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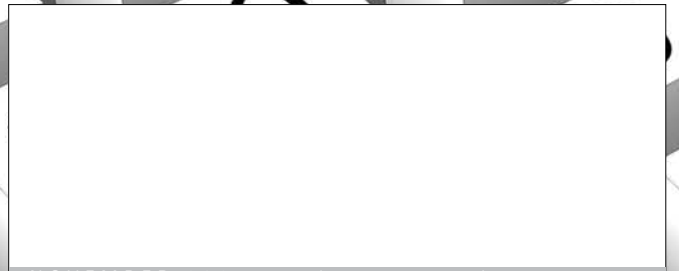
Communications & New Media

Nov. 2021 | Vol. 35 No. 7

TECH

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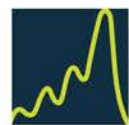
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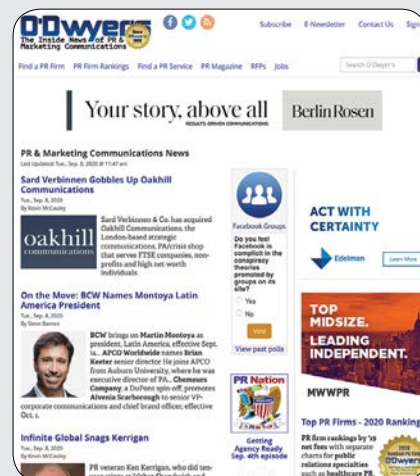
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Facebook's problems aren't going away

Welcome to another installment of How Low Can Facebook's Reputation Go? Once again, the world's largest social media network has found itself mired in controversy for its role in proliferating the spread of misinformation and divisive content online, plunging the company into arguably its biggest public relations crisis to date. But the real difference is that, this time, Facebook's troubles could signal a turning point regarding how digital media companies monitor the user-generated content that flows over their platforms, and may also usher in a new era of government-mandated regulations.

Facebook's latest scandal comes after a former employee turned whistleblower leaked a trove of internal documents to the Securities and Exchange Commission and *The Wall Street Journal*, documents that revealed company employees had repeatedly raised internal concerns in the months leading up to the 2020 presidential election about the constant flow of misinformation, hate speech, conspiracy theories and polarizing content on the site, concerns which the company summarily ignored, presumably out of fear of hampering site engagement and scroll time, and hence, profits. That bombshell development also included internal documents detailing how the social media giant had allegedly turned a blind eye to its own research showing how photo-sharing site Instagram is harmful to teen girls' mental health.

At this juncture, the parallels between Facebook's troubles and the PR crisis that sent big tobacco's reputation up in smoke can't be missed. Reminiscent of when Phillip Morris changed its name to Altria in an effort to adjust its public image after a series of high-profile settlements, Facebook announced days after news of the scandal broke that it had rebranded its corporate parent company to Meta. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg insisted the new brand identity wasn't an attempt to divert attention away from the company's ongoing woes, but instead reflected a months-in-the-making growth strategy as a "metaverse company," which apparently will include a suite of virtual reality products, which the company views as the next online frontier. Still, the cynic in us might suspect the familiar application of window dressing here, of a company attempting to start afresh with a new name in the hopes that we'll forget about its missteps. After all, we've seen this play before.

Admittedly, Facebook is due for a rebirth. It's hardly the first time the platform has faced a crisis. Who could forget the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the shoddy digital architecture that allowed Russian trolls to circulate fake news in an attempt to sway the 2016 presidential election, the numerous data breaches and site crashes, the massive advertiser boycott in the wake of the George Floyd protests? Am I forgetting anything? It's hard to keep track.

Ever since the 2016 election, we've grown increasingly wary of how social media platforms operate and what they do with our data, and Facebook's latest crisis is the clearest indication yet that online social ecosystems are due for an overhaul, that the media companies that own them can't police themselves and aren't doing enough to curb the fake and violence-inciting content that runs rampant over their networks. Social media in 2021 amounts to an informational garbage dump. People have become radicalized, polarized, increasingly filled with bad ideas. It makes sense why Facebook is now moving beyond the social media business. What brand wants to be known as a forum that birthed extremist movements like the ones responsible for the Jan. 6 Capitol riot?

For years, experts have said that media literacy efforts are key to addressing the issue, but I'm not so sure. Most Americans simply want their biases confirmed online, and many aren't interested—or don't possess the critical thinking skills required—to understand when they're being lied to. This is precisely why social media companies find themselves in the quandary they're in: divisive content is reliably more likely to bring in more clicks, views and shares, so there's an incentive to let this content run amok. Facebook gives algorithmic preference to content that elicits negative reactions, such as the anger emoji. Like tobacco, we're beginning to recognize that with social media, the product is the problem.

My guess is that lawmakers will increase their scrutiny of digital platforms in the not-too-distant future. A series of congressional hearings quickly followed Facebook's October scandal, and more are on the way. We can expect increased calls for reforms and the introduction of a slew of bills requiring everything from protections for children to increased transparency measures. Renewed calls for breaking up Big Tech are no doubt on the way. A recent Greentarget report found that more than a third of working journalists (34 percent) believe antitrust laws specific to fake news enforced against Big Tech are likely within the next three years (see more on pg. 8).

The more likely—and realistic—change we'll see will come in the form of self-regulatory efforts from social media companies, be it increased content moderation, privacy protocols, personal data protections and more stringent community standards. Either way, we can expect to see the concept of the social network evolve quickly within the next few years. That's not necessarily a bad thing. ○

— Jon Gingerich

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O'Dwyer's is published seven times a year for \$60.00 (\$7.00 a single issue) by the J.R. O'Dwyer Co., Inc.
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(212) 679-2471 Fax: (212) 683-2750.

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Fake news continues to hurt journalism

Most working journalists say the fake news problem hasn't gotten any better in 2021, according to a recent Greentarget report.

By Jon Gingerich

Despite a change of leadership in the White House, as well as recent efforts by Big Tech to monitor social media and establish protocols to boost media literacy and fight disinformation online, journalists say the “fake news” problem isn't going away and continues to plague the news industry, according to research released by Chicago-based B2B communications agency Greentarget.

Greentarget's annual report, which surveyed journalists to analyze their sentiments surrounding the fake news phenomenon as well as what effects it's had on their profession, found that journalists aren't

feeling much better than they were a year ago about the fake news phenomenon. 84 percent of journalists currently agree that fake news has negatively impacted their profession, compared to 80 percent who'd reported this sentiment for Greentarget's previous report on the topic last year.

One in five journalists surveyed (20 percent) said they believe recent media literacy efforts have had no impact when it comes to lessening the spread of fake news, and only six percent think Big Tech's monitoring of social media has had a significant impact on the problem.

Complicating the issue is the notion that

journalists appear to disagree on the meaning of the term itself: 41 percent of journalists said that when they hear the phrase “fake news,” they consider the term to be a reference to traditional or qualified news sources, compared to 38 percent who said it refers to sites specializing in misinformation, disinformation and propaganda.

Journalists widely believe that false and misleading news is something they and their colleagues have an ethical responsibility to fight: 93 percent said journalists are best positioned to vet and identify fake news, compared to 85 percent last year. Unfortunately, only 39 percent believe their efforts have had a moderate impact on lessening the spread of fake news, and only 14 percent believe their efforts have made a significant impact. ●

'Internet economy' created 17M jobs in '20

The “Internet economy” was responsible for creating more than 17 million jobs in the U.S. in 2020, according to an IAB report.

By Steve Barnes

The “Internet economy” created more than 17 million jobs in the U.S. last year, up seven million from four years

ago, according to a report from the Interactive Advertising Bureau.

That follows a 22 percent jump in the

contribution that the Internet economy has made to the gross domestic product since 2016, reaching \$2.45 trillion last year, out of an overall GDP of \$21.18 trillion.

Small firms and self-employed people accounted for 38 percent of Internet jobs in 2020, with 34 percent coming from the largest Internet companies. The online creator economy now employs 200,000 full-time employees, approaching the numbers of such craft and labor unions as SAG-AFTRA and the American Federation of Musicians.

The IAB study also says that news- and information-related Internet jobs are on an upward swing, rising to 142,000 last year from 46,000 in 2008. Podcasting, streaming video and digital gaming accounted for 34,000 jobs and \$40 billion of revenue last year, the report found.

Another growth area for Internet commerce: human resources jobs. In 2016, the IAB found 5,600 jobs focused on producing Internet software for use by corporate human resources departments. By last year, that number experienced a 13-fold increase to 83,000 jobs.

IAB found that every congressional district in the U.S. is home to Internet-based workers. Also, in 272 of those districts, there are at least 10,000 Internet-dependent jobs.

“The Internet has made business formation a much more democratic process,” said Harvard Business School's John Deighton, who authored the study. “Not only large firms, but also large numbers of small firms and individuals, now have the platforms and tools to find customers, engage with them, and transact.” ●

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Americans skeptical of socially responsible brands

Americans want brands to practice empathy but remain skeptical of their motives when they take a public stance on social issues, according to a recent survey.

By Jon Gingerich

Americans think companies should take more responsibility for their role in society and admit they're more likely to support brands when they take a stance on important social or political issues they agree with, yet they remain widely skeptical of the motives behind the private sector's forays into social activism, according to a survey by PR and marketing agency Method Communications.

Method's report, which sought to gauge Americans' opinions on empathy in society and business culture, found that two-thirds (66 percent) expressed skepticism when brands speak out on social or political issues, either because they think brands are doing it simply for media attention (41 percent) or because it's the popular thing to do (32 percent).

Only about a quarter (25 percent) said they believe companies genuinely believe in the issues they publicly tout, and less than a third (29 percent) think taking a public

stance on a social or political issue is an effective way of practicing empathy.

In addition, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) said brands should stay away from supporting specific political campaigns or candidates.

On the other hand, an overwhelming 92 percent of respondents said they'd like to see brands practice empathy, and more than half (55 percent) said they believe one such demonstration of empathy is when a company takes a stance on a social or political issue.

In total, nearly half (46 percent) of those polled said brands should take more responsibility for their role in society and more than a third (37 percent) said they want brands to take a stance on public issues.

More than half (55 percent) of respondents admitted that they're more likely to purchase from a brand that shows empathy, with virtually the same number (54 per-

cent) claiming that they're similarly more likely to shop with a brand that takes a stance on a cause they agree with.

Americans think the most effective ways the private sector can show empathy are through paying higher wages (43 percent), employing a more diverse workforce (40 percent) and being more accommodating with customers (37 percent). Respondents specifically believe brands today should take a stance on the minimum wage (67 percent), COVID-19 policies (64 percent) and women's rights (62 percent).

Americans particularly believe the technology sector, due to its relative influence and power, bears a responsibility in promoting empathy in today's world. More than half of respondents (51 percent) said tech brands have a greater responsibility in promoting empathy, and nearly a third (30 percent) said they want tech companies to take the lead in promoting empathy.

Method's report, "Is Empathy Dead In America?" surveyed more than 2,000 U.S. residents ages 16 to 76 in July. Data was collected via online survey using market research firm Dynata. ○

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Maintaining brand relevance in a chaotic world

Technology brands landed pandemic panic-buyers, but can they keep them?

By Amy Fisher

I think most of us are surprised that COVID-19 conversations are still relevant, having hung our hopes on 2021 as the year thing would move closer to “normal,” even if it was a completely new normal. But here we are, still working on being agile in a world that has felt very chaotic.

Not only is the pandemic still relevant, it has permanently changed nearly every business-to-business technology brand in the world. It has changed how technology brands position themselves in the market, how they communicate and connect with buyers and even how they develop and launch new products.

First to act will be last to leave

From a communications perspective, it was easy to see which technology brands were leaning in to change and which weren't. Cloud software companies and mobility applications were some of the first to recognize that the pandemic presented a business opportunity to move customers to innovate and adopt new platforms for a newly-remote and distributed workforce. Then came connectivity and engagement solutions such as telemedicine and video conferencing to support the sudden shift away from in-person interactions.

As it became apparent that consumers were staying put at home, logistics and delivery companies stormed onto the scene with new platforms that enabled businesses of all kinds to move products through the supply chain and to the last mile, straight to their buyer's doorsteps. A business model previously dominated by Amazon swiftly became standard for moving both business and consumer products around the world, backed by the latest data-driven, AI and automation technology. And, eCommerce technology brands, already well established, rolled out new features to make online shopping a permanent habit for businesses and consumers alike.

As we settled into the routines of a new work environment, people across all walks of life began to feel the effects of burnout and stress, as well as the impact of being confined to a smaller work / life social circle. Workforce engagement, mental health platforms and online training soon expanded to fill the gaps in productivity and wellness-related services and solutions.

And, finally, technology companies catering to industries that relied on in-person interactions brought forth new health and

safety technology like temperature scanners, traffic monitors, contact tracing and in-school COVID-19 testing platforms.

Branding beyond the immediate need

What we all thought—or hoped—pandemic-wise might be a short window of opportunity to build the brand value of these technologies has turned into a long-term play. As the pandemic permanently changes the way we think about the nature of work, initiatives around digital transformation, hybrid work infrastructures, secure remote access, connectivity and more have become critical elements of immediate technology planning, as opposed to future technology goals. And technology buyers are getting hit from every side with sales and marketing from current vendors as well as technology brands that were forced to jump into the conversation for fear of being left behind.

Technology brands that made a significant marketing push early on in the pandemic now need to consider how to maintain relevance in an increasingly crowded marketplace. This is especially difficult as buying behaviors continue to be erratic and late-entry competitors start to catch up. Plus, technology buyers that made fast decisions out of necessity may now be re-considering the technologies and brands that they embrace, long-term.

Now's the ideal time to step back and re-evaluate your brand strategy. With all the changes, how well do you still know your buyers? What opportunities or threats exist in the market that weren't there two years ago? How will you tell your brand story to maintain and build on the success you had during the pandemic?

Re-evaluate to maintain relevance

To ensure that your marketing and sales efforts continue to be relevant going forward, consider running your executive and communication teams through a new strategic integrated PR and marketing planning process. Redefine your business goals for the next three to five years and outline your key buyer personas, paying special attention to new buyers or buyers that are no longer relevant. Assess each persona to define changes in buying behavior and why or how their buyer's journey has changed.

Ask your team to walk through new or revised buying channels and outline significant influencers and barriers to adoption. Are your buyers more or less apt to

trust certain industry experts, read certain media, or respond to traditional or digital communications? Are they attending live events, or have they moved to virtual engagements?

If you're unsure of too many of the answers or if you have more than a few new buyer segments, consider performing a formal audience assessment, such as path-to-purchase research which can help lay out the behaviors and the steps your stakeholders take as they progress along the buyer's journey.

Don't be surprised if the buyers you thought you knew pre-pandemic have changed significantly. The entire point of slowing down to re-evaluate is to un-

cover these changes and re-position your brand to be successful. Similarly, you may need to implement change communications with internal teams to reinforce how your buyers have shifted, shake people out of their old ways and get them to embrace new sales and marketing tactics.

But, once you understand the new landscape and get your teams onboard, it will be much easier to define the PR, marketing and digital programs that will help you engage with your buyers, effectively articulate your brand value and connect with real purpose.

Technology brands that take a step back and re-evaluate now will be able to make more meaningful connections with existing customers and prospects, reinforce their value as technology providers and build stronger, longer-lasting partnerships. And remember, you don't have to tackle this alone. Padilla's role is to guide B2B technology companies through the integrated planning process. We do this in partnership with all our B2B technology clients at different stages of growth and change, from start-ups to Fortune 500 brands. Your journey and purpose are unique, but leveraging tried and true brand planning methodologies can help you quickly re-adjust to meet the needs of today's customers and solidify your relevance in the market.

Amy Fisher, APR, is a Vice President in Padilla's Technology Practice focusing on integrated B2B marketing, PR and digital communication across health, industrial, food and enterprise technology. ●



Amy Fisher

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Breaking through the clutter at industry events

How companies can leverage tech trade show events to boost awareness, demonstrate creativity, build thought leadership and deliver extra ROI.

By Henry Feintuch

When the global pandemic hit and lockdowns began, PR firms shuttered their offices and went virtual. Despite a great deal of initial uncertainty, business rebounded in many segments, though our colleagues in some markets—including travel and hospitality—underwent a longer period of downturn.

For those of us serving the tech and b2b markets, an important part of our clients' marketing year went dark as all trade shows, association meetings and industry events hit a hard stop. The b2b trade show market in the U.S., worth \$15.58 billion in 2019, tanked to approximately \$5.6 billion in 2020. Some projections show the market on a slow rebound to \$14.5 billion by 2024.

During normal years, trade shows are the events everyone loves to hate. They're costly, time intensive and absorb a disproportionate amount of marketing attention from companies' annual calendars. But for those of us in PR and marketing who've worked trade fairs, we know they present an opportunity to demonstrate our creativity and build thought leadership, meet the press—in-person—influence influencers and help our clients to sell their products/services.

Here are some examples of how some companies, occasionally with very lean budgets, leveraged trade show events to deliver considerable extra ROI.

Flexibility in audio-visual technology

ZeeVee is a pioneer in AV over IP technology, the transmission of AV content over open-standard Internet Protocol networks. But the privately held company had limited market recognition. For its upcoming exhibition at the 2018 InfoComm trade show, with a key product introduction planned, our client needed to attract attention to its back of show floor booth.

With the theme of "flexibility" of its AVoIP SDVoE technology, we set out to visually illustrate their key product differentiator by hiring a contortionist to do in-booth shows every hour. Following her gymnastic display of flexibility, ZeeVee's marketing manager took the microphone for a tech demonstration of AV flexibility.

It worked well beyond expectations: crowds formed, media shot photos/ videos and customers sought out demos and generated buzz. Show results included seven media briefings, winning of AV Technology Best of Show award for ZeeVee's ZyPerMX4 four-channel IP encoder and 16 show-related placements.

Blackberry vs. Israeli software

In 2007, at the annual CTIA conference—now absorbed by the Mobile World Congress—Israeli telecom software company eMoze wanted to demonstrate that its push email service was better and faster than the then-prevalent Blackberry. How to do that at the largest telecom conference in the U.S., where eMoze was outspent and outgunned by all the majors?



How do you illustrate "flexibility" in AV technology at a trade show? Hire a contortionist!

Our solution was to challenge Blackberry to a duel. We turned eMoze's show booth into an old Western corral and placed posters challenging Blackberry to meet us at high noon. Curious crowds thronged the booth for the showdown. When Blackberry was a no-show—as expected—we asked an audience member with a Blackberry to serve as a stand-in. A member of the Israel marketing team, dressed as a cowboy, stood back-to-back with the Blackberry owner. They each took 10 paces, turned and fired an email. eMoze's arrived first and our Blackberry stand-in lost the contest. Photos of the duel made the show dailies and the company's booth was busy throughout the conference.

If you're an outsider, become an insider

For consumer electronics and smart band developer, Healbe, building recognition for its GoBe2 watch, was a challenge. The device could automatically track users' calorie consumption, body hydration and stress level but the Russian/American import was up against rivals such as the Apple watch

and FitBit.

So, for CES 2018, we negotiated a sponsorship of the giant conference's health and wellness track. That resulted in exposure at CES' New York preview event two months before the conference and a speaking slot at the Vegas event. We offered product samples to key journalists attending the show, conducted numerous in-booth demos and participated in the ShowStoppers media event. Coverage was extensive and Healbe was able to negotiate a number of critical retail and licensing partnerships as a result.



Henry Feintuch

If you're an insider, keep communicating

Just two months ahead of CES 2018, the HDMI Forum announced the release of Version 2.1 of the HDMI Specification. Though all HDMI 2.0 adopters were well aware of the announcement, the industry was hungry for news. The announcement became the centerpiece of HDMI Licensing Administrator's CES exhibition.

We arranged for HDMI to participate in the CES preview press conference in Las Vegas and scheduled our own standalone media event. The media invite promised "a rare opportunity to get a complete update on the new HDMI 2.1 specification and the HDMI technology marketplace, including the latest adopter and market penetration statistics from both HDMI Forum and HDMI LA executives."

The result surpassed client expectations with more than 150 journalists—print, broadcast and online—jamming into our Mandalay Bay conference room to learn how the new specification would help to transform a wide range of consumer electronics industries. The news went around the world and proved to be one of the most important developments of the 2018 event.

The worst of the pandemic may be behind us. That, in turn, should signal a return to whatever the new normal may be in trade shows and events. Putting extra effort, and creativity, into trade show planning can mean the difference between a burdensome, obligatory event and one that turbocharges yours or your clients' marketing and sales success.

Henry Feintuch is President of Feintuch Communications. ○



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Tech PR's 2022 tenets: authenticity, inclusivity, impact

Tech companies have an opportunity to address society's biggest challenges and position themselves as stewards of positive change.

By Allyne Mills

Time and time again, technology has risen to meet society's biggest challenges. As we continue to address the COVID-19 pandemic, this has never been truer. The nearly universal acceleration in the adoption of technologies by consumers and corporations for communication, commerce, cybersecurity and health, to name a few, has also shifted physical, philosophical and very real business structures and priorities. Even as they have brought to market new innovations and facilitated services critical for global resilience, geopolitical, social and environmental issues have impacted technology companies in ways they did not anticipate, and that are likely to continue.

Whether advancing AI, 5G, VR/AR, cybersecurity, quantum computing, IoT, robotics, cloud or smart everything, no matter what the industry sector, it's imperative in 2022 and beyond that technology companies look inward and take action. This reflection should be multifold. Review the expanse and inclusiveness of their cultures. Question their own authenticity: does what they do mirror what they say? Identify the tangible impact their technologies and solutions are having on society. Filtering this assessment through the lens of their corporate values, technology companies may find they need to realign and reboot.

Authenticity, hybrid work and values

The reality today and for the foreseeable future is that workforces will, for the most part, be distributed and dynamic. Hence, customers, partners, investors and prospects will also likely continue to commingle their personal and professional lives. Anyone who's been on a teleconference has experienced on- and off-screen fly-bys of children, pets, roommates or car traffic. Whether humorous or a hindrance, there's no denying hybrid work has had a humanizing effect on many corporate cultures.

As technology companies determine their individual hybrid processes and policies, transparency will go a long way towards strengthening the authenticity of their brands. Because of the greater emphasis on cloud computing, collection of big data and information security, demand for technology talent is significant and will only grow through 2030, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. So, implications extend to the potential candidates

tech companies may be looking to recruit. Being genuine helps build credibility. For technology companies, this is tied to the values they espouse and publicly communicate about how they're approaching the future of work that's upon us.

Inclusiveness and innovation

The confluence of geopolitics, the pandemic, racial, social and environmental issues punctuate how critical diversity, equity, inclusion and sustainability are to corporate reputations. And the media will continue to shine a light on these concerns. Nearly 80 percent of workers in a recent CNBC/SurveyMonkey Workforce Survey say they want to work for a company that values diversity, equity and inclusion. Compared to overall private industry, historically technology companies employ a larger share of white men compared to African-Americans, Hispanics and women. The opportunity for technology companies isn't simply to acknowledge the issue publicly, but to quantify, qualify and show how DEI is ingrained in their values and daily operations. It's a natural expectation that tech-driven companies use data and insights in the solutions and services they deploy to customers, but also to better run their own businesses.

For example: What are the programs being implemented to eliminate discrimination, provide training and advancement opportunities for technologists from underrepresented populations? How is technology facilitating unbiased recruitment and fostering retention? What impact is a more diverse, inclusive and equitable culture having on innovation and the transformational solutions being brought to market?

There's little doubt that the global supply chain crisis fueling media and political conversations will be around well into the next year. Many technology companies have capabilities to help address this challenge. But looked at another way, it's also a chance to support and advocate for supply chain diversity, which can have significant economic, social and environmental impact. This could mean committing to a target of spending with businesses that are more than 51 percent owned or controlled by an individual or group traditionally underrepresented or marginalized. Similar requirements for working with suppliers that have decarbonization and sustainabil-

ity mandates can be implemented. If it's already inherent in their business practices, technology companies should look beyond compliance. How is supply chain diversity benefiting the communities in which those very providers operate?

Technology matters, but its impact matters more

Powerful, human, society-changing stories are at the core of all great technological advancements. But these must be more than casual anecdotes or asides during a software demo. A regular cadence of research and meaningful, measurable benchmarks supporting key initiatives can provide data and insights exponential-ly valuable for conveying the authenticity, innovation and impact of those endeavors.

Whether through webinars and whitepapers, social videos, podcasts or blogs—or campaigns integrating all of these and more—there's never been more engaging approaches and targeted channels through which to amplify those stories and strategically measure their influence. Tweeting media coverage of a transformation story, for example, can trigger a cascade of engagement, guiding a prospect to a company blog, report download, webinar registration, to share with colleagues and positively shape their evaluation of the business as a potential partner. While the press is central to imparting programs with third-party credibility and strengthening brand visibility, journalists are increasingly under pressure, juggling several beats and responsible for producing multiple deadline-intensive stories. So, thought leadership across owned channels is a vital part of the mix.

By leading with authenticity, inclusivity and impact, the valuable context and narrative for the advancements technology companies are bringing to the world can rise to the fore and flourish. That doesn't mean codes, digits and widgets don't matter, but focusing on the heart of the "why" will more strongly resonate if technology companies want to be known as true stewards of positive change.

Allyne Mills is a Senior Partner in FINN Partners' technology practice. ○



Allyne Mills



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Overcoming the net zero carbon communications gap

Achieving net zero emissions is a goal for many organizations, but it can feel out of reach. Here's how companies overcome shareholder criticism while doing what's best for the environment. **By Alex Wittner**

In the wake of the IPCC report, it's become indisputable that humans are influencing the warming of the earth. However, with the 26th UN Climate Change conference around the corner, along with Europe's recent pledge to become the world's first net zero emissions continent by 2050, it's clear there's growing momentum for a greener planet.

Future-proofing the environment is top of mind for forward-thinking technology companies, but progress is slow. Calls to action are mounting from consumers, investors, and government bodies, yet only 20 percent of the world's 2,000 largest corporations have made any sort of net zero carbon commitments to date.

The step towards net zero is an important one, not just because it's the right thing to do for the planet, but because prioritizing climate issues also gives companies a competitive advantage. Between 2011 and 2019, the Stoxx Global Climate Change Leaders index outperformed the Stoxx Global 1800 index by 5.3 percent per annum. In order to reap the many benefits of climate-focused initiatives, PR leaders should play a leading role helping companies overcome the net zero carbon communications gap.

Challenges

Sustainable business is the future, but there's still a lot of work to be done before our climate targets are within reach. Approaching net zero is an especially daunting task for the four-fifths of businesses that haven't yet broached the topic, but starting a conversation about the challenges can get the ball rolling:

- While frameworks are under development, there are no formal reporting regulations in place and likely won't be for years, which leaves many companies directionless and unable to accurately measure their impact.
- The first movers are facing scrutiny for failing to disclose enough specifics—tactics and timelines—detailing how they plan to reach their goals. But until regulations are implemented, there are no formal disclosure and compliance requirements to keep companies in check.
- Companies fear scrutiny from the industry if their planned practices are deemed less effective. While there's truth that approaches like carbon offsets—planting trees or protecting forests—have a smaller impact than reducing reliance on fossil fuels, any impact is better than none.

Despite these challenges, companies don't need to have all of the answers to take action; it's more important to start the process and inform stakeholders. There are three key practices companies can adopt to benefit the environment—and their shareholders—while avoiding criticism:

1. Involve key decision makers from day one

2. Develop a flexible plan

3. Overcommunicate to all shareholders

Internal Communications: Get all decision makers involved early

Net zero is a seemingly simple concept; offset greenhouse gas production by taking measures to reduce existing greenhouse gases. But in reality, it's a topic that has baffled the world's greatest environmentalists for decades. Achieving net zero is a multifaceted problem that touches every part of a company, so there's no one-size-fits-all approach. But despite the lack of an obvious path forward, one thing is clear: real change starts from the top. In order to create a lasting impact—on both stakeholders and the environment—it's essential that key decision makers get involved right from the start.

Collaboration is necessary for progress

Whether the goal is healthy returns or a healthier planet—or both—the pursuit of net zero must intertwine with every aspect of the organization. Companies can do this by involving the executive team and board members in early planning stages to share cross-organizational knowledge and external expertise. They can then assign a core task force to gather that knowledge and distribute it throughout the organization, making clear the direction, steps and goals to all key decision-makers. Coupled with regular, climate-focused meetings, this approach will help prioritize net zero planning and create a culture of positive change.

Wisdom can come from unexpected places

However, change doesn't always have to come from within the company. External partners can also be helpful collaborators; they may be working on their own ESG or net zero targets and could have useful insights that may supplement the process. Even competitive alliances can help with early-stage and more advanced plan development. Plus, working together can lead to even larger scale benefits:

Lead by example. Putting purpose over profits to develop industry-wide standards

with other major players is one of the most effective ways to make a lasting difference.

Provide guidance. These mutually beneficial, strategic relationships should reframe how the industry approaches net zero and creates accountability.

Rather than waiting years for frameworks, you can make a bigger impact if you start putting plans and partnerships into place now. In fact, eight of the world's leading insurance and reinsurance companies recently launched an alliance to help speed up a transition to a net zero emissions economy.

Create a plan that allows for flexibility

Implementing sweeping climate pledges without interim targets and measurable tactics is like delivering pizza without a map: you might reach your destination eventually, but you'll waste a lot of time and money in the process. In order to remain accountable, companies must establish timelines for their initiatives and implement cross-divisional reporting systems to measure progress.

But most importantly, companies need a plan of attack that not only uses net zero as a north star but also includes measurable milestones that will help them stay on track; it's important to integrate both smaller and larger scale targets that involve key partners. This provides the flexibility to pivot to a new strategy if one isn't working and the momentum to get the entire organization involved. While developing targets, it's important to keep in mind that:

- Directly reducing emissions is much more effective and sustainable than paying others to offset those emissions.
- Net zero isn't just about reducing future emissions; it's about addressing the pollution that already exists.
- To be successful, the entire organization and value chain must be prepared to align with and work towards net zero goals.

The net zero landscape is constantly changing and nobody has all of the answers. Rather than waiting until you find the perfect solution before getting started, you're better off assembling a team and structure that work to discover solutions through discussion and experimentation.



Alex Wittner

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Communications key to advancing clean energy

Communication is essential to advancing public energy policy, and the current conversation surrounding renewable energy tells us there's still work to be done.

By Rachel Roseneck

In 2021, you may think that the clean energy transition is well underway. Renewable energy is the fastest-growing energy source in the United States. Thirty-eight states have implemented renewable energy standards. The Biden administration is taking federal action to scale the country's clean energy resources, including the recently announced goal for solar power to produce half of US electricity by 2050.

Most importantly, there's widespread support for the clean energy transition: Polling shows that most Americans are in favor of transitioning to 100 percent clean energy by 2035, regardless of if they live in a blue or red state.

So, why do the headlines tell a different story? Policymakers and industry advocates have successfully codified ambitious clean energy mandates, yet an examination of the most shared clean energy news shows that the public conversation is sharply divided, and largely informed by partisan politics and flat-out misinformation compounded by social media.

Digital consumer intelligence platform BrandWatch shows there have been more than 1.4 million mentions of clean energy online in the U.S. since January 2019. Moments where the clean energy conversation volume was highest—meaning articles were shared at the highest rate—were primarily driven by political news and extreme weather.

The most significant spike in the clean energy conversation, with more than twice the amount of online posts than any other moment over the past two years, occurred during the Texas energy crisis. This spike

resulted in a staggering 98,989 posts in a single week—and misinformation about renewables and their role in the crisis dominated the narrative.

Social media worsened the spread of Texas energy crisis misinformation. Online activist group Avaaz analyzed a sample of high-performing, false narratives on Facebook during President Biden's first 60 days in office. They found that misinformation related to renewable energy and climate change resulted in an estimated 25 million views across Facebook. Three posts from Fox News promoting the false claim that frozen wind turbines were responsible for the Texas energy crisis made up 31 percent of those estimated views, representing more than 7.5 million views.

The clean energy industry faces two clear problems: For decades, the fossil fuel industry has used lobbying, litigation and strategic communication tactics to weaken policies favorable to renewables. The Texas energy crisis shows us that these efforts remain a key threat to the advancement of American clean energy. At the same time, there's a clear gap in positive narratives about the energy transition. Stories about job creation, manufacturing opportunities, and public health and cost-savings benefits should be at the forefront of the conversation. Instead, political news and misinformation dominate the public discourse.

Despite these challenges, there's an opportunity to take advantage of burgeoning support for renewables. Now's the time for the clean energy industry to meet the moment by initiating proactive, data-driven public education campaigns that will combat mis-

information spread and reinforce positive sentiment toward the energy transition.

Already, there are existing insights that a proactive public education can build upon. Research shows that while Democrats support renewable energy as a solution for climate change, Republicans support renewables for economic reasons such as job creation, lower energy costs and increasing America's energy independence. Going forward, regular public research can be used to inform messaging nuances and address rapidly changing perceptions among the public, particularly as new policies take hold. Findings should be shared liberally among all industry stakeholders, including companies, trade associations, advocacy groups and policymakers themselves to align messaging.

The U.S. has set a record for renewable deployment in the last year, with major climate and clean energy policy wins at our back. But without stronger public education on these policies, the clean energy industry risks jeopardizing this monumental progress. By leveraging real-world impacts, data-driven messaging, and more aggressive, proactive public education, we can successfully mitigate these risks, reinforce support for the clean energy transition and successfully build the buy-in necessary to advance ambitious climate and energy policy.

Rachel Roseneck is a Clean Energy Leadership Institute Fellow and Associate Director at Kivvit. ●



Rachel Roseneck

CARBON COMMUNICATIONS GAP

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Overcommunicate

One of the main factors hindering progress towards net zero is a lack of communication. Customers, investors—even internal stakeholders—feel like they're left in the dark because companies are unclear about their approach, goals and progress. Without visibility into the company's net zero initiatives, it's difficult to establish trust or build confidence.

In order to connect with stakeholders, companies must share goals externally when the time is right and be transparent about their progress, challenges, and unknowns. Bad news or sudden adjustments

to plans can be alarming to stakeholders, but they will be much more understanding if your company is transparent right from the start. If and when an adjustment to your plan becomes necessary, it's important to share:

- What the change is and how it will be implemented.
- Why the change is being made.
- What the change is expected to accomplish.
- How this decision furthers the relevant interim—and, ultimately, overarching net zero—goal.

In communications, companies can further build confidence by focusing on the processes and structures that help to address and overcome obstacles when they

arise. Involvement in external alliances—such as partnership networks—can be especially useful in building credibility and keeping the focus on long-term outcomes.

The path to net zero is a global puzzle with millions, if not billions of moving parts, and it's constantly changing. Many companies are afraid to jump in because they don't have all the answers, but the reality is that no one does. But creating a plan isn't about having all of the answers, it's about taking action. It's not too late—and definitely not too early—to implement a robust net zero strategy, execute against that plan and communicate challenges and progress along the way.

Alex Wittner is Account Director of Tech PR at ICR. ●

How to be useful to journalists

Tips for breaking through with reporters and establishing effective media relations outreach practices that build your media portfolio and land press coverage.

By Curtis Sparrer

A typical high-tech reporter receives something like 100-200 story pitches each and every day. As a result, PR professionals are faced with the difficult, if not seemingly impossible, task of cutting through the noise and clutter to help clients gain mindshare from journalists and to ultimately secure positive coverage.

Obviously, this means that tech PR pros are faced with the challenge of how to break through with reporters and where to begin, particularly if they're new to the profession or working with a client that isn't well-established. I would argue that one of the easiest ways to build an effective media relations practice is also pretty simple—work on being useful to reporters.

The benefits of the “utility” approach become quite clear when one thinks of the pressures that reporters face and their resulting need for reliable and trustworthy partners on the PR side. As the saying goes, “it takes a village,” and accepting some level of support from the PR community simply helps reporters do their jobs more effectively. Being useful takes many forms, and it can be a PR pro's secret weapon in the area of tech media relations.

Being useful starts with being reliable. This of course means returning calls, e-mails and other messages, including those delivered via networking and social platforms like LinkedIn or Twitter, promptly and completely. One never knows when a simple on-deadline fact-checking request just might turn into a bigger story or when being the first to call back means that your client's products, perspective or executive quote is included in a story. This is why being reliable matters and why PR people owe it to themselves to bring their “A game” all of the time when it comes to scrupulous and diligent follow-up with journalists.

Being an ongoing, helpful resource for background information is similarly useful in building journalist relationships. Proactively offering industry stats or specialized data, as well as information in the form of company expertise or technical subject matter experts, will build credibility and respect. In addition, our firm is a big believer in primary research to create news hooks and sharing the current state of a given industry through empirical data, which is a proven technique to gain and keep the attention of reporters. By offering useful industry data without expectation of

“quid pro quo” coverage, your company or client will be positioned as a thought leader and viewed as a neutral, honest provider of meaningful industry intelligence. And more likely than not, when the next coverage opportunity arises, reporters who have seen your research will think of you and make the call.

Another key best practice around making oneself useful—going hand-in-hand with being an honest broker—is sharing compelling information with journalists first. This may take the form of offering key industry news tidbits, sharing advance news when appropriate and/or offering journalists the opportunity to break news or pre-run an announcement. It can also include offering special extras and value-adds around a given story, such as a unique infographic or an executive sit-down interview, as part of the media relations process.

Respect for journalists' time is also critical in tech PR, and a big part of being useful is making yourself available for journalists on their timetable, not yours. This may mean early morning or late evening calls and managing multiple schedules across numerous individual calendars and time zones. As we know, schedule coordination around media availabilities is a big part of a PR person's job, especially when one is dealing with fast-moving news or events that require management of both spokespeople and the deadline-driven schedules of reporters. While it seems obvious to state that this is just part of the job, many PR practitioners would be well-advised to focus on better executing this basic function, because it will bear fruit in the form of media results.

Similarly, it's important that PR people not waste journalists' time with non-news. This translates to concise, on-target pitches that focus on a reporter's actual beat and interests! It's definitely not spamming every reporter under the sun with a pitch or a news announcement just to make up the numbers. Forcing journalists to sort through questionable pitch e-mails causes media relations efforts to be more difficult across the board. Not only does it waste everyone's time, but it also gives PR people a bad name. If a PR pro becomes associated with these shoddy pitches, chances are good that even their best and most appropriate news will be ignored.

Another path to building allies in the

media is to be a consistent advocate and cheerleader for the work of journalists that are in your orbit. In practical terms, this means actually reading their work and offering positive, thoughtful commentary and feedback when and where appropriate. Most reporters will appreciate the perspective of communications pros who are in the industry that they cover, and they will be more likely to recognize—and read—your pitches when it becomes clear that you're actually paying attention. In the same vein, many successful tech PR pros have grown in their careers in parallel with various reporters and editors over the years. As a result, being supportive of someone when they're a junior reporter is likely to be remembered positively, creating professional camaraderie and friendships that can last for entire careers.

While the above-mentioned best practices and advice might be considered unglamorous, I truly believe that focusing on these basics can provide a pathway to success in the “real world” of tech PR media relations. These solutions require only thoughtfulness and some effort on the part of the PR practitioner, and implementing them can and will grow your portfolio of media relationships, helping to gain more, and more impactful, media coverage.

Curtis Sparrer is co-Founder and Principal at Bospar. ○



Curtis Sparrer

PR news brief

Bospar rallies PR vs. Texas abortion ban

Bospar has organized the PProviding Choices virtual job fair for PR pros looking to relocate from Texas as a result of that state's abortion ban.

On Sept. 19, the San Francisco technology shop offered its six Austin employees relocation money if they feel the need to exit the Lonestar Star due to the law.

The job fair will launch Nov. 4 at 7 a.m. CDT and run for 30 days, showcasing roles available in PR and communications, in places not subject to the ban.

It is free to attend and other participating agencies include Bateman Agency, BOCA, EvolveMKD, Highwire PR, Karbo Communications, Manhattan Strategies, Redwood Climate Communications, Strange Brew Strategies and Trier and Company.



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How cyberattacks target stakeholders

Ransomware attacks are an omnipresent risk in today's business climate. As businesses have enhanced their crisis communications playbooks and deepened their sophistication in response to this growing threat, cyber actors are constantly evolving their tactics, requiring organizations to similarly adjust their ransomware communications efforts.

By Josh Chodor, Evan Roberts and Meredith Griffanti

For businesses hit by ransomware attacks, paying the ransom is often the most practical solution to recovering data and minimizing an extremely stressful situation.

However, paying a ransom, which can sometimes range into the millions, is easier said than done. In situations where a ransom isn't or can't be paid for a variety of business reasons—such as potential sanctions—organizations need to prepare for the avenues that threat actors will leverage to inflict significant reputational harm.

A common theme of today's ransomware attacks is double extortion: Not only will a threat actor lock a company's files and demand a ransom payment, but it will also threaten to release sensitive information that has been exfiltrated from a victim organization's environment. These threat actors may not truly care about the content of such data; it's simply a money-making operation.

Direct communication with key stakeholders

An evolution of the double extortion attack is particularly sinister: direct outreach to a victim company's stakeholders. This new strategy forces organizations, already under tremendous pressure, to act quickly to get ahead of the messaging around an attack in an attempt to reduce reputational risk and maintain stakeholder trust.

Over the past few months, cybersecurity industry publications have written about situations where companies faced this type of extortion from CI0p and REvil ransomware groups. In these scenarios, customers who provided email addresses to the target companies received messages indicating that sensitive personal and business information was contained among the stolen data.

Target companies, facing not only business disruption from encryption, but also damage to key stakeholder relationships, may be more likely to make the ransom payment to minimize stakeholder backlash.

Cyber actors also have increasingly relied on direct outreach to the press to tout their successes and publicly pressure impacted organizations into paying the ransom, something REvil leaders have admitted.

As an added threat, cyber actors will do their homework and look into a company's financial records for insurance policies in order to determine how much money they can truly extort.

Cyber actors may also publish victimized company information on dedicated webpages on the dark web referred to as "shame sites," which not only provide proof that a company was hacked, but also allows for niche trade journalists to potentially share news of the company's incident with the general public—before the organization itself has a chance to do so.

If the threat of ransomware groups using double extortion techniques and directly communicating with stakeholders wasn't concerning enough, a new tactic has emerged called "triple extortion." This tactic, recently deployed by the Avaddon ransomware group, involves a Distributed Denial-of-Service attack on a company's website should they delay in paying a ransom.

A DDoS attack isn't a new tactic, but it has been weaponized to increase pressure on victim organizations. DDoS attacks are defined as malicious attempts to disrupt or overwhelm a server or network infrastructure by flooding it with false traffic. They can be particularly painful for a company hit by ransomware, as a vital artery for communicating with stakeholders is disabled. Cyber actors who organize DDoS attacks will leverage website access in exchange for a ransom payment, adding another hurdle to the crisis communications process.

How companies can respond

As threat actors continue to adapt and evolve, companies too must plan and document their cyber communications response strategy in advance. A key tenet of this is preparation: companies test and drill against their cyber communications plan proactively to answer and solve for questions that could make or break a business.

Such questions should include: How do you plan to contact customers, employees, and other stakeholders when systems are taken offline? Who would lead the crisis communications response to a ransomware attack, and what advisors are already retained or need to be hired to support that

response?

It's often too late to answer these critical questions once the worst has happened. Without an integrated and transparent communications plan and approach, organizations should not expect customers and other stakeholders to remain patient as the incident evolves.

While cyber actors may use many different tactics to exert pressure on a target company to get them to pay a ransom, providing continuous and proactive communications around the issue with important audiences will help to mitigate the company's reputational risk of being truly paralyzed by an attack.

Facts are your best weapons in the early hours, days and weeks of an incident—be truthful and transparent about what you do and don't know about the situation and continue to adjust and update as remediation and restoration progress is made.

No matter the tactic employed by cyber actors, companies can still retain employee and customer loyalty, and preserve their reputations, by clearly and authentically communicating about the path forward, even if the destination isn't yet apparent.

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Josh Chodor



Evan Roberts



Meredith Griffanti

Improving the omnichannel marketing experience

Why personalization and customization are key in creating better omnichannel experiences.

By Nicholas Love

We know there's a significant difference between incremental innovation and substantial innovation, and that the difference between the two drives choice in nearly everything we do. By necessity, communicators and marketers must focus on:

- Delivering experiences that allow brands to be more thoughtful about the audiences with which they're engaging.
- Seamless channel integration due to the importance of omnichannel activity in the world in which we live.
- The ability to move audiences through various forms of the funnel with the intent of creating frictionless conversions led by value-rich content.
- Understanding the role and effectiveness of each channel in driving the desired result and maximizing spend allocation.

Building a better user experience

We've witnessed the mass adoption of a digital-first mindset across the world. As a result, the many channels we come in contact with every day, including social media newsfeeds, email inboxes, SMS marketing, advertising, mobile apps, search engine result pages and other digital channels, are as competitive as ever. We've heard the cliché of "experience is the new brand," and, in many ways, it's true. However, let's be clear, you can't have a brand experience without a user experience. User experience must drive a point of differentiation as it speaks specifically to a person's takeaway from a brand's product. User experiences are meant to be relevant, drive recall and resonance. If you are not delivering on those key points, you fall victim to limiting your brand's ability to elevate your reputation and serve as a solution for a particular pain point they may be experiencing or problem they are facing.

Planning is critical, and omnichannel marketing must represent the intent to educate your audience first and often across several devices, channels, and, most importantly, different content forms. Remember, the importance of video still exists, and if nothing else, has been amplified over the last 18 months. Social audio has become a staple in attempts to build diversified content mixes and communities. The dependency on solid writing remains while data and analytics are now normal in performance-driven cultures. However,

one of the most important aspects of performance-driven cultures is the level of curiosity on display. Our digital team spends quite a bit of time discussing the importance of being intellectually curious and being "allergic" to the dreaded plateau. Ensuring that we're asking the right questions instead of providing the right solution to the wrong question has become a must to our strategic planning approach. With an oversaturation of activity and content across digital channels, audiences are craving seamless interactions with brands, and brands must be in information acquisition mode to build personal and customized experiences.

Sometimes, users don't know exactly what their needs are, and personalization seeks to humanize a brand by providing content and functionality that anticipates a consumer's needs, interests and wants with no effort from the user, and methods like AI and machine learning largely drive this. Personalization is controlled by the company and relies on a broad set of demographic data. It's generally managed through an experience platform that follows the interactions of a user along a journey. Personalization is a very effective marketing tactic despite the dependency on technology, which can become outdated because of technological advancements. According to a 2020 Salesforce survey, 66 percent of customers expect companies to understand their needs and expectations. This expectation also focuses on reducing silos between departments and channels as frictionless conversions are table stakes these days.

Customizing your brand experience

While personalization and customization are often interchangeably used, they are different. Customization is driven by human preference as it works well under the idea that users know their needs. Customization allows companies to further target and segment audiences through touchpoints that will enable them to select what they need or want as an exchange for profile-based information. By doing so, companies can earn the rewards of this information.

Relevance. By allowing a user to customize their experience, brands deliver a more relevant brand experience that's suited specifically to their stated needs and, when

memorable, contributes to their ability to recall what they've experienced.

Engagement. Customized content provides a shortcut for users in terms of getting to their needs. As a result, engagement skews higher because their needs are being met. A great example of this is Buzzer, the new sports experience technology that curates the best live moments in sports to each fan's preferences while simplifying the discovery and viewing experience of live sports on mobile in a short form live format



Nicholas Love

Understanding. Customized content applications allow brands to better understand the needs and preferences of individual users and apply those learnings to enhance future efforts

Preference. We operate in a world full of preferences. By leveraging gathered intelligence, converting users into customers—and, ultimately, into loyal customers—is where your time should be spent and maximized as opposed to wondering what will resonate with your audience and guessing

Creating your omnichannel experience

At its core, personalization and customization represent the necessity of providing solution-based experiences as brands must emphasize the needs of their target audiences. Modern marketing recognizes that customers are in charge. If your companies' data, technology, and content aren't operating in an integrated fashion, you aren't delivering valuable experiences during a time in which brands must continuously create and win with user experience. Remember, your brand image is not what you say, but it's the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that users encounter when interacting with your brand. It's imperative that each touchpoint provides you and your team with additional user intelligence to continuously influence how your brand is received by its target audience. If not, you run the risk of being known as a brand that is out of touch with the preferences that users are essentially demanding. In the end, this leads to a brand's digital transformation; there's no quick fix but it's a journey that never stops.

Nicholas Love is VP of Digital Marketing at G&S. ○

A golden age for virtual awards

How the rise of the virtual world gave a surprise boost to online events and awards ceremonies.

By Rose Ross

Ten years ago, when we launched the Tech Trailblazers Awards, no one “got” an awards scheme without a physical ceremony. “No black tie? No LBD? No awards dinner? How could that work?” Virtual awards were an alien concept in the pre-COVID world.

But it seems there was method to our madness. Our MVP—to coin the startup term for a minimum viable product—was to focus on the awards as an opportunity for boot-strapped and more mature enterprise tech startups to promote themselves and to get some much-needed visibility when the “usual suspects” at awards were traditionally bigger, more established tech companies or consumer tech upstarts—oops I mean startups!

As the only independent enterprise tech startup awards program with global reach and recognition, the Tech Trailblazers has been recognizing and rewarding exceptional innovations virtually since 2012. Think infosecurity, AI, blockchain, cloud, IoT and beyond.

Because we’re global, we’d decided that unless we could welcome all finalists to an event, we’d not do one at all. Who knew that ten years later, virtual events were the only thing people could attend, and now, no one bats an eye at a virtual meeting or awards ceremony!

The ‘new normal’

Due to the pandemic, the gradual, pre-existing trend towards more virtual work environments accelerated overnight in Spring 2020. Sure, there were initial challenges and teething problems, but new opportunities and lightbulb moments followed too. As businesses embraced virtual setups in order to survive, the result was new initiatives like virtual conferences, more efficient processes and a heightened interest in developing and maintaining global relationships without jumping on a plane. The world has been forced to think outside the box, garnering incredible, creative solutions embracing our “new normal.”

In January 2020, PRCA research found that 64 percent of in-house communications leaders would consider hiring a virtual PR agency, and pointed to the benefits of doing so. Fast forward a few months and this was true for 100 percent of them. The same it seems is true for virtual events, including awards.

In our new eBook, Startup50 Founder and Editor-in-Chief Jeff Vance predicted that by

2030, the enterprise tech startup landscape will no longer need to rely on any particular place or region to find talent that exists globally, thanks to the pandemic’s virtual revolution.

So, from virtual workplaces and distributed teams, to online conferences and events now commonplace, virtual is here to stay.

Providing value to entrants is key

The Tech Trailblazers Awards has been 100 percent virtual from day one, allowing us to be nimble and provide value to cash-strapped startups. This means we can offer low barriers to entry, with realistic fees for startups to sign off on. What’s more, our Firestarter Bursary—covering the cost of entry to one category—ensures early-stage startups up to three years old don’t miss out either.

Awards programs can also add value to entrants in the submission and judging processes. For us, it’s an important chance for entrants to consider what information they should have in their pitch deck, so the entry process also doubles up as an exercise on reinventing and expanding their elevator pitch. The judges are especially keen to hear the voice of the executive team come through clearly in a submission. The CEO or founder is likely to be able to provide a clear picture of a business, its technology, go-to-market strategy and customer value in their sleep!

The strength of the awards has always centered around our 40-strong panel of high caliber judges from the likes of GigaOM, McAfee, Silicon Valley Bank and VMware to name a few. Even without winning an award or being shortlisted, there was always a value of getting on their radar and receiving expert feedback. I’m proud to say this is one of the ways we’ve helped our startup entrants to expand their networks and hone their strategies for future success.

And Tech Trailblazers alumni have seen their fair share of success. Since 2012, our winners and runners-up have raised over \$10 billion in VC funding post-winning and secured a whopping 54 acquisitions from the likes of Cisco, Google Cloud, Microsoft and VMware. We’ve also had some shared success stories. Two of our alumni who have IPO’d to date—Nutanix and Zscaler—have acquired fellow Tech Trailblazer alumni PernixData and Edgewise Networks.

Shine a light on the winners

Being a virtual awards program means we can also provide extra value to startups with

our entire library of content. They get the best of both worlds: various opportunities to promote their business in thought-leadership content as well as access to our hub of expert startup advice and resources. For us, virtual awards aren’t just about awarding titles; they’re about rewarding expertise and effort, providing opportunities for future success.

Winners and runners-up have various promotional opportunities at their fingertips: in our #FoundersOnFire podcast, new eBook Tech Trailblazers @ 10, amplification on our social channels, and so on. The opportunities for promotion just keep snowballing as the platform grows! It’s all about recognizing new ways to add value as you evolve.

Our content library is also designed to guide these startups through challenging processes and decisions. For example, our advice section offers practical guidance such as ‘A guide to early-stage funding’ and insights from senior enterprise tech leaders from around the globe in our #TechOnFire and #JudgesOnFire podcasts.

And as the world has fully embraced virtual working, it’s become even easier for the Tech Trailblazers team to connect with all these great minds in technology, grow our network and manage our 40-plus panel of stellar judges.

The future of virtual awards

Since launching the Tech Trailblazers Awards in 2012, we’ve learned that straying away from tradition and convention helped define us and offered the most value to our customers.

On this note, we’re holding our first ever virtual—and free!—awards ceremony on December 8. The winners’ ceremony will, of course, be the main event, but you can also expect panel discussions and fireside chats with tech experts from around the globe. Head to techtrailblazers.com to learn more. And if you really want to stay ahead of the curve, the Tech Trailblazers 11th edition will start in June 2022, so mark your calendars!

As the virtual revolution continues, the opportunities for award programs to raise their online game have boomed. My advice? Strike while the iron’s hot if you have a trailblazing idea. Hone your USP, and don’t be afraid to do things differently. Just like the Tech Trailblazers Awards blazed our own virtual trail, 10 years from now your unconventional idea could be what sets you apart.

Rose Ross is Founder and Chief Trailblazer of the Tech Trailblazers Awards. ●



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Moving past disruption to builder brands

As uncertainty grows in the market, tech brands are shifting away from language that draws attention to their outsider status and are instead adopting profiles that provide a much-needed sense of stability and certainty.

By Tom Faust

Since before the peak of the dotcom era, technology companies' value has been primarily in the camp of revolution, as opposed to evolution. To make your mark as the next big thing, you had to position yourself as a "disruptor," breaking down the gates of the establishment, shifting paradigms, making the tried-and-true obsolete and otherwise upending the way business is done. First articulated in a 1995 Harvard Business Review paper, the disruptor identity has served and continues to serve the industry very well, being central to many companies fundraising efforts.

But today—with the chaos created by COVID-19—influential technology voices are asking whether being a disruptor has the same currency today as it once did. As businesses continue to deal with global shipping delays, inventory shortages and workforce constraints, they're looking for a sense of stability and certainty more than anything. This is why more tech brands—whether startups or known players—are looking to adopt a "builder" brand profile and communicate it effectively to the market.

Facebook may not be the poster child for public reputation, but even they went from "move fast and break things" in their early years to "move fast with stable infrastructure."

While this doesn't change the job of tech marketers and communicators, it does require a change in tone and emphasis that meets the demands of the current environment and aligns with stakeholders' mindsets. Below are a few hallmarks of such an approach.

Be a team player

Tech brands have traditionally relied on aggressive language that draws attention to their outsider status or ability to change or even upend an industry. By contrast, builder brands demand softer language and concepts—ones that emphasize values and characteristics such as continuity, ongoing partnerships, and collaboration with existing industry participants. The challenge is not to destroy the current system, but to work together to make improvements while minimizing disruption to clients and the industry.

Co-authoring bylined articles with clients, analysts or other third parties should be one element of this strategy. In addition,

tech brands should look to facilitate roundtables and research that brings together a variety of voices who seek to meet solve industry problems.

Knowledge over solutions

Builder brands likewise tend to rely on domain expertise rather than "hero tech" or radical approaches. Demonstrating the deep understanding you have of your clients' businesses and end markets, and the real business challenges they are asking you to help them solve, is a more welcome approach than leading with advanced features or the latest software-engineering buzzwords. While a strong relationship with the CIO crowd is still important, grounding your brand value in the work your clients do every day communicates the reliability they need.

Practically, this means thoughtful case studies are far more important than press releases, and technical improvements should be communicated in the context of the user experience of your platform or product and the benefits derived. Bells and whistles detached from results should be avoided.

Commitment counts

For many businesses, choosing to work with a disruptor brand carries an implied risk. Many startups have followed the path of "we came, we broke the mold, we conquered, we moved on" as they strived to be recognized as the next tech unicorn. While some have succeeded, many others have crashed and burned as they switched models and jumped industries to follow the money, leaving a string of abandoned clients in their wake.

Tech firms can position themselves as more durable, reliable partners by outlining a commitment that goes beyond a product roadmap. Having a real dialogue and seeking regular input from key clients to inform a real vision for how you will work with your them over the long term is a cornerstone of a builder brand.

People focus

While the foosball table in the break room became a classic trope of the dotcom corporate culture, more recently tech brands who cultivated hard-charging corporate cultures have shown cracks in the façade. With billionaire owners focused on flying to outer space while their companies manage discrimination suits and allegations

of—inhumane—working conditions, it's no wonder that staff turnover is one of the historical weaknesses of disruptor brands. A builder brand corporate culture needs to put workers' concerns at the center, ensure transparency and understand the difference between truly valuing staff and mistaking Taco Tuesday for a strong corporate culture.

Before tech brands change their communications strategies wholesale and adopt a builder brand mindset, it's important to think about how long this trend will last. Disruption may quickly come back into vogue once

the turbulence stabilizes. But for many the brand pendulum had swung so far in the disruptor direction that moving it back toward a builder positioning brings some much-needed balance that can help carry organizations through the current crises and provide greater flexibility for the future.

Tom Faust is Managing Director at Stanton, a strategic communications firm that works with a wide variety of technology companies to build their brands. ●



Tom Faust

PR news brief

MSL wins pitch for Inspired Brands

Inspire Brands, owner/franchisor of brands such as Dunkin', Sonic Drive-In, Buffalo Wild Wings, Baskin-Robbins and Arby's, serves its PR business to MSL following a competitive pitch.

The Sandy Springs, GA-headquartered company boasts of systemwide sales of \$27 billion and 32,000 restaurants.

MSL will lead the planning and execution of fully integrated communications spanning all brands and corporate communications.

The agency will leverage its capabilities across strategy, digital, earned media, research, data and creative.

"We were drawn to MSL's legacy of creating trends—not just following them—and making heritage brands continually and refreshingly relevant in culture," said Inspire Brands Chief Communications Officer Chris Fuller.

He also credited MSL's diverse and integrated team, as well as its "industry-leading influencer marketing platform Fluency that will connect our brands to our guests in authentic ways."

Publicis Groupe owns MSL.

An aerial photograph showing a two-lane asphalt road that curves through a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. To the right of the road is a calm body of water with a light blue-green hue. The road has white lane markings and a yellow center line. The forest is lush and green, and the water reflects the sky and surrounding trees.

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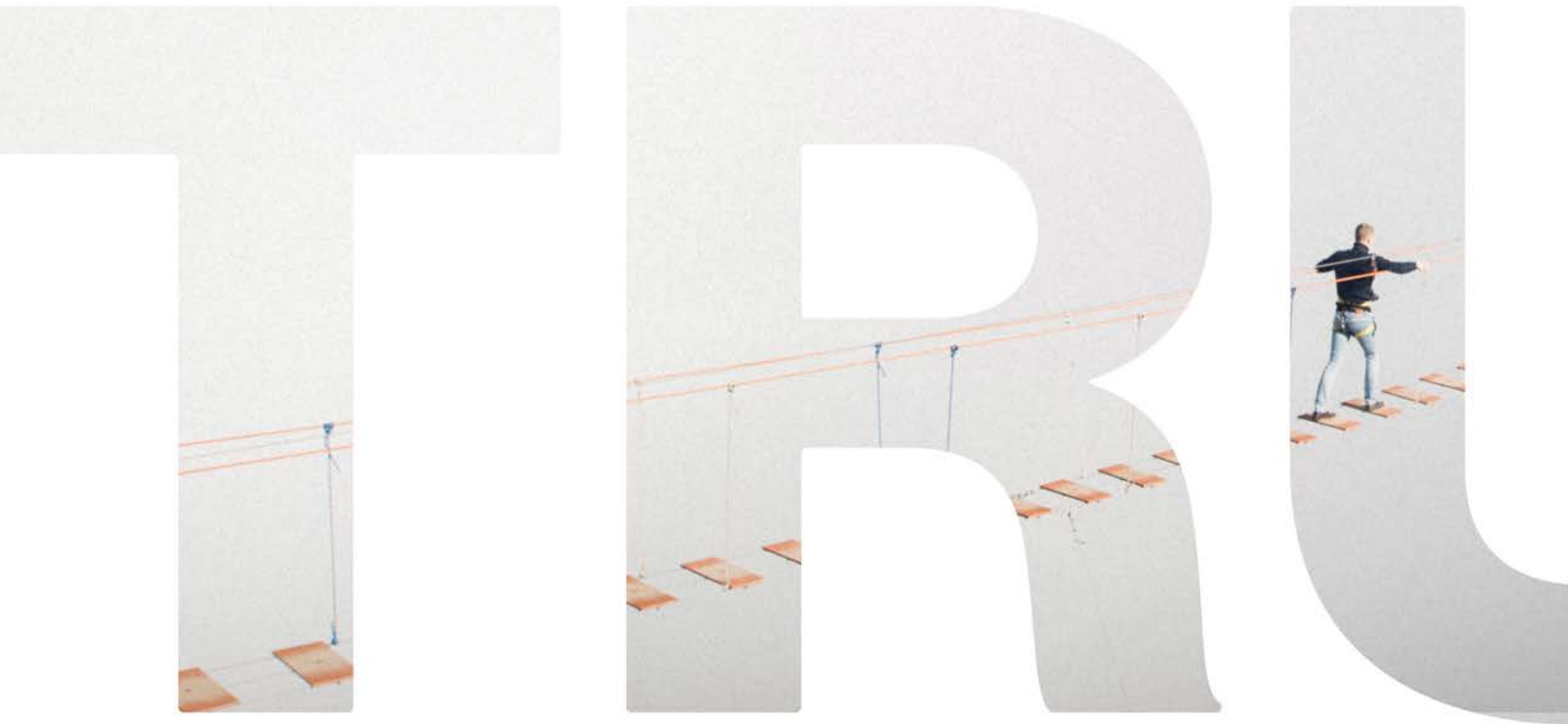
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Thoughtful Working 2.0: The New Deal

The technology sector needs to come to grips with the current changes shaping the labor force in our post-COVID landscape and recognize how professionals' new views of work can help businesses grow and succeed in the future.

By Heather Kernahan

Among the many consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, there's been a notable change in professionals' attitudes as they pertain to work.

People have reassessed what matters to them and increasingly are acting to turn their aspirations into reality, whether that's a determination to stick with remote working to reduce their everyday commute and allow for more family time or to leave their current job and pursue a passion project, as witnessed by the rise of the "Great Resignation."

The ramifications of these actions are simple; HR and management experts have been warning companies of the Great Resignation and it's here, whether we like it or not. Businesses face the risk of damage through a sudden draining away of talent. In fact, according to a recent survey by Bankrate, 55 percent of Americans anticipate looking for a new job that's a better fit for them, foreshadowing a continued trend of the Great Resignation.

At the same time across the country, news reports blare out that there are more jobs now than workers as the economy comes roaring back.

This is a complex situation, and from the hundreds of tech leaders we've been talking with, no one seems to have the right answer. With no proven solution having surfaced just yet, we should take the time now to pause and decide if we're asking the right questions about this problem.

Given the last 18 months—the worries, frustrations and constant changes—we need to focus on giving people greater freedom to accommodate what's right for them: a "New Deal" and a sweeping away of needless restrictions.

A key part of this is a philosophy called Thoughtful Working, which has been around since before the pandemic struck. It's a results-oriented approach to work that prioritizes autonomy and accountability, and sees work as what you do, not a place you go.

At its core, Thoughtful Working aims to expand the possibilities of how people work and how businesses can grow toward the future. For instance, by opening up roles to people who don't live in or close to big cities like London, New York and

San Francisco, companies have access to a broader talent pool, benefiting both them and their clients, providing them with a competitive advantage against others in their industry.

Now, after the challenges and subsequent opportunities introduced over the last year and a half, businesses must look to take a step further toward Thoughtful Working 2.0. I know at my company, we've questioned everything over the past year and are working on questioning the assumptions we've have about what it means to be a high-performance organization. We want to give our team the space to decide how they want to contribute to our work together. And we intend to meet our diversity, equity and inclusion commitments as we do this. Here are some ways we can all start rethinking our work and approach to Thoughtful Working 2.0.

Reach beyond the current industry talent pool

Open doors to diverse individuals who think differently and move your business ahead. At Hotwire, for example, we're looking for great people in sectors like travel, tourism and manufacturing who are interested in transitioning into a career in the tech industry and who we know will make a big, positive difference for our clients.

Spread a wider net

More and more companies are recognizing the advantages that stem from many having a workforce with diverse viewpoints and backgrounds. Still, we need to do better. Silicon Valley, where I'm based, may be a hothouse for technological change, but as The Wall Street Journal observes, this tech hub still struggles from a continuing diversity problem. All the more reason to spread our hiring nets wide.

Champion different ways of working

At the same time, Thoughtful Working 2.0 means trying our hardest to meet our employees where they are now in their lives. Aim to create an environment where employees have the confidence they need to come forward and articulate what they want. In a number of cases, businesses like yours and mine can likely help them achieve what they've wanted for so long as we're willing to listen and champion different ways of working.

If that passion project is calling, rather than simply resign, my hope is people will discuss it so we don't lose them entirely. We'll work to make it work somehow. One recent solution at my company was to support a switch to a contractor role with reduced hours so that someone on our team could explore their interest in social impact. Another example was when a member of our team decided to go back to school for a few months, but remains working with us on one client only now.



Heather Kernahan

Make mental health a priority

More people than ever are also needing to prioritize their mental health. Research shows coronavirus response measures have taken a heavy toll on mental health and this is one of the long-term concerns of business leaders.

The Center for Workplace Mental Health is monitoring employee mental health and wellbeing and have reported that anxiety and depression symptoms have more than tripled since 2019, with Black Americans shouldering the heaviest burden. If someone wants to cut their workload for a period of time, possibly for health and wellbeing issues, that shouldn't be an awkward conversation. Remain supportive, even after COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

As we look toward further implementing Thoughtful Working 2.0, all of the above is possible when organizations give their people autonomy and accountability. In other words, trust them. It's with this high degree of trust that businesses can feel comfortable reshaping agreements with employees concerning how they work.

The next few years will see continuous change but, as leaders, we don't need to be at the tail end of the impact. We can be proactive in creating a New Deal, and, for our people, Thoughtful Working 2.0 will be even better than version 1.0. When our team is looking after themselves and their loved ones, it will ultimately create a stronger business for everyone.

Heather Kernahan is Global CEO of Hotwire. ●

Getting coverage in a crowded storytelling landscape

Technology companies and investors need to rethink how their stories fit into today's broader media narratives regarding social responsibility.

By Todd Barrish

It's no secret in the public relations world that it's been getting harder to attract media coverage for startup funding rounds and corporate product launches. Part of the reason for that is because of the growing swarm of PR professionals relative to a dwindling number of journalists, along with an increasingly crowded tech investor space where every startup and venture capital firm is fighting to tell its story.

But it's also important to recognize how the dominant media narratives don't always align with the sunny Silicon Valley perspective of "everything is going great" and "technology will fix the world." As Jessica Lessin, Founder of the tech news publication The Information has pointed out, journalists have the responsibility to report on issues such as the role that technology plays in exacerbating social and wealth inequality, along with the implications of new tech products and services for individual privacy and freedom. A growing number of customers and investors are also increasingly aligned with social responsibility narratives and eager to hold tech companies accountable.

That means companies and VC firms need to ask themselves a serious question: how do their tech products, business models and investing philosophies fit within broader narratives about the social responsibility of tech founders and investors?

Organizations that can proactively align their brand with social responsibility in both messaging and practice will be far better positioned from a PR standpoint to attract positive media attention. Those that don't will find themselves more hard-pressed to earn desirable media coverage, or even forced into a defensive PR crouch by news reporting that shines a spotlight on an organization's social responsibility deficiencies.

Don't get left behind

Those organizations that are slow to embrace socially responsible practices run the risk of being left behind from both a business and PR standpoint. A growing number of companies and investors are adopting environmental, social and governance criteria, while some startups have built their organizations around such criteria from the get-go.

A 2021 global survey by Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week found that 85 percent of

business executives saw the COVID-19 pandemic as a "wake-up call for sustainability," and a majority of those executives expect to see financial benefits from investing in ESG activities within two years. Similarly, a majority of major institutional investors surveyed by J.P. Morgan said they expect the pandemic to have a positive impact on ESG investment momentum within the next three years.

The impact goes beyond mere sentiment. Investors and customers are increasingly rewarding companies for aligning with ESG criteria—and shying away from those companies that are seen as ESG risks. An S&P Global Market Intelligence analysis found that ESG funds outperformed the S&P 500 during the first year of the pandemic, even as flows into sustainable investment funds in the U.S. more than doubled between 2019 and 2020 to reach \$51.1 billion.

Many VC firms haven't yet integrated ESG criteria into their investment philosophies and portfolios, but a growing number are jumping on related investment opportunities such as in the clean tech industry. Venture capitalists and tech companies that can confidently say they have implemented a progressive ESG framework will have a powerful and positive story to tell when pitching news publications.

Embrace your role in a bigger story

Even if an organization has a winning pitch about its socially responsible hiring and operational practices, a crowded field means that many companies and VC firms will still find it difficult to consistently earn media coverage, let alone earn a glowing profile of the company or founder. But there are ways to win media coverage more often than not once organizations realize it's rarely all about them.

That fact is that many tech journalists want to write stories with a bigger scope beyond covering a specific organization's funding round or product launch. A pitch that can help journalists to see how an organization's latest announcement fits within the broader narratives and trends is more likely to succeed.

For example, many tech companies and VC firms still struggle on diversity and inclusion in their hiring, promotion and investing decisions. But even those that can boast of having a more diverse leadership, workforce or group of founders among

their portfolio companies may not be guaranteed media coverage for something like a series B funding round.

Instead of simply sending out a pitch about a new startup that raised \$20 million and happens to have a founder who's a woman or person of minority background, consider taking a big-picture approach. Start by highlighting the statistics that tell a story about the lack of diversity in the tech industry and among founders who receive VC funding. Explain some of the challenges that women and minority founders face within this context. Then you can paint the founder's story into the bigger picture.

The takeaway

There are undoubtedly opportunities beyond media coverage to tell your organization's story, especially through content marketing. But the good news is that embracing a socially responsible stance positions your organization to play a supporting—if not also starring—role in many positive media narratives moving forward. In the midst of both a global pandemic and a climate crisis, there are few better stories to tell than the story about how your organization did its part to make things better for everyone.

Todd Barrish is President of Indicate Media. ○



Todd Barrish

PR news brief

WPP records 15.7% Q3 growth

WPP recorded a 15.7 percent growth in Q3 revenues to \$3.6 billion as clients across-the-board hiked investments in marketing, especially digital media and ecommerce services.

CEO Mark Read noted that WPP posted 6.9 percent over the comparable 2019 pre-pandemic period and is now well-positioned for growth due to the restructuring actions put into place over the past three years.

Germany, which was up 34.5 percent, ranked as the No. 1 growth market during the period. Greater China (18 percent), UK (16.9 percent), US (12.4 percent) and Australia (2.4 percent) were next.

WPP's PR group registered 16 percent growth during the quarter to \$319 million. It was up 10.3 percent to \$911 million for the nine-month period.

"We are very pleased with the performance of both BCW and H&K as well as Finsbury Glover Hering, which have all had an outstanding year," Read told O'Dwyers.

Getting over social media

Social media is a waste of time for reaching and engaging followers. Here are some of the platforms you should be paying attention to instead.

By Edward M. Yang

What's your social media strategy?" It's a common question that companies will ask agencies. And agencies, wanting to look like they're up-to-date on the latest digital strategies, will talk about the usual suspects of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Maybe they'll mix in TikTok to seem even more trendy.

But assuming this is the correct path without a deeper analysis can lead to two problems. The first is that it can make an agency feel good but without actual results. After all, you're posting every three days, you have an editorial calendar laid out all neat and tidy. You're doing what you're supposed to, right? But take a closer look at the visibility and engagement of your posts. Data shows that both these metrics continue to remain low, shockingly low in some cases. Facebook has, for years, been focusing on nudging businesses to spend on Promoted Posts or Sponsored Posts, at the expense of organic reach. Research shows organic reach at only five percent for Facebook, at best. It's not uncommon for your month's-worth of posts to barely reach any followers.

The second problem is that the large social media sites may not be where your key buyers and influencers actually frequent. If so, you could be missing out on a huge opportunity to engage people at an authentic level where they're truly congregating. Here are some places to consider exploring, keeping in mind that the nature of a B2C or B2B business will also dictate the types of platforms your potential customers visit.

Reddit

Reddit has grown tremendously over the years, with an eye on a large IPO in the near future. Its strength lies in the various

engaged community groups, so much so that Reddit is one of the most visited websites in the world. Indeed, it was the Reddit investment community that pushed "meme stock" prices up, demonstrating the collective power of Redditors. There are numerous industry and interest groups in Reddit. But as with most groups, they don't look kindly upon obvious promoters or spammers. Instead, engage in an authentic and honest manner. AMA (Ask Me Anything) is a popular means of live engagement, which can be hosted by any Reddit community.

Quora

Once synonymous with finding answers to questions on the Internet, Quora's sway has lessened in recent years. There are numerous reasons given, but in summary Quora isn't as powerful as it once was. That said, there are certainly media relations opportunities on Quora, primarily due to how well it ranks on Google. Quora recently launched a formal partnership program to help amplify the voice of individuals or brands. It's certainly worth exploring as a way to cultivate a new avenue to interact with communities.

Discord

You can be forgiven if you've never heard of Discord. Its origins started as a way for gamers to communicate. But like many areas of emerging technology, Discord has grown beyond its gaming roots to now become an effective way for communities and groups to collaborate. One advantage of Discord is that it's easy to set up and free to use. This makes it naturally attractive to groups. Emerging technology fields such as blockchain, cryptocurrency and others are particularly active on Discord.

Slack

Ah Slack, the symbol of the power and pitfalls of corporate communications. Slack is the tool that far-flung remote teams can't do without. But various Slack channels have also sprung up catering to very specific interest groups or professional groups. It has become a popular way to share information in a free-flowing way and receive quick feedback on queries. The general public usually won't know about these Groups, likely because they aren't displayed on Google search results. Rather, members find out about it by word of mouth, which increases the quality of members.

Message boards / forums

The humble forum has an origin that goes way back to the original Bulletin board system (referred to as BBS), which had as one of its features a message board. Today, despite the advances in technology, message boards and forums still thrive. There's literally a message board for every personal and professional interest you can think of. Many of these boards are moderated by experienced influencers, and it's still an effective way to engage in depth with people.

Clubhouse

Clubhouse debuted with a bang, and coincided with the pandemic shutdown. The novelty of speaking and listening to key influencers was intriguing, and users flocked to the app (aided by a common viral technique of requiring someone to invite you to join). But as quickly as it has risen, Clubhouse has seen its download rate slow dramatically. Still, there's no debate that it has created a new category of engaging with people through audio conversation, which lends a degree of intimacy that few other formats can match. It's no surprise that a flurry of copycats has emerged: Twitter Spaces, Facebook Hotline and Live Audio Rooms and Reddit Talk.

As technology evolves, this list will change. New sites, apps or communities will emerge. Think virtual reality, in game communities or the upcoming "metaverse." Staying on the cusp of new community gatherings will help ensure your clients are reaching people where they truly are.

Edward M. Yang is Managing Partner at Firecracker PR. ○



Edward Yang

COVID drops as concern for finance pros

COVID-19 is no longer the biggest concern for marketing and comms. execs in the financial services sector, according to a survey from Financial Narrative.

The survey found that for 30 percent of respondents, "changing the imaging/positioning of our company" was a major driver of marcom efforts this year (down two percent from last year). But the importance of "pivoting strategies due to COVID" slid much further as a top concern, going from 37 percent in 2020's study to 28 percent in '21.

Marketing budgets and team sizes are

continuing on an upward path, the survey respondents say. 41 percent said that 2021 marketing budgets increased from '20, with 63 percent reporting that headcount on marketing teams had increased.

Things were slightly less bullish for communications teams, with 23 percent reporting a hike in budgets and 35 percent adding members.

Holding on to existing team members is also a challenge. Nearly a third (29 percent) say they're struggling to retain employees, with 26 percent trying to hire replacements for those who have left. ○



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Is your reputation vulnerable?

How to establish an effective process that protects your company from everyday threats as well as major disasters.

By Julie Karbo

Bad CEO behavior. An oil spill. A dangerous product. These are the kinds of catastrophes that come to mind when many of us think of the corporate crisis cautionary tale. It's something that happens to someone else. Not us. Many executives tell themselves that they're too small to suffer a major disaster. They think there isn't anything on their corporate radar that can do that much damage. And if something does happen, they believe they can respond quickly and avert any real crisis. Large companies may have anemic or woefully out-of-date plans in place. Or they believe they can throw money and staff at the problem.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it's that no matter what the size of your company or how healthy your market is, no one's immune from damaging forces beyond their control. Who would have thought a global pandemic would sound the death knell for an additional 200,000 businesses, according to the Fed. We've seen legacy brands such as Hertz, Neiman Marcus, Gold's Gym and J. Crew file for bankruptcy protection. A crisis can be the end for even the healthiest companies.

We don't need to look to a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic for dangers to companies. To be effective, we must broaden how we define and mitigate a crisis. If a competitor suddenly announces a product that exceeds your product's key features and is backed by top brand endorsements and a high-quality marketing campaign, would that pose a threat to sales? Would a social media firestorm criticizing the company

based on a policy or controversial customer action affect your ability to sell and hire? Would an unflattering analyst report damage the sales funnel? How about a problematic funding or IPO effort? Could that bring on a financial crisis? The smart executive realizes that threats come from beyond the scope of traditional crises. They come in all shapes and sizes and at any time. Rethinking what qualifies as a crisis and then undertaking thorough preparation is the best approach to mitigate even the most damaging product, market, natural disaster and global event.

As a PR practitioner with more than 35 years of experience, I've crafted custom crisis protection models for companies from startups to multi-billion-dollar brands. These shields of protection can focus on competitive threats, product issues, stock de-listings, social media revolts, community issues, management team errors or misbehavior, employee misconduct on social media and more.

There are four critical elements to an effective process which will help identify and lessen—and can sometimes completely eliminate—certain threats:

Threat assessment matrix: This stage helps identify any threats to the company that could result in critical damage. It also identifies key stakeholders that the crisis can directly affect and influence. Potential crises may include product failures, social media campaigns—involving employees or those outside the company—competitive strikes, a problematic funding or IPO event, executive misbehavior, an embarrassing

email or video and more. Once these events have been identified, an audit must be conducted to measure the sentiments of key stakeholders such as influencers, media, partners, groups, employees and analysts. This baseline audit is done to form a basis of comparison which allows you to effectively measure the scope and effect of the crisis.

The message matrix: In this stage, protective foundational messaging and customized narratives for critical stakeholders and personas are developed and tested. A matrix is as simple or complex as the number of stakeholders and the threats to the company. They can be calibrated according to likelihood and level of damage.

The playbook: Next, a custom playbook is created. This document will identify players and proactive and reactive programs and processes. While a master crisis playbook is essential, depending on the scope and nature of threats, some companies are well advised to develop playbooks for individual divisions or threats.

Post-threat analysis and correction: If a crisis occurs, a thorough assessment of the event and response is carried out and any necessary corrections made. While an internal investigation is warranted, when a serious crisis occurs that results in injury or loss of life, severe property damage, major financial loss, criminal activity, and legal issues, the company must hire a reputable, fully-independent firm with deep knowledge of the financial, legal, technical and market implications to ensure a fully accurate and impartial assessment. In some cases local, state and federal authorities must also be notified and cooperated with.

The crisis plan is a necessity, not an optional activity to be implemented if resources and time allow. Taking a laissez-faire approach to the possible—and in some cases the probable—can be deadly. Don't get caught in a game of Russian roulette. The stakes are too great. The PR professional must initiate and play a central role in ensuring the company is protected. Assess and prepare to alleviate—and in many cases avoid—threats to your company's survival. Ensure the entire C-Suite is onboard and participating in planning, prevention and action. Crisis planning should be the ultimate team effort.

Julie Karbo is CEO of Karbo Communications. ○



Julie Karbo

Environment trumps pay for employees

In today's marketplace, retaining employees takes a lot more than just paying them well, according to a new study from Weber Shandwick's management consultancy unit United Minds.

While a bigger paycheck certainly doesn't hurt, a positive work environment, job security and trustworthy peers come out ahead of competitive salary and benefits.

The study also finds that employees place a premium on being valued. However, a sizeable number of respondents say they are not receiving that motivation in their workplaces. Almost a third (30 percent) do not think their manager is committed to their success, with almost as many (29 percent)

saying they are not getting enough feedback to keep improving.

While COVID has made the ability to work from home a high-profile perk, it placed low (#58 out of 79 factors) on the list for survey respondents. Much more important to them: achieving work/life balance, which came out at number-five.

Inequality in the workplace remains a major problem. One in three survey respondents said they had experienced unfair treatment, including discrimination and harassment at work. Of those employees, one-third said they were less likely to be satisfied with their organization and less likely to advocate for it or rank it highly. ○



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Is yours an internal blog culture?

How PR pros in the tech marketing world can bypass overt marketing and sales talk and craft quality, editorially-acceptable blogs and byline articles.

By Dan Garza

Growing numbers of Silicon Valley tech companies are placing content writing assignments on the PR pro's plate, with an emphasis on internal blog ghostwriting. That's because many marketing operations are consumed with posting literally hundreds of blogs on their websites.

Attention to blog production is so great that it takes corporate attention away from the importance of the PR role. All blogs extol and promote products and endless features. Their products are the best. No competitor can come near them is, essentially, what each blog says.

The original blog format has mutated into a variety of forms to suit marketing and execs. In marketing's case, blogs provide another form of blatant sales communications. Nothing subtle about it. Blogs become glorified data sheets combined with sales pitches. Execs also use blogs to further their careers by taking the product sales pitch to another level explaining their products' benefits to the buyers and trying to get potential employers to notice them.

This isn't to say that normal blogging based on accepted journalistic standards isn't an important aspect of a company's website. But when you go beyond those boundaries, there's an issue for the PR pro. Also, it's important to remember the original blog definition: "Blogging is an online journaling activity where writers share their opinions on a subject for personal or business reasons."

But that's not exactly what's happening

In effect, tech marketing is having its way with blogs in many instances. To the outsider, it sounds like those company employees penning those blogs are talking to themselves. Site visitors—including potential customers—are looking for answers and not breast beating.

The drill goes something like this: The PR pro submits his or her ghostwritten blog into a PC doc sharing system and sends the manuscript to several people to review and make their suggestions, changes and/or additions. In effect, that's an online rewrite room with people eager to put in their two cents. In other words, there are a lot of cooks in the kitchen. What happens is those so-called editors drop in their interpretations and what they believe to be a preferred way of stating the facts and/or amplifying them with hyperbole. Meanwhile, there's a high probability that the story loses its key messages due to so many changes.

A PR pro at a Silicon Valley cybersecurity

firm said blogs in his company go through so many iterations that the text becomes "incomprehensible." He further said that an executive blog usually takes four to six weeks to complete because so many marketing people are encouraged to add their own perspective.

From another end of the spectrum, some execs don't fully understand the basics of journalism and don't give a hoot about it. Other execs just don't have the common sense to realize the ghostwriter first has to get information on which to write their articles or blogs. They strongly believe the ghostwriter should know all the facts to write their blog to their satisfaction.

Further, it's important to point out that the original blog format has mutated into a variety of forms to suit marketing and execs' objectives. In marketing's case, blogs provide another form of blatant sales communications. Nothing subtle about. Blogs become glorified data sheets combined with sales pitches. Execs also use blogs to further their careers by taking the product sales pitch to yet another level to subtly detail their own professional prowess with technology. In short, blow their own horns.

What to do? Where to go?

So, what is the PR pro to do in a company steeped in a blog culture? Primarily, you've got to be an in-house evangelist for establishing a strategic PR plan by huddling with supporters for such a plan while simultaneously educating blog-intensive proponents. Turn those individuals into contributors who can help you craft customer-centric rather than company-centric product stories and articles.

It's your job as a PR pro to get the company story out by re-structuring all that mis-directed, hyperbole-laden blog content into editorially acceptable stories and byline articles. In cases where there's a strong blog culture, you move forward—cautiously watching your flanks—to execute your strategy a day at a time and work with company personnel that closely associate with your PR strategy.

Let's tackle the strategy first. The initial critical step is to collaborate with trusted execs, marketing and sales people, those who aren't adamant about blatantly pushing product, but more intent on listening to you and educating their customers. Working with such individuals will soon lead to a consensus about the key subjects you, as the PR pro, should pursue as the foundation for stories and articles you create. That's the

strategy.

Next, you take the initiative to select execs, directors and managers, especially from engineering ranks to be your subject matter experts or SMEs. They're the ones who will be your trusted team members to develop byline articles for submission to key trade publications.

Here's an example of how byline article sourcing is performed: The PR pro at a Silicon Valley cybersecurity software company arranges for a Zoom discussion with an engineering senior vice president. The subject to be discussed is secure access service edge or SASE, pronounced "sassy" in industry jargon. SASE is defined as the convergence of wide area networking and network security services.

The PR pro and exec set out to discuss the most prominent SASE issues customers face. But immediately, the exec naively begins talking about the virtues of the company's SASE product. That's natural because that exec lives day in and day out in that world. The PR pro politely interrupts him and lets him/her know that the editor will throw out the piece if the focus is on the company's product. The exec resets and talks about the issues the industry is facing. But he/she apologizes that they may not know all the key issues and needs to do more homework.

Another Zoom discussion is arranged. This time, the exec is fully prepared to discuss all the issues and then talks about how the company's software product has certain features that resolve those issues. That's the classic problem/solution byline article format editors love and are willing to accept for publication.

Once you get the rhythm going with one, two and three execs, your thought leadership keeps building momentum and other top company leaders—finally getting the message—will eagerly jump on the bandwagon. But it takes time, patience and a keen eye toward selecting the proper and cooperative executive SME team.

Dan Garza is a marketing PR professional and veteran observer of Silicon Valley PR. He's collaborated with top technology companies and was instrumental in creating and implementing successful PR strategies at these firms. ○



Dan Garza

David Finn dies at 100

David Finn, a founding father of modern PR who launched Ruder Finn in 1948 with Bill Ruder, has died. He celebrated his 100th birthday on Aug. 30.

As RF Chairman and CEO for more than 70 years, Finn nurtured the growth of corporate communications.

His 1969 book, "The Corporate Oligarchy," developed the groundwork for "stakeholder capitalism" by depicting corporations as "the central institution in American life" while underscoring the importance of public service.

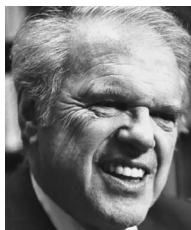
By agreeing to take on only clients and projects that he believed in, Finn helped set the stage for the development of the corporate social responsibility practice.

Finn was a leading voice promoting ethics in business and Ruder Finn became the first firm with a standing ethics committee.

He led a full life beyond the world of public relations. He was a celebrated photographer who wrote or contributed his photos to more than 100 books.

Finn was an adjunct professor of PR at New York University, fellow at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and member of the advisory council for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Ruder Finn has established www.rememberingdavidfinn.com to honor its Co-Founder. ○



David Finn

Edelman vice chairman Dubner exits

Edelman Vice Chairman Russell Dubner is exiting the No. 1 independent firm in December after a 28-year run.

He handled corporate development and chaired Edelman's Trust Institute, which was launched in June, as a learning laboratory for trust-building between companies, institutions, brands and people.

Dubner also was in charge of DJE Holdings' sector-specialist agencies, Revere, Salutem, Edifi and Edible. He also counseled key clients such as PwC, Genentech and Nationwide.

A spokesperson said Edelman is grate-



Russell Dubner

ful for everything Dubner has done for the firm over the years and those contributions helped power the growth of the firm.

Edelman will name a new chair for ETI and head of the sector firms in the coming weeks.

In his departure memo, Dubner wrote that he is leaving Edelman "in a strong position, ahead of the curve and leading the market." ○

Brunswick's Miller takes Christie's post

Deidrea Miller, former Deputy Communications Director for NYC mayor Bill de Blasio, has joined Christie's Americas as head of communications, based in the auction house's New York office.

Miller comes to Christie's from Brunswick Group, where she served as director at Brunswick Arts. At Brunswick, she advised clients including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark.

While working for de Blasio, Miller oversaw external relations for such city agencies as cultural affairs, economic development, and media and entertainment. In addition, she advised the mayor's office on constructing monuments to honor women, minorities and LGBTQ individuals. ○



Deidrea Miller

State Street's Tisdalle takes to TIAA

State Street Advisors Chief Marketing Officer Stephen Tisdalle is heading to TIAA, where he will take on the newly created role of chief brand and demand generation officer, effective Nov. 22.

At State Street, Tisdalle and his team created the Fearless Girl campaign that spotlighted the benefits of women in corporate leadership roles and was embodied by the bronze sculpture near the New York Stock Exchange.

Before joining State Street, Tisdalle was head of marketing for OppenheimerFunds and a Managing Director at Ogilvy. He also served as head of Safron Brand Consultants, where he implemented brand strategies for



Stephen Tisdalle

Goldman Sachs, Bain & Co, KPMG and Swiss Re.

At TIAA he will be responsible for brand and advertising strategy and execution, creative services, paid and social media and all marketing for TIAA's institutional, wealth advisor and consumer channels, reporting to CMO Marty Willis. ○

Weber chair Jack Leslie to step down

Jack Leslie plans to retire as Weber Shandwick Chairman at the end of March after a 45-year career in public affairs and corporate communications, which included stints as Political Director for Sen. Ted Kennedy and President of the legendary Sawyer Miller Group.

He'll continue to advise Weber Shandwick and clients on corporate reputation, public policy and social impact matters before stepping down as chairman.

Leslie became Chairman and Harris Diamond took on the CEO role at Weber Shandwick in 2001, with its merger Bozell Sawyer Miller Group. At Sawyer Miller, Leslie ran presidential and statewide campaigns in the US, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Leslie is a longtime activist for humanitarian assistance, international development and global health issues. He chaired the USA for UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) during the 1990s and was appointed by president Obama as chair of the US African Development Foundation, where Leslie led missions to 25 African countries. ○



Jack Leslie

Purdue Pharma's Levy joins JPA Health

JPA Health has added Danielle Lewis Levy to its newly established New York office as a Senior VP in the agency's life science practice.

Most recently, Levy was Executive Director, Corporate Communications, and Corporate Social Responsibility at Purdue Pharma.

Earlier, she held executive positions at Finn Partners, GCI Health, Edelman and Cooney Waters. ○



Danielle Lewis Levy

O'Dwyer's guide to TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATIONS



360PR+ client Earin's CEO Kiril Trajkovski demos to press the company's latest innovation, the M-2 wireless Bluetooth earbuds, at CES Las Vegas.

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Since 2003, New York City-based 5W Public Relations (5WPR) has worked with widely known and emerging brands, corporations and high-profile individuals. We have a 360-degree approach to PR, social media, branding and digital marketing that delivers game-changing results to our clients.

Our Tech Practice includes clients from unicorns and *Fortune* 500's across all verticals including FinTech, eCommerce, AdTech, HRTech, AutoTech, Consumer Electronics, eSports & Gaming, Legal, Cybersecurity, Cryptocurrency, B2C and B2B SAAS. The team is grounded in an entrepreneurial, agile, high-octane culture, an ideal fit for technology companies seeking visibility and relevance in today's fast growing digital world.

The core of our success is our unmatched ability to distill the complexities of a client's offering and convey it in ways that are both comprehensible and compelling—creating messages that resonate with all stakeholders. We understand that the technology doesn't always drive the story and build programs that integrate corporate positioning and profiling, fundraising announcements, product launches, C-Suite visibility programs, media training, industry and analyst communications, speaking and awards programs, digital/performance marketing, IPO and SPAC programs, crisis and reputation management, and more.

Client work includes: Appian, Axiom Space, AvidXchange, CarParts.com, E2Open, Five9, Multiverse, SAP NS2, Samsung SmartThings, Therabody, Experian, Axis, and WeBull.

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Laura Tomasetti, CEO
Victoria Renwick, EVP & Partner
Mike Rush, EVP & Partner

Consumer technology brands—and other businesses powered by tech—must continually evolve their communications and marketing strategies to build and sustain relevance in our daily lives. 360PR+ can help. We're immersed in the smart home, connected fitness, digital entertainment, family tech, edtech and many more solutions that enable consumers to live better. We're not just spotting trends, we're making them—and making headlines for our clients as a result, from widespread product reviews to feature stories that cast our clients as the thought-leaders they are. Earned media creates a strong foundation and we extend reach and impact with influencer activation and branded content, driving retail and DTC sales. Our tech storytelling has cut across both newcomer challenger brands and established players, including Jabra, Nintendo, Trek e-bikes, Honeywell appliances, Cedar Electronics, Zipcar and The Sharper Image. At 360PR+, we are experts in our craft, bringing a caliber of intel that makes us better storytellers and relationships to land the big stories that get our clients to the goal line. Learn more at www.360pr.com.

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Boardroom Communications (BoardroomPR) is a full-service public relations and integrated marketing agency, leveraging the skills of our staff of journalists, PR and marketing professionals and multimedia specialists to provide visibility across numerous platforms. Our creative solutions increase awareness and understanding, establish credibility and

ultimately improve business.

BoardroomPR bridges traditional and new media, combining print, television and radio media with excellent digital expertise in website development, social media management and email campaigns. We incorporate research, search engine optimization, pay-per-click and online reputation management and offer branding capabilities, consisting of logo, graphic design, copywriting and video production.

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Bob Gold, President

PR and marketing agency, Bob Gold & Associates is the Gold standard for data-driven Public Relations and Brand Management. The agency was founded in 1997 and along the way, Bob has been named Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA-LA) 2019 Communications Professional of the Year. BG&A was named to the *Forbes* America's Best PR Agencies list for 2021.

We focus on data and analysis through a proprietary method we call BG&A Insight™ that allows us to meet every client's unique needs. This approach provides each client with tailored strategies for today's digital-first world.

At Bob Gold & Associates we know Technology Public Relations. Serving as your strategic partner, we are well-versed in B2B tech PR because we've been a part of the tech revolution for 20+ years.

We thrive on deciphering complex information and making it easy for investors, partners, customers and the media to understand. We have an active roster of software and hardware companies and have proven success at growing a business—whether it's in the fast burgeoning Crypto/NFT and Gaming space or in more traditional avenues such as streaming, telecommunications, IT design, and other complex business services.

Our brick & mortar offices are in Los Angeles and New York City,



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Forbes named us one of the best PR agencies of 2021.

PRovoke named us their innovator of the year for 2021.

PRWeek named Bospar its “Outstanding Boutique Agency of the Year” for two years in a row. *PRNews* included Bospar on its

Agency Elite Top 100 list.

Bospar is a team of hard-driving tech PR professionals with purpose and relentless joy for what we do. We are comprised of former journalists from social and traditional media and marketing, influencer, financial, SEO and public affairs experts. As a team, we get smart on contact, build relationships and launch PR campaigns, grounded in strategy and infused with creativity.

If you want to get known fast, ac-

celerate adoption, or drive impact, Bospar exceeds all expectations.

With breakthrough coverage and visibility, simply put: our clients speed ahead—no “BLAH, BLAH, BLAH” about it!

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Terri Douglas, Co-founder and Principal
Guy Murrel, Co-founder and Principal

Catapult is a leading public relations agency for software delivery and B2B tech companies. We blend strategic narrative services, media and analyst relations, social media and content marketing to help clients define new categories, align teams, stand out and win markets. Our Strategic Narrative Marketing approach helps companies discover and share “why” they exist. We are experts at coordinating and executing high-impact company/product launches. The Catapult team has deep knowledge in all major technology markets, including DevOps, agile software development, application development, IT security, cloud, big data, commercial wireless and enterprise platforms that disrupt market norms. Catapult’s success stems from our personal and professional service, along with partner-level account involvement and strategy.

Catapult is the preferred agency for technology companies looking for both strategy and execution.

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The world of consumer technology is ever-changing. For example, consumer technology was vastly different a year ago, a month ago, and even just a day ago. Technology has drastically altered the way we live, work and play—creating new opportunities and habits in our everyday lives.

As storytellers, our job is to communicate how that technology meets consumer needs. Being able to truly understand the nuances between varying technologies and articulating the consumers benefit is key to positioning your product, your brand, and your expertise as industry leaders. We take an integrated, channel agnostic approach to developing effective communi-

— Continued on page 38



Amy Heidemann and Nick Noonan, right, of Karmin, perform at Casio's launch party for the new Privia digital piano line at Edison Ballroom in New York. Casio is a Coyne PR client. (Photo by Diane Bondareff /Invision for Casio)

COYNE PR

Continued from page 37

cations strategies that have helped everyone from established global brands, to leading innovators and tech startups, translate technology into knowledge.

Coyne has represented many of the most prominent and successful consumer technology brands in the world, including AccuWeather, Casio, DineTime, Engadget, Eureka, HARMAN, IMAX, KEF, littleBits, Midea, Signify, VTech, among others.

We've launched countless products, planned and executed scores of events and tradeshows, launched numerous breakthrough campaigns and initiatives, and helped brands navigate significant industry challenges. We live and breathe technology which not only helps us understand the space but enables us to become an extension of the communication and brand teams.

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Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Our 6,000 people in more than 60 offices deliver communications strategies that give our clients the confidence to



Fahlgren Mortine's B2B Peer Summit Series of in-person and digital interactions engages clients and industry thought leaders on forward-looking trends and topics.

lead and act with certainty, earning the trust of their stakeholders. Our honors include the Cannes Lions Grand Prix for PR; *Advertising Age's* 2019 A-List; the *Holmes Report's* 2018 Global Digital Agency of the Year; and, five times, Glassdoor's Best Places to Work. Since our founding in 1952, we have remained an independent, family-run business. Edelman owns specialty companies Edelman Intelligence (research) and United Entertainment Group (entertainment, sports, lifestyle).

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Fahlgren Mortine helps business-to-business brands get to precisely what matters by combining data, design and creativity to build, deploy and measure integrated communications campaigns. Our buyer-centric approach delivers impact-centered strategies and tactics demonstrating a deep understanding of our clients and their customers, and the business triggers that create demand for our clients' products and services. Fahlgren Mortine provides clients with deep knowledge and versatile

resources to deliver across a full range of services including branding, public and analyst relations, media planning and buying, content marketing, social media strategy and management, advertising and digital development. Core areas of technology experience: industrial and manufacturing, logistics, data center, software and building products.

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Tech PR is one of the most fascinating segments in the PR industry and our team is proud to have played a key role in introducing core technologies which continue to shape the market today as well as new, cutting edge breakthroughs which will define tomorrow's marketplace.

Yesterday's bag phones are today's bendable smartphones. Proprietary VIC-20, Commodore 64 and Kaypros have been displaced by light as a feather iPads, chrome books and ubiquitous PCs. Noise cancelling headphones? We introduced them. Power over Ethernet? Check.

The pace of change is quickening. And not every new product enhancement is market changing. But as story tellers, marketers and advocates for our clients, we get a charge out of positioning, launching and building market

In 2021, the Feintuch Communications/NCSolutions team won a PRSA Silver Anvil for their 2020 campaign reporting on the nation's toilet paper shortages and CPG purchase trends.

awareness. Current clients include ClassWallet (digital wallet tech for education), HDMI Licensing Authority, NCSolutions (ad/marketing tech), Leclanché (energy storage), SeaChange (advertising and streaming platforms) and ZeeVee (AV signal distribution).

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With more than 175 professionals across three continents, Finn Partners is the third-largest technology agency in the world. With senior professionals in the U.S., Europe, and Asia, the firm enjoys strong global growth.

Today's technology trends are disrupting and altering the way we engage in the world of business, completely changing dynamics across all industries. We support our clients to address trends like 5G connectivity, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, machine learning, robotic process automation, blockchain, and quantum computing.

The technology revolution impacts every single company. It includes big technology giants that need to transform and articulate their relevance. It touches hot new startups that must demonstrate their potential, establish credibility, and communicate a compelling value proposition. It affects non-tech companies that need to act like technology brands by sharing unique stories that underscore how they use technology in new, inno-

vative ways.

No matter the type of company, you need world-class, seasoned communications professionals who understand the technology landscape, reach the right decision-makers and deliver data-driven business impact.

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Edward M. Yang, Managing Partner

Firecracker PR helps you get known, period. Our proven 5-step process—"Ignites"—has helped numerous technology companies rapidly scale their awareness from Day 1. Deep expertise in SaaS, AI, machine learning, cloud, mobile, health tech, smart homes, digital transformation, cybersecurity, consumer electronics, startups and more.

Companies we have worked with include Fujitsu, SRI International, Boeing, HP, Microsoft, D-Link, TP-LINK, Beyond Limits, Baylor University, the American Heart Association and many others.

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Founded in 1997, French/West/Vaughan (FWV) is the Southeast's leading public relations, public affairs, advertising and digital media agency, a distinction it has held since 2001.

FWV has developed countless PR campaigns and communications strategies to help brands and innovative start-ups stand out in a complex marketplace. From using data to insert clients into conversations about the Internet of Things (IoT), creating media events to demonstrate their expertise or developing clear messaging around a complex product or issue, our work is often the foundation on which category leadership is built.

FWV's tech PR experience includes work done on behalf of: 3Flow, A4 Health Systems, ABB,

Dunn Solutions Group, Foresight Corporation, Lenovo, MDeverywhere, Neopatents, Reflexion, Saft, SAS, SkyTrak, SunCom and Time Warner Cable.

In addition to its diverse range of technology clients, FWV's passionate team of expert storytellers works with many of the world's leading companies and brands, including Wrangler, Proximo, Melitta, Volvo Trucks North America, the V Foundation for Cancer Research and the N.C. Department of Transportation, just to name a few.

Among FWV's operating divisions are: FWV Fetching, a pet and veterinary PR and marketing agency; AMP3 PR, a fashion, beauty, luxury and lifestyle PR firm based in New York City; CGPR, an active lifestyle, outdoor, ski, fashion, technology and travel PR and consumer brand marketing agency based in Greater Boston; and Prix Productions, the company's long-form content feature and documentary film division, with offices in Raleigh and L.A. FWV employs more than 130 public relations, public affairs, social media, advertising and digital marketing experts between its Raleigh, N.C., headquarters and other offices around the country.

FTI CONSULTING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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Mark McCall, Global Segment Leader

C-suites, boards of directors, and business leaders from around the world come to FTI Strategic Communications with their most complex, business-critical issues that require diverse skill sets and integrated disciplines. As part of a global business advisory firm, we help these organizations manage change, mitigate risk and enhance their market position by combining decades of deep subject matter expertise with functional and disciplinary experience.

Our financial communications professionals serve as trusted advisors to management teams on a range of capital markets events as well as other stakeholder issues throughout the corporate life-cycle. We help clients navigate their most pressing challenges and opportunities around M&A, IPOs, restructuring, capital raising, cor-

porate governance, ESG strategy, proxy fights, and shareholder activism. Our integrated capabilities in financial communications, corporate reputation and public affairs help clients protect and drive business value.

G&S BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

111 West 33rd Street, 22nd Floor
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www.gscommunications.com

Steve Halsey, Chief Growth Officer
SHalsey@gscommunications.com

G&S Business Communications helps innovative companies change the world. Our digital team can audit, challenge and fundamentally transform your digital construct through the lens of four pillars: people, process, culture and data. Ensuring that digital is a priority for your organization is necessary to help you stay ahead of the competition. Digital transformation is no longer just hype; it's reality. We help you maintain a competitive advantage and drive a sustained culture of innovation that drives brand preference, scales awareness, and amplifies your differentiation.

Our strategies help B2B clients meet their business goals, and our work produces meaningful results that move markets. Our commitment to measurement ensures that we are constantly learning and improving to make programs better.

Our mission is to inspire people to take action, and our vision is to fuel transformation, resulting in business growth for our clients.

THE HOFFMAN AGENCY

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Lou Hoffman, CEO
Kymra Knuth, EVP, North America
Steve Jursa, EVP, North America
Caroline Hsu, Mng. Dir., Asia Pacific
Mark Pinsent, Mng. Dir., Europe
Lydia Lau, VP of Global Operations

With expertise that spans digital,

— Continued on page 40

THE HOFFMAN AGENCY

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content marketing, and thought leadership as well as traditional PR. The Hoffman Agency knows how to differentiate brands and deliver air cover for sales. With a heritage in the tech sector, the firm's award-winning work today pushes the boundaries of B2B and consumer communications.

For clients with global needs, the company operates its own offices in Asia Pacific, Europe and the United States. Unlike traditional agencies handicapped by their siloed structure, The Hoffman Agency applies a collaborative approach to implementing multi-country campaigns, leveraging content and thinking across geographies with a single-point-contact for clients. Built on the firm's cultural foundation of teamwork and trust, this approach consistently generates better results.

While campaigns vary by client and industry, all share one theme: the creation of content that reflects the key tenets of storytelling. This means developing narratives that prompt journalists to write and target audiences to read—a far cry from the “corporate speak” that satisfies internal stakeholders. The firm also conducts storytelling workshops that orient Hoffman employees and client stakeholders around this shared goal.

Even on the operations side, The Hoffman Agency walks to a different drummer. Eschewing the traditional focus on the financial side—

measuring account people based on their “billability”—the firm adheres to the belief that if you deliver great work to the client, financial performance will follow. This fosters a culture of personal accountability and ownership, and an environment in which everyone is valued for their contribution.

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Tara O'Donnell, UK Managing Director

Hotwire is a global tech communications consultancy that helps businesses better engage and connect with their customers. From Sydney to San Francisco, we operate with a borderless mind-set across 12 locations including the UK, US, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Australia, together with a partner network that includes The

Hoffman Agency in Asia and VI-ANEWS in Brazil as well as other non-exclusive affiliate partners.

For more information, please visit www.hotwireglobal.com

ICR

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Kevin McLaughlin, Managing Director
Matt Lindberg, Managing Director
Katie Creaser, Senior Vice President
Alexis Blais, Vice President

ICR brings equal parts business acumen, technology expertise and media savvy to every account, for clients spanning all business stages—from startups seeking to raise additional capital, growth companies with IPOs or SPACs on the horizon, organizations investing in M&A, businesses in the throws of digital transformation, and public companies seeking to elevate their brands. Comprised of former Wall Street analysts working alongside seasoned PR agency and in-house communications experts, ICR offers a unique combination of experience, contacts, and skills that helps technology companies generate the types of stories that both capture mind share and grow market share.

Embracing a roll-up your sleeves approach from senior members to associates, the team delivers results for clients across a range of sectors, including Artificial Intelligence, Automotive Technology, Digital Payments & Ecommerce, Fintech, Martech & Adtech, Data & Analytics, Cybersecurity, Crypto Currency, IT and IoT. ICR maintains offices in New York, Connecticut, Boston, Baltimore, San Diego, San Francisco and Beijing.

Clients: HARMAN (wholly owned subsidiary of Samsung Electronics), Mobileye/Intel, Marqeta, BigCommerce, Cherwell, Dynatrace, TechStyle Fashion Group and Scout (a Workday company).

INK COMMUNICATIONS CO.

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Starr Million Baker, CEO & Co-Founder
Kari Hernandez, CSO & Co-Founder
Blair Poloskey, Sr. VP & Partner

At INK, telling technology stories is in our DNA. We partner with companies across a variety of industries to overcome communication challenges, outthink the competition, and connect with the people who matter most to them. As a full-service marketing communications agency, we integrate public relations, content, digital, creative, analytics, and research to help clients realize their business goals. Our programs are designed with the calculated intent to be there before and move beyond the predictable—it's our client service philosophy. Equally important is our commitment to our culture and each other. We are a women-owned business and an equal opportunity employer that welcomes everyone to the team. We thrive on collaboration, take pride in our ability to lead in real time, and work hard to live our mission—good work with good people makes for a good life.

With offices in Austin and Denver, our 50 specialists span North America and enjoy a flexible and connected work environment.

Clients include: ACTIVE, Agoro Carbon Alliance, argodesign, Bluetooth SIG, CoreLogic, CORT, Ed-Fi Alliance, Effectual, Enel North America, International Food Technologists (IFT), Khoros, M Holland, NI, Outside, Semtech, SiFive, StatsPerform and uStudio.

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Additional offices in Boston, Seattle, Washington, D.C. and Redwood City

Julie Karbo, Founder & CEO

Karbo Communications is a top ranked, integrated technology PR and digital marketing agency that delivers sales and market leadership. With Karbo Com, you don't get bench players. You get the industry's top marketing and PR teams working with you every day, whether it's elevating brand identity, scoring top tier media recognition, deploying content marketing strategies, driving traffic, building communities, or pioneering partnerships. We've pioneered market-



Good work with good people makes for a good life at INK Communications.

ing and PR efforts across categories and industries, such as cloud/SaaS, mobile, the IIoT/IoT, social, data, analytics, apps, marketing and advertising tech, security, high performance computing, AI, augmented reality and telecom.

The Karbo Com team has worked extensively with both B2B and consumer tech companies, including Apple, AppDynamics, NerdWallet, TIBCO, Hootsuite, Penguin Computing, The IoT World Conference, Equinix, Cisco, Defense.Net, GoDaddy, Fox Digital, Airbnb, Logitech, Oracle, TDK, RTI, 500 Startups and Intel. Our clients range from stealth startups to billion-dollar global brands. When it's make or break, you want the best. You want a team that's seen it all, yet knows the latest and greatest trends, technologies and tools. At Karbo Com, we have a track record of delivering revenues, industry-leading stature, partners and funding.

Current clients include Hootsuite, Promethean World, Penguin Computing, RTI (Real-Time Innovations), Gurobi, vFunction, Sweep, Worthix, Airspace, Sendinblue, Incognia, CoreAVI and Subtext.

LAUNCHSQUAD

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LaunchSquad is a strategic communications and public relations agency with offices in San Francisco, New York, Boston, and Chicago (but currently operating entirely remotely).

Since 2000, we've focused exclusively on helping innovative and fast-growing companies build their brands, become market leaders and change the world. Our expertise spans both consumer-facing and B2B clients in a variety of industries, including consumer technology, enterprise software, healthcare, fashion, retail, media & entertainment, e-commerce, education, finance, energy and more.

We work with our clients to deeply understand, shape and illuminate their stories and then share and spread them through an integrated mix of earned and owned media strategies, from media relations and content marketing to social media and visual storytelling. We have an unlimited amount of energy and enthusiasm for new ideas, and that passion translates to smart, hard work. Over the last 20

years, our team has collected deep media relationships and insights, and are consistently tapped into the trends, issues and challenges driving our clients' industries. We spend time in the trenches every day, delivering real results and exceeding expectations.

Current clients include American Giant, Getty Images, ICF, iHeartMedia, Monday.com, Netflix, NOBULL, Nutrafol, Trevor Project and Uber among dozens of other fast growth private and public companies.

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Michelle Schafer, SVP, Partner

Merritt Group is an award-winning, woman-owned strategic communications firm founded in 1996 in Northern Virginia. We are a mid-sized agency with locations in McLean, Virginia, San Francisco, California and North Texas. Merritt Group specializes in public relations, content creation, marketing, social media, demand and lead generation, analytics and measurement, and marketing infrastructure consulting.

The success of our client campaigns are grounded in our extensive domain knowledge in hot technology areas like cybersecurity, AI, IoT, cloud, and mobile, as well as verticals such as government, healthcare, supply chain, finance, and more. Our philosophy starts with intrinsically understanding our PR clients' target audiences, which leads to the development of powerful messaging and creative marketing, PR, content programs that drives high impact awareness, engages audiences and accelerates sales around their innovations.

Our client roster includes organizations ranging from large, global tech leaders to emerging, venture-backed innovators.

Merritt Group's philosophy starts with understanding our clients' target audiences and markets and developing powerful messages and creative programs that create awareness for their innovations. Our in-depth knowledge of



One of Merritt's foundational values is giving back to our community, and it has served as an integral part of what makes our agency culture unique and sought after. In addition to ongoing volunteer time off programs, we plan an annual Merry Week of Giving that allows our team to partake in a week of off-site and in-office volunteer efforts, one of which you see pictured here. We've partnered with DC Central Kitchen for the past 5 years to ensure our local community is able to enjoy the holiday season.

our clients' competitors, industry trends and influencers turns our campaigns into immediate ROI for their business.

We pride ourselves on delivering insightful, strategic communications approaches that take full advantage of the intersection of media, digital and creative based on analytical research. While the landscape has evolved, our passion for consistently delivering high-quality, well-executed creative campaigns is undiminished. Our goal is to help the world's most inspiring companies share viewpoints that get people talking and keep their audiences engaged. We also have built our business on the expertise of our people by procuring and developing the industry's best talent. We foster innovation and experimentation that allows our people to develop their careers to their fullest potential and, in the process, deliver incredible service and value to our clients.

At Merritt Group, we are family. We are go-getters, authentic, and love a balanced and fulfilling work life. The agency places employee culture as a top priority, which has resulted in an industry-low turnover rate.

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Rose Ross, Managing Director

With over 20 years experience in B2B technology PR and marketing, boutique agency Omarketing helps its clients eclipse their competition. Its team of specialists have a wealth of experience working with growing startups all the way through to established international names. Omarketing's effective campaigns are tailored to its clients in sectors including AI, big data, cloud, IoT, security, storage and much more.

PADILLA

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Amy Fisher, Vice President/
Technology Lead

Padilla is an independently operated, globally resourced public relations and communication company with offices across the United States. The agency helps clients transform by building, growing, and protecting their brands and reputations worldwide through

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PADILLA

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public relations, advertising, digital and social marketing, investor relations and brand strategy. Padilla includes the brand consultancy of Joe Smith, the food and nutrition experts at FoodMinds, and the research authorities at SMS Research Advisors.

Padilla's Technology Practice helps complex B2B technology brands reach and influence prospective buyers and customers, partners, investors and employees through targeted, compelling brand stories. Clients include enterprise hardware, software and services, AI, cloud, IoT, big data/analytics, mobility, blockchain, networking and security, engineering and materials science organizations. Padilla's Technology team consists of experts helping tech companies sell into verticals such as retail, hospitality and CX, health care, education, finance, marketing, industrial, agriculture and transportation.

We service technology brands of all sizes including 3M, Rockwell Automation, Calabrio, Crisp, Direct Source and Outlier.

Padilla is an AVENIR GLOBAL company and a founding member of the Worldcom Public Relations Group, a partnership of 132 independently owned partner offices in 115 cities on six continents. Transform with purpose at PadillaCo.com.

PAN COMMUNICATIONS

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Gareth Thomas, Managing Dir., UK

PAN Communications is a leading integrated marketing and PR agency servicing B2B tech and healthcare brands. With 25+ years of experience, PAN helps companies transform ideas into captivating stories that align to emerging,

mid and late-stage growth strategies through the firm's NXT Stage approach. Recognized as Technology Agency of the Year and Best Mid-sized Agency to Work For, PAN has office locations in Boston, San Francisco, New York, Orlando and London, as well as a growing virtual community in the US and UK. The agency is positioned to help brands emerge in new markets and scale globally, with experience driving integrated strategy across a variety of brands like Citrix, Radial, GYANT, athenahealth, OneStream and Payoneer. PAN strives to help today's modern marketers by integrating a combination of services to better engage with target audiences and move markets.

Connected Content—Creative Storytelling—Results that Matter!

Clients include: 908 Devices, Absolute Software, airSlate, Amdocs, App Annie, athenahealth, Bazaarvoice, ByMiles, Cedar, Citrix, CloudBees, Definitive Healthcare, Degreed, Human, Hyperscience, Igloo, MediaMath, NTT Data, OneStream, Payoneer, Patients-LikeMe, Quanterix, Quorum Software, Radial, Rapid7, Smartly.io, Sailpoint, Software AG, UPS Capital, VEEAM and Waters.

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Bob Osmond, President
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Carolyn Regan, Senior Vice President, People

Society has always been propelled forward by technology. There is a growing expectation, however, that innovation must serve humanity—there must be a higher moral purpose than innovating only because we can.

We believe that the complex challenges we face as a global society can only be tackled by embracing

creativity and innovation fueled by purpose. Every company in every category is in some way using technology to sustainably change the way we work, live and play.

At Racepoint Global (RPG), our mission is simple: We help our clients navigate and succeed in the new communications landscape by shaping the conversations that matter. We live at the intersection of conversation and innovation and we serve clients with channel-agnostic communications strategies that engage their target audiences in authentic and meaningful ways. Our work with clients establishes competitive differentiation and drives business impact. In 2021, RPG was named a *PRWeek* Top 100 U.S. integrated communications agency, a Top 15 U.S. Technology PR Agency by *O'Dwyer's*, a *PRovoke* Global Top 250 agency and ranked in the Top 25 of *Boston Business Journal's* Largest PR Firms in Massachusetts list.

Capabilities: Communications Foundation & Brand Strategy, Reputation & Relationship Management, Editorial & Content Development, Industry, Technology & Thought Leadership, Tradeshows, Events & Experiences, Visual Design & Content Creation, Digital & Social Media and Measurement

Clients include: ACD/Labs, Atmotic Technologies, CHIPS Alliance, The Commission on the Future of Mobility, Consigli Construction, Duck Creek Technologies, eClinicalWorks, E Ink, Infinix, John Deere, MediaTek, Mythic, Panasonic System Solutions Company of North America, Qlik, RISC-V, Semtech and Tapcheck

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John Raffetto, CEO
David Herman, President
Hally Wax, Senior Vice President
Emily Porro, Senior Vice President

RH Strategic is focused on the future. We partner with clients who are disrupting the future of their industries; we invest in the futures of our incredible team members; and we contribute to readying the communications industry for the

future ways society will consume and share information. We do more than simply meet the needs of our clients today—we craft campaigns that will power our clients' growth tomorrow.

We go deep to explore industries and have established our success in representing clients whose missions we are proud of. From launching LiDAR technology for self-driving cars, to promoting widespread adoption of new modes of home healthcare and education during the pandemic, to publicizing cybersecurity thought leaders, RH Strategic tells the stories of innovators with an over-the-horizon view of our future world.

This is why our team of more than 30 pros comes to work every day excited to challenge the status quo and introduce the world to the new market leaders. RH Strategic is based in Seattle and Washington DC, with team members nationwide. We are a partner in the Worldcom Public Relations group, spanning 132 offices in 115 countries on six continents.

SOURCECODE COMMUNICATIONS

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Greg Mondschein, Co-Founder and Managing Partner
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Karlsson Banks, Vice President, Consumer
Amanda King, Vice President, Enterprise

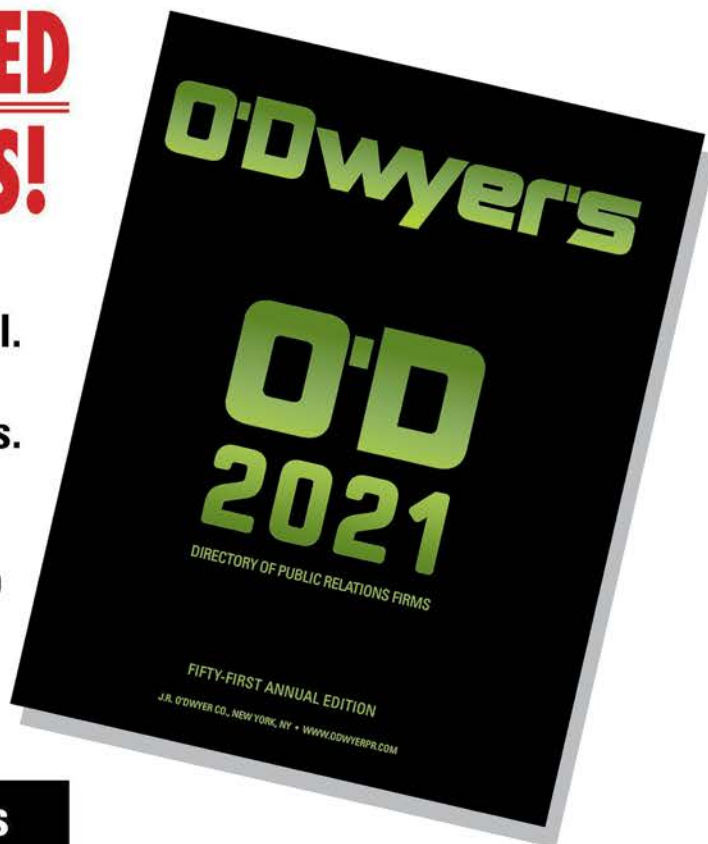
Since its inception in 2017, SourceCode Communication's philosophy has centered on changing technology conversations by injecting humanity, empathy, and an emphasis on storytelling back into technology communications. We believe that if we can make the end user emotionally connect with a brand, we can more effectively change perceptions and behavior. Over the last four years, SourceCode has used this philosophy to fuel its growth into an award-winning communications marketing agency delivering measurable business impact to brands across D2C, Health & Wellness, Consumer Lifestyle, Consumer Technology, Financial Technology, Mobile,

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ORDER THE ONLY PRINTED DIRECTORY OF PR FIRMS!

O'Dwyer's is the #1 source for researching public relations firms and outside PR counsel. We've been connecting clients and PR firms for 50 years through our Directory of PR Firms.

You get quick access to large, medium-sized, and small PR firms and even experienced freelancers who work out of their homes. Whether you seek a long-term, worldwide relationship or need extra help on a project, **O'Dwyer's is the place to shop.**



Why O'Dwyer's Directory of PR Firms is so popular:

- ✓ **Has brought billions of dollars in business to PR firms.**
- ✓ *Authoritative industry rankings, based on CPA statements & tax returns.*
- ✓ *Firms ranked by 13 geographical regions in the U.S.*
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"One of a kind resource for anyone involved in public relations—from clients to potential clients, from recent graduates to experienced practitioners—this is the directory to have close at hand."

—Fraser Seitel, PR consultant, author & New York University adjunct professor

"The O'Dwyer's Directory of PR Firms is the most trusted resource for PR firm profiles and a platform for their brands. I have been a very satisfied user for my 33 years in PR."

—Rick Gould, Gould+Partners

"Up-to-date, indispensable resource. Saves time and money. Every PR pro should have one."

—Robert L. Dilenschneider, The Dilenschneider Group

"A phenomenal job-seeking aid."

—Marie Raperto, CIMSearch

"The most comprehensive PR industry reference tool for clients and agencies. The gold standard in PR industry reference materials."

—Henry P. Feintuch, Feintuch Communications

SOURCECODE COMMS.

Continued from page 42

Cloud & Telecoms, Insights & Engagement, Analytics, and Enterprise Technology. The agency also proudly runs the Diversity Marketing Consortium™, a 501c3 using communications to amplify Black-, female-, and other minority-owned businesses, as well as WeRaise PR launched earlier this year to support, and champion, working parents within the communications industry. For more information, please visit www.sourcecodecommunications.com.

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Managing Directors
Liam Collopy, Matt Conroy,
Katrin Lieberwirth, Mike
Goodwin, SVPs

The Stanton team has a distinguished track record of helping leading companies and emerging innovators tell their story so media, not only understand it, but want to write about it. We excel at simple, compelling explanations of complex technologies and demonstrating real-world impact. This approach moves the story beyond tech trade media to connect with broader business and financial audiences critical to strong technology brands. From launching new companies and products to cultivating relationships with business partners, industry thought leaders, analysts and influencers, our work helps tech clients capture mindshare and build leadership.

With offices in New York and the San Francisco Bay Area, Stanton is a full-service agency that supports our clients across a variety of communications disciplines including media relations, brand messaging, content development and marketing, executive visibility, thought leadership, digital and traditional marketing, reputation & change management, executive counsel, and social media. Our senior professionals spend the majority of their time on client work, ask tough questions, challenge assumptions, and suggest bold solutions. Clients find a home at our firm because we deliver a unique blend of smart strategy, strong rela-

tionships, innovative thinking, and first-class execution that produces business-changing results.

TECH TRAILBLAZERS AWARDS

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Rose Ross, Managing Director

The Tech Trailblazers Awards is an industry-renowned global awards program dedicated to the enterprise technology startup ecosystem. The program recognizes and rewards technological and commercial innovation and entrepreneurial excellence. The awards are open to all private companies under seven years old that are privately funded or VC backed (Series C or earlier). Categories include AI, Big Data, Blockchain, Cloud, Containers, Developer, Diversity, Female CxO, Fintech, Firestarters, IoT, Investment, Male CxO, Mobile, Networking, Security and Storage.

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Despite the continued presence of COVID in 2021, Trevelino/Keller anticipates its best year to date in terms of revenue and year over year growth. Paramount to that success is the firm's technology practice which continues to successfully leverage its strong vertical practices while also standing horizontally as a pure tech play. Ongoing work and success in the food-tech space with brands like Tillster and Franklin Junction play critical roles in serving the restaurant market with technology to drive delivery, kiosks and host kitchen solutions. With healthcare being particularly important in the pandemic environment, the firm also sees continued success in the health IT space with SOC Telemed and SnapNurse which positions itself as tech-powered nurse staffing.

The firm has continued its work in the fin-tech space with its rep-



The UPRAISE Marketing + Public Relations team.

resentation of Fin-Tech South, the annual conference backed by the Technology Association of Georgia. Consumer-tech work in the used car market with Carvana, boating and marine ecommerce with upstart Boatzon and soon to be launched DiscoverRoad, serving the outdoor travel space, all reinforce the firm's ability to showcase the breadth of its industry expertise in the direct to consumer space.

Of course, the firm remains heavily focused on the deep technology industry, representing brands like Adaptigent which serves the mainframe and software industries, 5Q, an IT service company and Go In-store, a retail technology solution.

As Atlanta continues to establish itself as one of the country's technology growth sectors, Trevelino/Keller continues to leverage its depth with emerging and middle market brands and its strategic partnerships with organizations such as Atlanta Tech Village, Atlanta Tech Angels, TechAlpharetta, Raise Forum, LaunchPad FN and Keiretsu Forum. Not limited by geography, its emerging, middle market and national technology clients can be found coast to coast.

UPRAISE MARKETING + PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Tim Johnson, President
Victoria Guimarin, Vice President

UPRAISE is the smart, savvy, scrappy agency driven to help organizations grow and build their brands through integrated campaigns, anchored with aggressive, creative strategy. Services include

energized media and analyst relations, compelling content, engaging digital and social media, captivating design and video, and breakthrough events. If you want "yes men" and "yes women," you've come to the wrong place. If you're looking for an agency that thinks big but sweats the details, you've come to the right place!

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Additional offices in San Francisco, Seattle, Boston and Atlanta

Mike Santoro, CEO

Walker Sands is a full-service B2B marketing agency with core capabilities in public relations, demand generation, branding, creative, marketing strategy and web. For two decades, we've pushed the limits of what B2B marketing can do to get the results and recognition our clients deserve. We pride ourselves on helping B2B brands reach their goals—whether that's increasing revenue, pushing into new markets, attracting top talent, going public or getting acquired.

Our mission is to accelerate the growth of B2B companies. Through strategic programs tailored to meet our clients' needs, we offer a full range of marketing expertise—from strategy to execution—to provide endless possibilities for B2B brands.

Our integrated approach drives awareness, credibility and conversions for 100+ B2B technology and professional services clients worldwide. A nine-time *Inc.* 5000 honoree, we're one of the fastest-growing B2B marketing agencies in the world, with offices in Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston and Atlanta. **○**

O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

TOP TECHNOLOGY PR FIRMS

Firm	Net Fees (2020)	Firm	Net Fees (2020)
1. Edelman , New York, NY	\$250,632,000	34. Kivvit , Chicago, IL	\$1,598,940
2. Hotwire , New York, NY	41,748,611	35. Peppercomm , New York, NY	1,586,040
3. Finn Partners , New York, NY	30,050,000	36. Coyne PR , Parsippany, NJ	1,500,000
4. Highwire PR , San Francisco, CA	24,163,050	37. Standing Partnership , St. Louis, MO	1,192,965
5. Zeno Group , New York, NY	20,875,754	38. 360PR+ , Boston, MA	1,037,427
6. Walker Sands , Chicago, IL	20,169,584	39. CommCentric Solutions, Inc. , Tampa, FL	897,706
7. PAN Communications , Boston, MA	19,918,991	40. Jackson Spalding , Atlanta, GA	880,082
8. ICR , New York, NY	18,443,930	41. French West Vaughan , Raleigh, NC	774,003
9. Hoffman Agency, The , San Jose, CA	15,115,000	42. Pierpont Communications , Houston, TX	756,713
10. Inkhouse , Waltham, MA	11,755,489	43. Bob Gold & Associates , Redondo Beach, CA	601,064
11. 5W Public Relations , New York, NY	10,800,000	44. Feintuch Communications , New York, NY	575,314
12. Matter Communications , Boston, MA	10,041,000	45. Bellmont Partners , Minneapolis, MN	434,588
13. Racepoint Global , Boston, MA	9,281,740	46. Tunheim , Minneapolis, MN	409,349
14. Clarity , New York, NY	9,035,115	47. Landis Communications , San Francisco, CA	362,000
15. MWWPR , New York, NY	8,232,993	48. Montieth & Company , New York, NY	323,000
16. Fahlgren Mortine (includes TURNER), Columbus, OH	7,867,949	49. Berk Communications , New York, NY	314,500
17. Merritt Group , McLean, VA	7,113,910	50. Greentarget Global LLC , Chicago, IL	282,000
18. Bospar , San Francisco, CA	6,242,285	51. BoardroomPR , Ft. Lauderdale, FL	275,000
19. Touchdown PR , Austin, TX	5,600,633	52. Rasky Partners, Inc. , Boston, MA	275,000
20. LaunchSquad , San Francisco, CA	5,471,510	53. Pugh & Tiller PR, LLC , Annapolis, MD	231,017
21. Lumina Communications , San Jose, CA	5,204,425	54. MP&F Strategic Communications , Nashville, TN	230,150
22. SourceCode Communications , New York, NY	5,168,512	55. FrazierHeiby , Columbus, OH	188,194
23. March Communications , Boston, MA	3,869,104	56. WordWrite Communications LLC , Pittsburgh, PA	117,000
24. Idea Grove , Dallas, TX	3,577,000	57. Fish Consulting , Fort Lauderdale, FL	107,500
25. Crenshaw Communications , New York, NY	3,061,499	58. Beehive Strategic Communication , St. Paul, MN	75,436
26. ARPR , Atlanta, GA	3,022,086	59. Akrete , Evanston, IL	65,607
27. Padilla , Minneapolis, MN	3,019,908	60. O'Malley Hansen Communications , Chicago, IL	61,933
28. Havas Formula , New York, NY	2,966,409	61. J Public Relations , New York, NY	52,500
29. Citizen Relations , Los Angeles, CA	2,634,085	62. BizCom Associates , Plano, TX	46,542
30. TruePoint Communications , Dallas, TX	2,629,819	63. rbb Communications , Miami, FL	42,016
31. Gregory FCA , Ardmore, PA	2,315,110	64. Stuntman PR , New York, NY	7,500
32. Hunter , New York, NY	1,700,000	65. Champion Management Group , Dallas, TX	5,000
33. Trevelino/Keller , Atlanta, GA	1,600,000		

Ranking the *New York Times* columnists

By Fraser P. Seitel

The *New York Times* is, inarguably, the world's most powerful newspaper.

Each day, the *Times* turns out 60-100 pages of originally-sourced news from around the globe, covering every subject imaginable.

It reaches seven million people a day, 6.9 million of them online. Its daily news stories help set the agenda for governments and thought leaders throughout the world.

I've been a subscriber to the print edition of *The New York Times* for three decades. And I despise it. It was not always thus.

Oh sure, the *Times* has always been contemptuous of public relations people, traditionally characterizing them as "flacks," disregarding their news releases and often going to great lengths to avoid mentioning their clients, no matter how eleemosynary the client-sponsored subject.

But the *Times*, traditionally, has also housed the finest domestic and international journalists. Its war zone foreign correspondents, like John Burns and David Rhode, were fearless truth tellers. Its obituaries, still authored by high craftsmen like Sam Roberts and William Grimes, are models of meticulous writing. And its opinion columnists from James Reston to Russell Baker to Johnny Apple were legendary.

Today, alas, the tree has fallen far from the Apple.

The *Times* news pages have been overtaken by an obvious left-leaning, liberal bias. Similarly, its editorial page has become a wasteland of monotonous anti-capitalist, anti-conservative, anti-democratic screeds, authored mainly by mediocre writers, united in their antipathy toward Republicans and their uncompromising hatred of Donald Trump.

Now, there's nothing wrong with despising the truly despicable Trumpster, but sadly, ever since the Donald's stupefying victory in 2016, *The New York Times* has given up all pretense of objectivity. It's still not as far left as NPR or MSNBC, but it's getting there.

Nowhere is this truer than on the once-revered editorial page, where a cavalcade of lesser lights is making its mark. Among them:

Charles Blow, the accidental humorist.

Charles Blow—his real name—is without question the *Times*' funniest columnist. Not that he intends to be funny; he doesn't. But Mr. Blow is so angry, so enraged, so apoplectic in every column, you can't help but chortle. He sees racists beneath every rock, sexists behind every smile, traitors around every tree.

There's no subject that Mr. Blow confronts where the fate of the world doesn't hang in the balance. Everything stands in peril, every column, every day. A cynic might argue that the only logical reason for a columnist to be so persistently, pathologically pessimistic is to attract clicks to the *Times*, which Mr. Blow does. An even bigger cynic might argue that he purposely writes over the top to attract interest from TV networks, which Mr. Blow has as an MSNBC contributor and Black News Channel host.

Technically, Mr. Blow is less a "writer" than a "stenographer," in that most of his columns spend most of their space quoting the words of others. Typical was a recent offering that spent six whole paragraphs quoting President Biden's Town Hall exchange with CNN's Anderson Cooper.

Michelle Goldberg, the wounded worrier.

Michelle Goldberg is the *Times* version of Debbie Downer. She's worried about the possibility of Trump coming back, about her Upper West Side kids getting enough COVID shots, about less privileged kids getting no COVID shots, about Trump coming back, about centrist senator Kyrsten Sinema derailing a desperately-needed \$3 trillion spending bill and, most of all, about Trump coming back.

Like her opinion associate Mr. Blow, Ms. Goldberg imagines disaster lurking around every corner. Don't read her column if you've recently installed a pacemaker. On the bright side, unlike Mr. Blow, Ms. Goldberg doesn't believe everything is wrong with the country in which she resides; just ... most things.

Tom Friedman, Paul Krugman, Maureen Dowd, fading fast.

The senior *Times* op ed triumvirate has grown old, cold and increasingly irrelevant. Each of them, the paper is quick to point out, has earned high honors for commentary. True but ... Ms. Dowd earned her Pulitzer Prize three decades ago, Mr. Friedman earned his Pulitzer two decades ago and Mr.

Krugman earned his Nobel Prize in Economic Science more than a decade ago.

Today, their columns often tilt toward nostalgia, e.g. Mr. Friedman writing longingly of his trip to Afghanistan with Joe Biden in 2002, or nastiness, e.g. Ms. Dowd describing the adversarial Sen. Sinema as "the Greta Garbo of Congress, or subjects about which they know little, e.g. the Nobel economist Mr. Krugman waxing on climate change, vaccine mandates and Mitch McConnell.

No longer, sadly, are the columns of the three stalwarts "must" reading; more like, read them if you must.

David Brooks, already gone.

And then there's once-commonsensual, once clear-eyed, once laser-focused *Times* columnist David Brooks. What in the world has happened to him?

His columns today are abstract, obtuse and impossible to wade through. Recent Brooks' columns, for example discussed such pressing topics as "essentialism," the belief that the groups we join are rooted in reality; the mirage of "self-awareness;" and "estrangement" within the American family.

All perfectly reasonable issues for say, *Psychology Today*, but for the daily *New York Times*? I don't think so.

On the other hand, Mr. Brooks at least still tries to be even-handed, which is more than you can say for most of the newer *Times* contributors, whose views cover the spectrum from left to far left, from merely radical to downright revolutionary. Mr. Manjoo, for instance, recently extolled the virtues of a "post-job, antiwork world," where "people wrest the reins of their lives from the soul-sucking, health-destroying maw of capitalism."

It is, indeed, a dismal lot. Then again, there are ...

Gail Collins and Bret Stephens, a sign of hope.

Somehow in this gloomy galaxy of eminently forgettable *New York Times* opinion writers, someone somewhere came up with the bright idea of teaming liberal Gail Collins with conservative Bret Stephens in a weekly op ed dialogue. And they struck gold.

Ms. Collins, whose career as a satirist nosedived when she couldn't find anything funny to write during the Trump years, and Mr. Stephens, who almost got fired when the *Times* realized he was an actual Republican, are a breath of fresh air on the opinion page. Their topical weekly give-and-take is inspired, intelligent, informative, witty and civil.

Pity it's the only such column in the newspaper. ○



Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for more than 30 years. He is the author of the Prentice-Hall text, *The Practice of Public Relations*.

Leveraging technology to monitor performance

By Dominic Rovano

March of 2020 brought many changes to how owners manage their business. The workforce became remote—or at least hybrid for a period of time—the way businesses interfaced and collaborated as a team and with their clients also changed, as did the way businesses monitored financial performance.



Dominic Rovano, CPA, is a Co-Partner in Charge of Janover LLC's New York City office. He leads the Professional Services group, and helps its clients satisfy their financial-reporting requirements successfully by providing assurance, tax and other advisory services.

Prior to the pandemic, reports might have been dropped on a manager or owner's desk to review the performance for a team, project, client or firm as a whole. Often, these reports were backwards looking and not strategic in nature. Suddenly, with a remote or hybrid business model, owners needed to be more forward looking, and real time information became even more valuable. Did your organization evolve to track performance measurements digitally? If not, recognizing the need to shift to leveraging technology in order to make better business decisions is the first step in transforming the process.

Gain better insight into your business with dashboards

How much time does your organization spend pulling reports? Do you have the visibility you need into key operational data? Is your data stale by the time management looks at it? Does it provide any actionable information?

Data collection and processing can be time-consuming for many PR and marketing organizations, especially when you need to pull data from multiple places. The amount of data a single business generates can be overwhelming and challenging to access, interpret and update on an ongoing basis. This is compounded by the fact that many teams cultivating this information are not centrally located anymore.

More often than not, this information represents historical data and offers little

insight into steps you can take to evolve your business based on the results.

The good news is it's possible to monitor operational and financial data in real time through dashboards that give you a better pulse on your business.

How are dashboards different from Excel spreadsheets?

Experienced business leaders are familiar with the trends of their operations, but drilling down into that information can help identify inefficiencies and ways to improve productivity.

Presenting and comparing data sets in a graphical format enables businesses to capture valuable insight often hidden in the rows and columns of Excel spreadsheets.

Dashboards not only provide timely, easy-to-digest information, but they're also accessible anytime and anywhere. Putting information at your fingertips enables you to quickly identify issues and opportunities so you can easily pivot and make more informed business decisions. They also allow businesses to continuously analyze large amounts of historical and current operational and financial data and turn that information into actionable insights.

Dashboards are customizable, aggregate data, present information in a visual format and update in real time. Technology makes this possible, bringing data together from multiple sources and making it available to you in the cloud so you can access it whether you're traveling or working from home, day or night, from any web browser, tablet or phone. This allows you to track data such as current sales activity down to the hour or even minute.

Data presented in a visual format also helps business leaders quickly analyze performance and trends, compare time periods and drill down into key metric categories.

There are many tools out there, including Power BI and Tableau, that allow you to answer questions about business activity quickly and eliminate the need to pull together reports manually and after the fact.

Metrics vs. key performance indicators

To create meaningful dashboards, you need to establish your key performance indicators and ensure you capture the right data to monitor and track that information. While the terms "metric" and "KPI" are often used interchangeably, they are, in fact, different.

Metrics are quantifiable data relevant to the performance of a company such as: revenue, expenses, profit margin, website

clicks and number of employees.

KPIs capture information related to a specific organizational goal that's defined, achievable, measured, tracked and monitored. Examples of KPIs include: year-over-year growth in service lines, employee retention/turnover, project/service profitability, utilization (billable vs. non-billable), revenue per employee and project overruns.

Determining your KPIs

Identifying your KPIs depends on many factors, including the goals of your business. Working backward from there can help your organization determine the KPIs necessary to track to measure your success.

To bring this data together, it must be tracked individually and consistently. Many PR and marketing businesses aren't the best at tracking time by project, but this information is necessary to drill down and measure profitability, utilization and revenue.

Again, we can turn to technology to help capture time and how salaries are allocated. When tracking KPIs, you may start to notice things about your business you previously were unaware of. As a result, your KPIs may evolve as you develop new goals based on the information.

Once you have the KPIs and metrics you want to track and have identified where the data will come from, customized dashboards can bring this information together to provide you with better, more timely information to run your business.

Creating custom dashboards

Imagine being able to track the profitability of a project in real time from your smart phone. Having the ability to make timely adjustments to a project plan is vital while managing a business in a remote or hybrid environment. Leveraging technology through the use of dashboards can make this possible.

Programs like PowerBI and Tableau can help harness the multiple lines of data running through your business every second to create tools for the business owner to execute plans successfully. There's no longer a need to spend time waiting around for the latest report to be dropped onto your desk or sent to your inbox. Create a plan to establish dashboards for your business that you can access anytime from one of your many devices while managing your business.

Dominic Rovano, CPA, is a Co-Partner in Charge of Janover LLC's New York City office. ○

Ogilvy boosts FEMA ties with \$250M resiliency push

Ogilvy has strengthened its longtime relationship with the Federal Emergency Management Agency as the WPP unit picks up \$250 million in fresh funding for the Resilience Action Partners communications push via a joint venture Michael Baker International.

The goal of FEMA's community engagement and risk communication program is to support efforts to change the way communities understand and think about disaster risks and encourage them to take actions to bolster their resilience to natural disasters.

The WPP unit's CERC team includes staffers in 20 cities involved in PR, advertising, healthcare, growth and innovation and behavioral science.

Housed in Washington, the effort is by Lisa Miller, Senior VP and CERC Program Director; and Meg Bartow, Executive VP for Resilience and Social impact and CERC Executive Sponsor.

The Resilience Action Partners program launched in 2015. ○

Cornerstone calls Cleveland Clinic alum

Cornerstone Government Affairs has added Carlos Jackson, who has more than 20 years of experience in forging relationships between healthcare organizations and policymakers.

He joins the D.C.-based firm from America's Essential Hospitals, where Jackson was VP-Legislative Affairs.

Earlier, Jackson was Executive Director of Government Relations at the Cleveland Clinic's Health System.

He guided advocacy programs at the state and federal levels and was Cleveland Clinic's interface with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Dept. of Health and Human Services.

Jackson also did lobbying and government stints at the American Hospital Assn. and American Nurses Assn.

Cornerstone, which has 110 professionals, has 13 offices across the U.S. ○



Carlos Jackson

Vanda's Jones takes Starbucks PA post

Vanda Pharmaceuticals' Aranthan (AJ) Jones will join Starbucks on Oct. 25 as Senior VP-Global Communications and Public Affairs.

He also will oversee partner communications, Starbucks Stories, as well as marketing integration and entertainment teams worldwide.

Jones will advance Starbucks' "growth at scale" agenda and develop narratives in support of customers, products, partners and social impact.

At Vanda, Jones was Chief Corporate Affairs and Communications Officer in charge of PR, IR, government affairs, corporate marketing, ESG and corporate philanthropy.

Previously, he led policy and communications at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and did stints at the Podesta Group and BCW.



Aranthan Jones



Jones also has Capitol Hill experience, serving as Policy Director for Congressional majority whip James Clyburn (D-SC) and Lead Communicator for the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 and the creation of the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP). ○

ALEC's Meierling moves to IFA

Bill Meierling, who was CMO and EVP-External Relationships and Strategic Partnerships at the American Legislative Exchange Council since 2013, has joined the International Franchise Association.

As VP-Strategic Communications and Marketing, Meierling will support IFA's mission to protect, promote and enhance franchising that supports 7.6 million jobs and contributes \$675 billion to the US economy.

Prior to ALEC, Meierling had strategic communications and policy experience at United Way Worldwide, Edelman and OpinionMakers International, where he was a founding Partner. ○



Bill Meierling

Brunswick hires former Spitzer/Paterson press sec.

Errol Cockfield, who was Press Secretary to former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer and his successor David Paterson, has joined Brunswick Group as a Partner in its Big Apple office.

Most recently, Cockfield was Senior VP-Communications at MSNBC, where he handled overall media strategy, and Senior VP in Edelman's corporate & PA affairs shop.

He began his career as a journalist (Los Angeles Times, Harford Courant and Newsday) and will advise Brunswick clients on in the technology, media and telecommunications sectors.

The firm also has brought on Andrew Williams, who was Managing Director of Corporate Communications at Goldman Sachs, as a partner in New York. He led PR for Goldman's digital consumer bank, Marcus.

Previously, Williams was Director of Media Relations at General Electric and served on the public affairs staffs of the Treasury Dept. and New York Federal Reserve during the global financial meltdown. ○



Errol Cockfield

Stripe Theory aids Jordan King's rep

Stripe Theory has signed on to provide consulting services to the Royal Hashemite Court regarding potential defamation suits concerning articles about Jordan's King Abdullah II.

The 59-year-old monarch was among movers and shakers featured in the "Pandora Papers" project that was conducted by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

It alleged that the King secretly owned luxury homes in the UK and US worth more than \$100 million.

Craig Kronenberger, who, as Managing Director of Edelman Intelligence, co-led a team of more than 200 data scientists and researchers, launched Stripe Theory data-based PR, crisis and reputation management firm in 2015.

Acceleration Community of Companies, the firm of former PMK-BNC CEO Michael Nyman, acquired the Atlanta-based Stripe Theory in 2020.

Stripe Theory is working for the Jordanians as a subcontractor to DLA Piper, which bills at a \$1,335-an-hour rate.

Mary Gately, who co-head of DLAs Washington litigation group, oversees the work for Jordan. ○

Italy hires Project Assocs. for digital push

Italy's mission to the United Nations has hired Project Associates for a campaign to leverage its events and content on digital platforms to increase its social media following as well as raise

awareness and promote the image of Italy at the UN and to a global audience.

Project Assocs. will concentrate on growing the following, reach and engagement rates of the official social media accounts of the Mission with a particular focus on the Twitter channel, @ItalyUN_NY, which has 22,600 followers.

Under the eight-month contract that began Sept. 7, Project Assocs is to audit the Mission's existing social media standing, draw up a strategic framework for a digital promotion strategy in conjunction with the Mission's press office, develop a content creation schedule, execute outreach, and monitor daily social media activity.

Italy's UN ambassador Maurizio Massari inked the contract with Project Assocs. ○

Edelman gets \$1.3M budget to promote Saudi mega-city

Edelman is promoting Saudi Arabia's Neom Co., which is developing a \$500 billion mega-city in the northwestern part of the kingdom.

The No. 1 independent PR firm is providing media relations, strategic counsel, stakeholder identification and engagement, content development and media monitoring services. It has a budget of \$1.3 million for a six-month effort that kicked off on Sept. 28.

Neom is the centerpiece of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's push to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy.

Jere Sullivan, Edelman's Vice Chairman for Global Public Affairs, heads the Neom push that is supported by DC staffers Jack O'Shea, Debora Comenalli Murray and Tyler Lehner. ○

FARA News



NEW FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT FILINGS

Below is a list of select companies that have registered with the U.S. Department of Justice, FARA Registration Unit, Washington, D.C., in order to comply with the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, regarding their consulting and communications work on behalf of foreign principals, including governments, political parties, organizations, and individuals. For a complete list of filings, visit www.fara.gov.

Cornerstone Government Affairs, Inc., Washington, DC, **registered Sept. 16, 2021 for Republic of India**, Washington, DC, regarding providing counsel on strengthening ties to the United States government and institutions.

Foster Garvey PC, Washington, DC, **registered Sept. 30, 2021 for Global Guardian Trust**, Tokyo, Japan, regarding monitoring congressional, administrative and judicial developments with respect to U.S. laws and policies that may affect the Japanese fisheries industry on high seas or otherwise.

Park Strategies, LLC, New York, NY (as subcontractor to Forbes Tate Partners, LLC), **registered Oct. 25, 2021 for Hydro-Quebec**, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, regarding providing government and public affairs consulting services for Hydro-Quebec and in support of the Champlain Hudson Power Express project.

Lobbying News



NEW LOBBYING DISCLOSURE ACT FILINGS

Below is a list of select companies that have registered with the Secretary of the Senate, Office of Public Records, and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Legislative Resource Center, Washington, D.C., in order to comply with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. For a complete list of filings, visit www.senate.gov.

Arent Fox LLP, Washington, DC, **registered Oct. 14, 2021 for Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers**, City of Industry, CA, regarding federal legislation and funding opportunities to promote STEM education.

Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP, Washington, DC, **registered Oct. 20, 2021 for Viking River Cruises**, Woodland Hills, CA, regarding general maritime issues.

Hogan Lovells US LLP, Washington, DC, **registered Oct. 13, 2021 for Grand Canyon Trust**, Flagstaff, AZ, regarding land use and conservation issues of interest to the organization and its board.

Venable LLP, Washington, DC, **registered Oct. 14, 2021 for American Optometric Assn.**, Alexandria, VA, regarding legislative outreach and monitoring on Medicare vision expansion and other issues.

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Agency Statement:

A global communications agency with a specialization in public relations, social media, content creation and digital marketing. With 55+ team members across four U.S. offices including New York City, San Diego, Los Angeles and Nashville, two international offices in London and Toronto, plus a presence in Denver and Arizona, JPR is a trusted leader in integrated media relations, social media and brand strategy, trend forecasting, guest programming, brand partnerships, experiential activations, influencer engagement and crisis communications.

Established in 2005, JPR has consistently risen as a leader in the travel and hospitality spaces. Today, the agency's growing portfolio spans many markets outside of travel and hospitality, with clients in lifestyle, culinary, real estate, and wellness. JPR's global roster includes more than 120+ hotels in the U.S., U.K. and throughout Europe, Mexico, Caribbean, Africa and more. JPR represents destinations such as North Carolina and Utah as well as flagship hospitality brands including Hilton Luxury Brands, Virgin Limited Edition, Relais & Châteaux, Vail Hospitality and Iconic Luxury Hotels.

JPR is continuously listed on the Observer's annual "PR Power 50" as one of the country's most powerful PR firms and Crain's "Best Places to Work in New York City." The agency also garnered "Top Places to Work" by PR News and received a Five Star rating in Forbes inaugural list of "America's Best PR Agencies," in addition to multiple trade and consumer awards for company culture and brand success. An industry innovator, JPR became the first travel PR agency to launch a podcast in 2018, Priority Status.

Jamie Sigler O'Grady, Sarah Evans, partners

Office Locations:

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530 7th Ave., #502, New York, NY 10018

212/924-3600

San Diego

2341 Fifth Ave., San Diego, CA 92101

619/255-7069

Los Angeles

429 Santa Monica Blvd., #280

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Jamie Sigler O'Grady,
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