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O'Dwyer's Newsletter

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MSU BRINGS ON TRUSCOTT ROSSMAN

John Engler, interim president of embattled Michigan State University, has retained Michigan's Truscott Rossman to deal with the fallout from the Larry Nassar sex abuse scandal.

Nassar, former doctor for MSU and USA Gymnastics, has been sentenced to 40 to 125 years in jail for abusing scores of young girls for more than two decades.

John Truscott, TR president, was press secretary and communications director for Engler for more than a decade when he served as Michigan's governor.



Larry Nassar

Republican Engler was named interim president on Jan 31.

James Blanchard, Michigan's former Democratic governor, was tapped as Engler's senior advisor.

Kelly Rossman-McKinney, TR CEO, served on Gov. Blanchard's press team.

Lou Anna Simon resigned from the MSU president post on Jan. 24.

Truscott told the *Lansing State Journal* his firm will develop a public outreach strategy for Engler. TR will not get involved in day-to-day communications.

MSU turned to [Weber Shandwick](#) in December to provide communications counsel.

Rossman-McKinney and Truscott formed full-service PR firm TR in 2011. It has offices in Lansing, Detroit and Grand Rapids.

BRUNSWICK UNVEILS GEOPOLITICAL UNIT

Brunswick Group has formed a geopolitical unit to counsel clients on how to deal with emerging political, social and economic trends that will impact their businesses.

Brunswick Geopolitical complements the firm's regulatory and PA practice.

Bob Zoellick (former World Bank president and US Trade Representative), George Yeo (ex-Singapore cabinet minister), Charles Powell (ex-foreign affairs advisor to UK prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major) and Pascal Lamy (one-time director general of the World Trade Organization) are Brunswick Geopolitical principals.

Kate Fall, Brunswick partner since 2016 and ex-chief of staff to UK Prime Minister David Cameron, presides over the geopolitical group as its executive director.



Kate Fall

PORT AUTHORITY SEEKS MARKETING PITCHES

The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey is seeking proposals from firms that can provide a broad spectrum of marketing communications services supporting the agency's corporate and business objectives.

The bi-state agency, which handles transportation and trade in the New York City region, is seeking a firm that can support the Port Authority's marketing department with strategy, planning, execution and evaluation of communications programs across all media. This would include assisting in the development of marketing and other communications strategies, creating and/or producing specific communications projects, developing media plans, developing communications promoting the Authority's revenue-generating services, assisting in the development of communications strategies that bolster public support for the Authority's strategic public affairs agendas and media monitoring duties.



The contract would commence on or around July 16 and would remain in effect for a three-year period, with options to extend the contract for up to three additional one-year periods.

Proposals are due by 2 p.m. EST on March 13.

[View the RFP \(PDF\)](#).

NASDAQ UNLOADS PR BIZ TO WEST CORP.

Nasdaq announced Jan. 29 the \$335M sale of its PR business to Omaha-based West Corp., provider of voice/data services communications.

The units include GlobeNewswire, webhosting/web-casting services, media monitoring and an influencer database of journalists and their social media profiles.

The sale is the result of Nasdaq's decision in September to explore strategic alternatives for businesses that did not fit its technology, data and analytics segments.



As part of the PR divestiture, Nasdaq has agreed to a multi-year partnership with West to provide Nasdaq clients access to certain of its products and services.

West generated \$2.2B revenues during 2016 from businesses such as web/video conferences, 9-1-1 emergency services networks, school safety systems and healthcare communications.

In 2016, it announced its own plan to study strategic alternatives, which led to the \$5B acquisition of West by Apollo Global Management last October.

GREECE GOES WITH TRIPPI & ASSOCS.

The Embassy of Greece's press and communications office has hired Trippi & Assocs. to provide global PR counsel, specifically on matters regarding the European Union and the US.

The EU has agreed to open negotiations on debt relief with Greece as the country is set to emerge from its eight-year bailout program, according to a BBC report on Jan. 23.

It has praised Greece's performance during the bailout program, but believes more relief is needed to ensure that the country gains "full access" to financial markets.



Joe Trippi

The International Monetary Fund backs the financial restructuring of Greece's debt, though a deal faces opposition from Europe's No. 1 economy, Germany.

Trippi & Assocs. reports to Greece's press counselor, Efthymios Aravantinos. Joe Trippi worked for Greece's former prime minister Andreas Papandreou, as well as ex-UK PM Tony Blair and Italy's ex-leader Romano Prodi.

He began his career working on Ted Kennedy's 1980 presidential run, but moved into the national spotlight as national campaign manager for Howard Dean's White House run in 2004.

WHITEBOARD ANIMATION SCRIPTS PR SEARCH

WhiteBoard Animation, which has done work for Verizon, Trader Joe's, ExxonMobil and Aetna Life, is looking for a PR firm, according to its owner/creative director Steve Day.

The firm will position Day as a thought leader in the use of online animated commercials at conferences, association meetings and industry events. He has appeared as guest speaker on the BBC, History Channel, ESPN and NPR's "Money Matters."



WA's firm will develop a press kit, handle reporter outreach and create a media relationship database. It will do business development work, targeting the technology, pharma, healthcare and biotech sectors.

WA has offices in Brooklyn and San Francisco. Day can be reached at steve@whiteboardanimation.com

BRIEF: **Padilla** has been selected to create and execute a marketing communications program to drive the expansion of high-caffeine coffee brand Death Wish Coffee into metro and western New York as well as New England and California. The brand, which brews what it calls the "World's Strongest Coffee," was founded in 2012 in Saratoga Springs, NY. "Padilla's partnership with Death Wish Coffee will help build and grow the company's national reach, connecting them to critical audiences looking to experience their seriously strong coffee," said Padilla CEO Lynn Casey.



CANADA ARTS CALLS FOR DEAF PR STRATEGY

The Canada Council for the Arts, the government of Canada's national promoter and funder of public arts, has issued a request for proposal for communications firms with expertise in sign language as well as communications with the deaf or hard of hearing, to develop and provide a comprehensive communications strategy.

The Ottawa, Ontario-based Council seeks to implement an effective method of engaging and communicating with deaf and hard of hearing arts professionals and members of the public, and is looking for firm that develop a comprehensive strategy to deliver key messages and information to the deaf.



The proposed strategy should address a range of media including sign language-interpreted videos, captioned videos, plain language text and other visual cues to be implemented in a variety of contexts and environments including announcements, blogs, event summaries, webinars, live web events, consultations and information sessions.

Proposals will be rated on a criterion of firm capabilities and cost. Total proposed budget should not exceed \$30,000.

Deadline for submissions is February 12 at 5:00 pm EST (Ottawa local time). Deadline for submitting questions is February 5. RFP submissions should be sent via email, with the RFP's title, "Deaf Communications Strategy," in the email's subject line.

[Download RFP \(PDF\)](#)

THOMAS ENROLLS AT HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Howard University has named Alonda Thomas PR director in charge of media relations, reputation management and its push to increase overseas visibility.

Citing her stints at North Carolina Central University and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, the DC college cited Thomas' ability to "combine her PR skills with her passion to promote historically black colleges and universities" among the reasons for her recruitment.

At FAMU, Thomas was media relations director and interim chief communications responsible for a \$1M budget. She earned strong coverage for FAMU in the *New York Times*, *Chronicle of Higher Education* and MSNBC and handled PR surrounding the hiring of a new president.

Most recently, Thomas was senior PR manager at TV One, promoting programming such as "Rickey Smiley for Real," and "When Love Kills: The Falicia Blakely Story."

She also served as publicity consultant for Liquid Soul, an entertainment and sports marketing firm in Atlanta. The work involved urban press outreach for Spike Lee's film "Chi-Raq" and CNN's "The United Shades of America," as well as PR/crisis management for the second season of ABC's sitcom, "black-ish."

Crystal Brown is VP-communications at Washington-based Howard University, which was founded in 1867.



Alonda Thomas

B-M RECRUITS LEE FOR NO. 2 HEALTH SLOT

Burson-Marsteller has named Avril Lee deputy global healthcare practice chair. Stationed in London, the former managing director of MSL Group's UK & EMEA health unit will join the WPP unit Feb. 19. Helene Ellison is B-M's global healthcare practice chair.

During a two-year stint at Publicis Groupe's MSL, Lee was responsible for the global effort of Allergan's ophthalmology and medical aesthetics businesses and other clients in the biopharma, device and diagnostics and O-T-C segments.

Earlier, she was with Luther Pendragon as director for its AbbVie Humira business and Ketchum London serving as relationship lead for Bayer Global & Roche.

B-M CEO Don Baer called strengthening London healthcare capabilities central to the firm's global ambitions.

Lee will report to Ellison and Stephen Day, CEO, B-M London.



Avril Lee

H+K'S KOENEMAN TAKES TO BULLY PULPIT

Hill+Knowlton Strategies' Claire Koeneman, who has more than 20 years of corporate & financial PR experience, has joined Bully Pulpit Interactive, digital marketing & communications shop, as a partner.

She had served as executive VP at H&K, central region chief and practice leader of the financial communications group. Earlier, she was president of the Financial Relations Board.

At BP, Koeneman will expand its corporate communications capabilities, build out the Chicago office and spread its footprint throughout the Midwest.

Andrew Bleeker, one-time global digital practice leader at H&K, launched BP in 2009. He was lead digital marketing strategist for Barack Obama's presidential campaigns and was senior advisor to Hillary Clinton.

BPI also has offices in New York, Washington and San Francisco.



Claire Koeneman

PICARIELLO SAILS FROM NCL

Vanessa Picariello, global head of PR for Norwegian Cruises Lines, has left her post.

Since NCL doesn't use an outside PR firm, Picariello handled all North American media relations, as well as publicity for brand announcements, product updates, food/beverage enhancements, ship launches and crisis PR.

She was in PR's front lines during the Jan. 4 "Poseidon Adventure"-like cruise of the Norwegian Breakaway, which went ahead with its return to New York from the Bahamas during winter storm Grayson in the "bombogenesis."



Vanessa Picariello

NCL apologized to "guests for the stronger than expected weather conditions and any resulting discomfort or inconvenience they may have experienced."

It assured them that safety of guests and crew members "is always our top priority."

Guests received a \$500 voucher good for a future cruise.

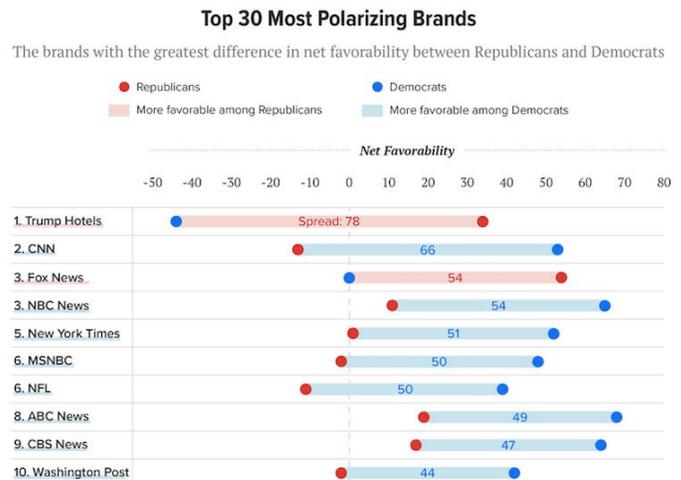
Picariello joined NCL in 2012 as PR and events manager.

A NCL spokesperson told *O'Dwyer's* that Picariello has not yet been replaced.

TRUMP HOTELS MOST POLARIZING BRAND

Brands reflect ideological associations, and keeping in the spirit of the present political climate, it appears that some have never been more divisive than they are today.

According to a recent **study of the most polarizing brands in America** conducted by digital politics and policy outlet The Morning Consult, companies, organizations or brand names seen as pro- or anti-Trump reveal massive gaps in favorability, depending on Americans' political affiliation.



The Morning Consult's study asked respondents to rate how they felt about particular brands, and brands were then ranked in terms of the differences they exhibited in net favorability (their favorable ratings minus their unfavorable ratings), to determine which are the most divisive among those who identified as Republican or Democrat.

The long and the short of it should come as a surprise to no one: Republicans immensely dislike brands critical of President Trump, and Democrats view any pro-Trump or Trump-associated brand as anathema.

President Trump's hospitality company, Trump Hotels, was rated America's most polarizing brand in The Morning Consult rankings, exhibiting the study's greatest net favorability divide (78 percentage points) between Republicans or Democrats.

Democrat-favored news network CNN took the number-two slot (with a 66 percent net favorability divide) while right-leaning Fox News and left-leaning NBC tied for the third-place (both with a 54 percent favorability gap).

In terms of overall aversion, Trump Hotels, Wells Fargo, DirectTV and Phillip Morris are among the brands

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TRUMP HOTELS MOST POLARIZING BRAND

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with the highest unfavorable rating among Democrats, while the National Football League, CNN, MSNBC and MTV are some of the brands most disliked among Republicans. The NFL's unusually high ranking, cited as the single most disliked Republican brand, was undoubtedly influenced as a result of the league's First Amendment player protests against police brutality, which eventually boiled into a spat with President Trump.

It should also come as no surprise that U.S. media companies accounted for the brands that divided Democrats and Republicans the most often. The *New York Times* took fifth place in the list, beating out MSNBC, which was number six. *Washington Post* was ranked tenth. Overall, media brands comprised 19 of the top 30 most polarizing brands in America, and accounted for all but one brand in the top ten (Trump Hotels).

The rankings brought to light other political battlegrounds among brands as well. Walmart is more popular among Republican shoppers, while Democrats see Target in a more favorable light. The NBA is a Democrat favorite, while Republicans prefer NASCAR. National pizza chains such as Papa John's, Little Caesars and Pizza Hut are enjoyed overwhelmingly by Republicans.

Morning Consult's "Most Polarizing Brands" study was based on survey interviews with more than 360,000 U.S. adults conducted online between early Oct. 2017 and early Jan. The top 30 brands were drawn from a prospective list of about 1,900.

TRAD. MEDIA TO GAIN AS FB SCALES BACK NEWS

Facebook's decision to downplay news from publishers and brands in favor of what it calls "meaningful social interactions" on individual feeds will likely lead audiences back to the original sources of that news, according to a report from **CooperKatz**.

Citing Pew Research Center numbers, the report finds 45 percent of Americans use Facebook to access news. CK polled 250 Americans via SurveyMonkey to find out where those users will go for news once it becomes less prominent on FB.



Social media sites didn't do particularly well in the survey. Twitter was the new news source of choice for only six percent of the respondents—and Snapchat, Instagram and LinkedIn came in even lower. Eleven percent said they will seek no new source of information.

Traditional news sources did much better, winning 65 percent of respondents who plan to rely on them for their information.

The CK study has several implications about what this means for both news sources and PR professionals.

For news sources, the fight for loyal readers is likely to become more intense. The study notes the tendency of

many people to stick with one or two news outlets rather than surf the web to pick up information from a variety of outlets. Finding and keeping a dedicated audience could become much more difficult.

For the PR industry, this shift could place a renewed importance on earned media. If an increasing number of users are gravitating toward mainstream news sources, placing stories there becomes more attractive.

FB on the other hand, will become less attractive. Breaking through on FB, the report says, will be costly and more difficult. Brands who continue to prioritize FB will need to be prepared to spend more and to devise strategies that are more focused on user engagement.

INFLUENCERS DOUBLED ON INSTAGRAM IN 2017

Photo-sharing site Instagram has now become the **top channel for influencer marketing**, according to recent data from social media analytics and intelligence platform Klear.

Using the #ad or #sponsored hashtag now mandated by the Federal Trade Commission to identify influencer-endorsed posts, Klear in January reported that the number of posts on Instagram sponsored by influencers nearly doubled between 2016 and 2017 to account for more than 1.5 million posts worldwide last year.



Klear's findings, which were published in its "The State of Influencer Marketing 2018 Report," claims that the total use of influencers in online marketing campaigns grew by 198 percent in 2017, with consistent month-over-month average growth of five percent. The report revealed that influencer-sponsored Instagram posts generated about one billion total "likes" globally last year, averaging about 682 "likes" per post.

Klear's data also found that young people and women overwhelmingly comprise the majority of Instagram's influencer economy, with nearly 84 percent of #ad posts in 2017 coming from women, and three-fourths of those posts coming from influencers between 18 and 34 years of age.

When it comes to what sectors are now leveraging influencers the most to raise brand awareness and drive engagement, Klear's report claims the number-one spot currently goes to the fashion and accessories industry, followed by beauty and cosmetics, food/beverage, automotive and consumer electronics. Travel, entertainment, retail, tech and fitness/wellness rounded out the top ten, respectively.

January estimates by digital market research company eMarketer found that Instagram, which now counts about 594 million regular total users, is quickly catching up with Facebook in terms of becoming the leading social platform, and now accounts for nearly a quarter — 24 percent — of all social network users worldwide.