-jansen-its-new-chair-ft-reports-2024-07-29/), [[6]](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20240730944199/en/WPP-Appoints-Philip-Jansen-as-Non-Executive-Chair-of-the-Board)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a7c3c271-c82d-4de7-a719-60a31a026ef5), [[6]](https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20240730944199/en/WPP-Appoints-Philip-Jansen-as-Non-Executive-Chair-of-the-Board)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a7c3c271-c82d-4de7-a719-60a31a026ef5), [[5]](https://www.campaignlive.com/article/wpp-names-ex-bt-chief-philip-jansen-chair-roberto-quarta-steps-down/1882604)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.prweek.com/article/1920041/somethings-gone-horribly-wrong-new-chair-faces-calls-fix-wpp-general-meeting> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/a7c3c271-c82d-4de7-a719-60a31a026ef5> - WPP has appointed Philip Jansen, former chief executive of BT Group, as its new chair, effective January 2025. Jansen succeeds Roberto Quarta, who has been chair since 2015. The appointment comes amid industry upheaval, with WPP facing challenges such as declining revenue and increased competition. Jansen's experience in corporate transformation and technological investment is seen as crucial for WPP's future growth, especially in leveraging AI advancements. CEO Mark Read expressed optimism about Jansen's leadership in navigating these changes.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/ad-group-wpp-lines-up-former-bt-boss-philip-jansen-its-new-chair-ft-reports-2024-07-29/> - WPP is set to appoint former BT Group chief Philip Jansen as its new chair, succeeding Roberto Quarta. The decision, reported by the Financial Times, comes amid WPP's struggles with declining revenue, partly due to decreased spending from tech clients and challenges in the Chinese market. Jansen, who announced his departure from BT in July 2023, is expected to help steer WPP through these challenges. WPP has not yet responded to requests for comments regarding this development.
4. <https://www.cityam.com/287497-nearly-30-per-cent-wpp-investors-revolt-over-sir-martin/> - WPP faced significant shareholder dissent at its annual general meeting, with nearly 30% voting against the pay report related to Sir Martin Sorrell's departure. Investors questioned the appropriateness of Sorrell's remuneration package given the circumstances of his exit. Chairman Roberto Quarta defended the company's handling of the situation, stating that the process was robust both legally and from a governance perspective, and acknowledged the need for further disclosure to address shareholder concerns.
5. <https://www.campaignlive.com/article/wpp-names-ex-bt-chief-philip-jansen-chair-roberto-quarta-steps-down/1882604> - WPP has appointed former BT chief executive Philip Jansen as its new chair, effective January 2025. Jansen will join WPP's board in September and succeed Roberto Quarta, who has been chair since 2015. The appointment follows a lengthy search for a leader to guide WPP amid industry challenges. Jansen's experience in leading technology and consumer goods companies, as well as his background in marketing, is expected to bring valuable insights to WPP's strategic direction.
6. <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20240730944199/en/WPP-Appoints-Philip-Jansen-as-Non-Executive-Chair-of-the-Board> - WPP has announced the appointment of Philip Jansen as a Non-Executive Director and Chair-designate, effective September 16, 2024. Jansen will succeed Roberto Quarta as Non-Executive Chair on January 1, 2025. With a background in leading technology and consumer goods companies, Jansen is expected to bring significant value to WPP. CEO Mark Read expressed gratitude for Quarta's contributions and welcomed Jansen's leadership in transforming WPP for the future.
7. <https://www.odwyerpr.com/story/public/21622/2024-07-30/ex-bt-group-ceo-chair-wpp.html> - WPP has named former BT Group CEO Philip Jansen as non-executive director and chair-designate, effective September 16. He will succeed Roberto Quarta as non-executive chair on January 1, 2025. Jansen, who led BT Group from 2019 to February 2024, is expected to help WPP navigate challenges in the advertising industry, including the impact of artificial intelligence. His appointment follows a lengthy search for a leader to guide WPP amid industry upheaval.