



Kevin McCauley  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's Newsletter



The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications

271 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016  
212/679-2471. Fax: 212/683-2750  
[www.odwyerpr.com](http://www.odwyerpr.com); [jobs.odwyerpr.com](http://jobs.odwyerpr.com)

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## OCEAN STATE FLOATS TRAVEL PR RFP

The Rhode Island Commerce Corp. floats an RFP for a travel PR firm in a bid to bolster the Ocean State's \$6.5B tourism sector, which employs about 85K people.

The winning firm will "further develop and build a PR strategy, cultivate promotional and strategic partnerships, and provide research and analytics," according to the RICC's RFP. The scope of work includes "proactive pitching" and follow-up, organizing media events/familiarization trips and developing social media content, press releases, backgrounders and speeches.

RICC defines its target audiences as prospective/previous visitors, RI residents, transportation partners, tour operators and NGOs.

A contract will be issued during the first quarter that will run through June 20, 2020. RICC has the option to renew the agreement at the end of term for an additional three years, subject to state funding.

It will invite those with the best three proposals to Providence for oral presentations.

RFP responses are due Jan. 28. Send or hand-deliver an electronic (PDF) version on thumb drive or disk and eight printed copies to:

Rhode Island Commerce Corp.  
Attention: Tourism Public Relations Agency RFP  
315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101  
Providence, RI 02908

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

## NFL PASSES PR DUTIES TO SCHWARTZ

The National Football League has hired NASCAR's Jon Schwartz for the senior VP-communications & PA spot.

At the NFL, Schwartz will focus on long-term brand & PR strategies, align internal/external communications and provide outreach to various stakeholders. He will report to Jocelyn Moore, executive VP-external communications & PA.



Jon Schwartz

Schwartz, who has more than 20 years of PR experience, was NASCAR's managing director of integrated marketing communications. Earlier he was at MasterCard, Bank of America, American Hockey League and Arena Football League.

He also did a stint at sports PR powerhouse Taylor, handling sponsorships for Reebok, Texaco and Castrol.

## FRONTFOUR LAUNCHES PROXY FIGHT AT MDC

FrontFour Capital Group, which owns a 5.3 percent stake in MDC Partners, has launched an effort to oust three of eight directors of the ad/PR holding company.

The Connecticut hedge fund believes a board revamp is needed to create shareholder value at MDC, according to its Jan. 2 Securities and Exchange Commission filing.



MDC shares trade at \$2.79. 52-week range is \$2.20, \$10.10. The firm lost \$36.2M on \$1.1B nine-month 2018 revenues.

FrontFour wants a meeting no later than March 29 for a shareholder vote to remove directors Scott Kauffman (outgoing MDC CEO), Clare Copeland (vice chairman of Falls Management commercial developer/casino operator) and Irwin Simon (CEO of Hain Celestial Group natural/organic food company).

Its slate of directors includes Stephen Loukas (partner at FrontFour), Kristen O'Hara (ex-CMO of Time Warner) and David Moran (co-founder of Deep Relevance Partners branding firm).

MDC said it remains focused on its previously announced plan to explore strategic options and search for a CEO.

It owns Allison + Partners, Sloane & Co, KWT Global and Hunter PR.

## ICR ACQUIRES WESTWICKE PARTNERS

ICR has acquired Westwicke Partners, a health-centered investor relations firm based in Baltimore with offices in New York, Boston, San Diego, San Francisco and London.

Headed by founders Bob East and Mark Klausner, Westwicke's 30 staffers serve more than 100 clients in the life science, medical technology and healthcare sectors.

ICR CEO Tom Ryan plans to combine his firm's 75-plus healthcare staffers with Westwicke's group to create the Westwicke, An ICR Company, brand.

East and Klausner will helm the new entity that has expanded its capabilities to include PR, digital branding, crisis/special situations and governance advisory services.

Founded in 2006, Westwicke has worked for Quorum Health, Ensign Group, Archer, Netsmart, Tonix Pharmaceuticals and Teleflex.



Bob East

## SKDKNICK OPERATES ON SLOAN KETTERING

SKDKnickerbocker is working with Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center as the nation's top research and treatment facility seeks to restore luster to a reputation tarnished by news of cozy ties between some of its top researchers and industry, and the ensuing revolt by rank and file doctors.

The *New York Times*, in conjunction with ProPublica, has published a series of stories about lucrative relationships between Sloan Kettering's top researchers and the private sector. One story attributed a cultural change at SK following the 2010 departure of CEO Harold Varmus to head the National Cancer Institute.

Following an Oct. 1 meeting of SK doctors, who were angered by revelations about lucrative relationships with the private sector, Varmus's replacement as CEO, Craig Thompson, vowed greater openness with rank and file doctors.

SKDKnick helps SK manage messaging and has "aggressively pushed back against the idea that the hospital's leaders are too close to industry," according to the NYT. Mark Penn's Stagwell Group owns SKDKnick.

## VATICAN SPOKESPERSON BURKE RESIGNS

Vatican spokesperson Greg Burke has resigned, as Pope Francis revamps his communications shop.

Burke joined the Vatican as strategic communicators adviser in 2012 from Fox News, where he was Rome correspondent.

Paloma Garcia Ovejero, Burke's deputy, has also stepped down.

Pope Francis has appointed Alessandro Gisotti, former deputy editor-in-chief of Vatican Radio, as interim director of the press office. He was social media director at the Vatican's dicastery for communication.



**Greg Burke**

The Roman Catholic Church wrapped up a "hellish" year that was filled with investigations in a dozen US states and DC into sex abuse scandals, and calls from conservative clerics for the resignation of Pope Francis.

## SUBJECT MATTER GETS H&R BLOCK'S GRANT

Subject Matter is adding Cedric Grant to its government relations team.

Grant joins the firm from H&R Block where he was lead Democratic lobbyist. Before that, he was chief of staff to Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY).

His previous positions also include serving as director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Commerce.

"Cedric's experience on the Hill, working with Executive Branch agencies and working with the financial service sector and a range of faith-based organizations will be a great asset to our clients, as we help them develop legislative strategies," said Subject Matter partner Steve Elmendorf.



**Cedric Grant**

## MEDIA MANEUVERS

The *New York Daily News* has eliminated the position of sports editor. Eric Barrow, a 15-year veteran of the paper who had served in the position since January 2016, was fired Jan. 3. In a memo to his staff, Barrow said that he was not being replaced. Instead, according to the *New York Post*, the department will now be run by Kyle Wagner, who is taking on the title of director of digital audience development for sports. Barrow had reportedly been a critic of the decision by Tribune Publishing, owner of the paper, to operate all the company's papers from one design and copy desk in Chicago. That move meant that the Daily News often was unable to get stories and scores from late games into the paper. Poynter cites sources that say the Daily News is losing between \$20 million and \$30 million per year.

Several staffers from *The Weekly Standard*, which ceased publication last month, have been enlisted to work for The Bulwark, a conservative news aggregator site. The Bulwark is run by the Defending Democracy Together Institute, a non-profit organization helmed by former Weekly Standard editor-at-large William Kristol. The Wrap reports that radio host and MSNBC contributor Charlie Sykes will serve as the site's new editor-in-chief and that several Weekly Standard writers are also coming on board.

**RM Broadcasting**, a U.S.-owned company that has leased airtime to Rossiya Segodnya (the Russian Federation government owned news agency that runs Sputnik) is being pressed by the Department of Justice to register as a foreign agent of the Russian government, according to the *Hollywood Reporter*. The U.S. government says that a "service agreement" between RM and Rossiya Segodnya gives the Russian company "complete control over the contents" of RM's station WZHF 1390 AM in Washington, D.C.



**Fuse**, the Latino-oriented TV network owned in part by Jennifer Lopez, is being pulled by Comcast and Verizon FiOS. The Wrap reports that the loss of Comcast could eliminate about a third of Fuse's household reach, while Verizon's decision will likely result in a low single-digit reduction of the network's distribution. According to Nielsen figures, Fuse reached about 74 million cable households a few years ago but dropped to about 60 million as of February 2018.

The contract between **CBS** and **Nielsen** has expired, and plans to renew it are facing considerable headwinds. According to *Variety*, CBS is considering dropping Nielsen in favor of a combination of its own data and measurement information from Comscore. Part of the issue is Nielsen's dependence on measuring linear TV audiences (those watching TV in real-time). That reliance has become more problematic as consumers turn to streaming and on-demand services. *Variety* says that Nielsen's contract with CBS is estimated at more than \$100 million per year.



## CONSUMERS WANT A DATA DIALOGUE

If there's one theme that rises to the surface for 2019, it's the issue of personal data. You can bet it's going to be a hot topic at CES in Las Vegas this week. Our personal data is being collected, stored, analyzed, sold, and mined like never before. And let's not forget stolen and compromised all too frequently.



**Melissa Kinch**

Data has become the currency for many digital services that we get "for free." People don't pay in dollars – they pay in sharing their data on countless apps, social media and services. And this data currency trend touches every inch of our lives – con-

nected homes, connected cars, health and wellness management, mapping and traffic tools, online shopping.

While it's the cost of doing business, most consumers admit to being uncomfortable with their personal data being collected and used beyond the product or service they have subscribed to. Ketchum surveyed more than 1,000 consumers in 2018 for our inaugural Social Permission and Technology Study, and their opinions should give pause to corporate communications and C-suite executives. Consumers don't trust companies with their data – but they also don't really know what to do about it.

These conflicts are leading to a tipping point of trust – and reputation fallout – that most technology brands are unprepared to manage.

How should brands react when the topic turns to data privacy and security – as it invariably does after years of headline-grabbing breaches and glitches? My point of view is that you must engage your consumers in an open dialogue about how you are using and protecting their data.

Almost always, that prompts a deeper discussion. How do I go about doing that? What do we say about data and privacy? How do we strike a balance between openness and overload

For many brands, this may be the first real exposure point to the need for deep corporate reputation and crisis or issues work; indeed, companies may suddenly see brand fans turn into angry "Techruptors," a tech-savvy early adopter audience who our research suggests will be at the forefront of demanding change in the way companies operate and interact with them.

### How to get data-engaged

OK, enough with the problem. Let's start solving it. Here are seven suggestions to help you create a true dialogue with consumers around data:

- **Publicly solicit questions and feedback.** Companies are exposing themselves to reputational risk if they don't have an open dialogue on data. Be transparent in how you are handling data privacy and security. Publicly and authentically encourage feedback. And really listen.

- **Secure C-suite buy-in.** Even the most brilliant, comprehensive communications plan is destined to fail without the involvement, and support, of the company's top executives. Encourage them to address the topic in speeches and public forums, and to answer questions directly. You'll garner consumer confidence if they're con-

fident your executives mean business regarding data.

- **Remember, anything internal can (and probably will) become external.** Your data dialogue can't be just a collection of statements and hard-to-decipher policies. To be effective, and credible, it must be inculcated into the corporate culture. Nothing hurts reputation worse than when an internal email or memo goes viral – especially if it details how a company is hiding data policies from consumers while telling the public something else.

- **Don't speak in absolutes.** Nothing is 100 percent safe. Be honest about continuous improvement.

- **Answer the questions people really have.** Facts are great – but facts don't mean your brand is being transparent. Take the time to understand and answer consumers' data questions.

- **Make human touch possible.** If consumers can't reach a human being to talk to about their data, you have already failed. Blocking consumers from talking to a person about something so critical can destroy trust.

- **Don't throw stones.** If your data story isn't 100 percent palatable to the public, be careful before you attack competitors or become too self-righteous in your statements.

Data security and privacy, along with numerous other reputational issues, will increasingly impact companies of all sizes in 2019. Be proactive in addressing them and you'll increase your chances of keeping Techruptors as allies and fans, not enemies.

*Melissa Kinch is partner and managing director of technology for Ketchum, specializing in corporate communications, issues management, business-to-business branding, corporate branding and strategic philanthropy/CSR.*

## ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

**Stuntman PR adds Parmigiano Reggiano Cheese Consortium** for 2019. It will work in collaboration with San Francisco-based marketing agency Ponte to implement a fully integrated U.S. media relations campaign.

The effort will be directed at strengthening Parmigiano Reggiano's product image in the U.S. and to raise awareness of the product's nine centuries of history. The Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium had previously engaged Stuntman for an initial project in the latter part of 2018, which included arranging and leading a visit by American journalists to Italy's Food Valley of Emilia Romagna, home of Parmigiano Reggiano cheese production.

**The Pollack PR Marketing Group** is supporting the 50th anniversary efforts of the **Oceanic Society**, the United States' oldest non-profit organization dedicated to ocean conservation. PPMG will work with Oceanic Society as it hosts five trips and one gala to mark the anniversary. By using PR, message development, corporate outreach, influencer outreach and social media tactics, the agency will identify, target and engage with audiences of travelers, individual donors and corporate philanthropy. The efforts are meant to raise awareness of Oceanic Society's mission and build support for programs tackling the issues that face the world's oceans.



## **ONLINE PRIVACY TO BE TOP CONCERN IN 2019**

Ninety percent of Americans think technology companies such as Google, Facebook, Apple and Verizon should make a better effort in terms of self-regulating how they collect and share consumers' online personal data, according to a recent online privacy survey from cybersecurity firm ExpressVPN.

ExpressVPN's survey found that 35 percent of respondents said they would return an electronic device they'd purchased to the store and/or ask for a refund if they discovered that device could be used to actively monitor their private conversations.



When it comes to who Americans think should be responsible for deciding whether tech companies can share their online personal data without their permission, however, Americans seem somewhat divided. Nineteen percent said this responsibility lies

solely with Congress, while 12 percent said this should be a task for the tech companies themselves. More than a third (34 percent) said it should be a shared effort between Congress and tech companies, though more (36 percent) said this responsibility lies with neither party.

The survey also discovered that 89 percent of Americans think they should be able to choose whether tech companies can share their online personal data.

According to the survey, 82 percent of Americans think Congress should do more this year to regulate how tech companies collect and handle their online personal data. In fact, 47 percent think online privacy should take precedence in Congress over immigration matters, 46 percent think it should be more of a priority than foreign policy issues, 35 percent think it should be more of a priority than healthcare and 25 percent think it should be more of a priority than tax reform legislation.

However, only 40 percent said they believe Congress will actually do anything to address consumer data issues in 2019.

The ExpressVPN survey polled more than 1,000 U.S. adults online in late November. The survey was conducted by market research company Propeller Insights.

## **CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY NAMES CCO**

The Central Park Conservancy has named Mary Caraccioli as its first-ever chief communications officer.



**Mary Caraccioli**

Caraccioli comes to the Conservancy from Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, where she also served as CCO. Previously, she worked as a reporter, broadcast anchor and news executive at ABC, CNBC, FOX, Comcast and Al Jazeera America, among others.

In her new post, Caraccioli is responsible for the direction and leadership of the Conservancy's marketing, public relations, and internal communications across all platforms, and messaging for all institutional initiatives, programs, and events.

## **FH SCORES PR TOUCHDOWN WITH PAC-12**

FleishmanHillard is representing the Pac-12, athletic conference of a dozen western colleges, which were again shut out from the College Football Playoff. The Pac-12, which bills itself as the "conference of champions," is suffering similar futility on the men's basketball front as it fails to place a single team on the AP's top 25 rankings.



The Pac-12 hired FH for "to provide a review of our overall communication strategy as part of a collaborative process with our members," according to a report in the Jan. 3 *Oregonian*.

The Omnicom unit recommended an "in-depth analysis of the influencers landscape to identify neutral to positive voices and systematically build relationships with these influencers to shift the conversation."

It also called for expanded media partnerships with the *Los Angeles Times*, *Players' Tribune* and other national outlets.

## **PENTAGON SPOKESPERSON WHITE QUILTS**

Dana White, who was chief Pentagon spokesperson, resigned New Year's Eve evening amid charges that she mistreated staffers.

The Pentagon's inspector general is probing whether White, who was appointed by president Trump in April 2017, punished workers who objected to running her personal errands.

White, who used to hold regular TV press briefings, has been off the air since May.

Prior to joining the Pentagon, she was an editorial writer for the *Wall Street Journal* and foreign policy advisor to John McCain's 2008 presidential run.



**Dana White**

Charles Summers, principal deputy assistant to the secretary of defense, has taken over White's duties on an acting basis.

## **MIAMI COMMS DIRECTOR MOVES TO KIVVIT**

Eugene Ramirez, the city of Miami's communications director, has moved to Kivvit, where he is director of the Chicago-based shop's Miami office.

As Miami's director of communications, Ramirez managed the city's communications office and served as top spokesperson and communications consultant to the office of the mayor and city manager, as well as city commissioners and directors.

He was previously stationed with Miami's WFOR-TV and Tampa's WFLA-TV, where he served as a morning anchor. The Miami native also worked as a media relations manager for Macy's.

Kivvit was formed in 2015 after ASGK Public Strategies, the Chicago-based firm founded by Eric Sedler and David Axelrod, merged with New Jersey-based agency M Public Affairs. Axelrod left ASGK after the 2008 Presidential election, where he became President Obama's senior advisor.

## **IN 2019, EVERYTHING IS PUBLIC RELATIONS**

In 1968, the late, great Jack O'Dwyer had the prescience to found a newsletter devoted to the budding, uncertain practice of public relations.

It was far from a sure thing.

Public relations at the time was a bit of a backwater, little-considered, low-level occupation best known for three things:

1. The field was dominated by men.



**Fraser Seitel**

2. Most of them existed by agreeing with everything their employers said, whether right or wrong, fair or unfair, right or wrong. Thus, the term "yes men."

3. The vast majority of public relations men of the time specialized in drinking martinis.

Nonetheless, the intrepid, indefatigable, never-take-no-for-an-answer O'Dwyer plunged headlong into the business of covering — relentlessly and often unforgivably — the practice of public relations.

Here we stand a half-century later, with Jack sadly now gone, in an age where PR has become not only accepted but respected, even feared for its potential power.

The year just ahead promises — threatens? — to unleash an era in which public relations is everything.

Consider as Exhibit A, B and C: the (groan) "presidency" of Donald J. Trump.

- Donald Trump's wild ride to the White House depended solely on public relations. Trump himself was largely a creation of the media: a preening, bombastic scion of inherited real estate wealth who dominated print, broadcast and social media with his outrageous bravado, extramarital escapades and ubiquity.

Despite knowing very little about policy or public affairs and lacking the interest to read or learn, Trump was elected President basically because he was well known. In other words, his public relations celebrity.

- Once President, Trump spent his first two years governing by tweet, the short-form communications device that caters to meager thinkers with short attention spans and large egos. While his critics deplored such a witless and often-insensitive tactic, Trump's use of Twitter was, at times, pure genius.

As he surmised, the media who despised him nonetheless slavishly covered his every cryptic, misspelled missive, and Trump tweets largely controlled the nation's daily agenda. So much so that future U.S. Presidents, most of whom will publicly condemn the Trump years, will likely adopt some form of the Trump tweeting strategy.

- Today, as we head into the third year of the Trump presidency, the President has clearly lost his PR edge.

His tweets no longer resonate positively. On the contrary, forced to rely on his suspect public relations instincts, recent tweets have damaged him considerably in the one area he can't afford to lose — the stock market.

Ironically, the stock market's instability has little to do with an economy that is still chugging along, with wages that have generally improved across the board or profits which continue to perform well. It is based, pure

and simple, on Donald Trump's losing the reins of public relations. As the stock market goes, so goes the Trump Presidency.

What can he do to regain the public relations edge?

He can announce new regulations on the computer program traders who have disrupted trading by exacerbating market movements. He can also tweet that the U.S. and China have agreed on a fair trade policy, negating the need for new tariffs. Both moves could restore the equilibrium of the Trump presidency.

Failing policy moves like these, the Trump presidency will continue to suffer public relations damage. Were that to result, not only will he be impeached by House Democrats but also risks being convicted by Senate Republicans tired of their own loss of credibility.

*Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for 40 years. He is author of the Pearson text "The Practice of Public Relations," now in its 13th edition, and co-author of "Rethinking Reputation" and "Idea Wise." He may be reached directly at [yusake@aol.com](mailto:yusake@aol.com).*

## **ACCELERATION BEEFS UP EXECUTIVE TEAM**

Marketing, media and advisory firm Acceleration Community of Companies, which was started up last year by Michael Nyman, formerly co-chairman and co-CEO of PMK\*BNC, has added David Kingsdale, Scott Floyd and Robert Ogden to its leadership team.

Kingsdale, who has come on as head of acquisitions, is chairman of the board of independent trustees of Aspiration.com, a financial services company.

Floyd, ACC's new head of collaboration, was previously senior vice president of marketing and operations for musician Will.i.am's tech start-up company, I.AM.PLUS. He previously spent 20 years at PMK\*BNC, most recently as chief growth officer.

Ogden, who has been named chief financial officer, ran strategy and corporate development at Madison Wells Media, a diversified entertainment company.



**David Kingsdale**

## **RASKY RECRUITS CAMPAIGN VET SMITH**

Rasky Partners has brought on Marianne Smith as a vice president.

Smith has worked and consulted for several political campaigns at the state and national level, including serving in various roles on presidential campaigns from Michael Dukakis for President to Hillary for America. She has served as DNCC deputy director of podium operations, and was a key member of the transition teams for both the Clinton and Obama presidencies.

In addition to her campaign experience, Smith held various appointments in the public and private sector, including eight years of federal service at the White House Offices of Presidential Personnel, the National Archives and the Departments of Commerce and Transportation.

At Rasky, Smith works to develop business opportunities in the government and business communities.

## COMMENTARY

### Are you ready for another two years of Donald Trump?

*Wall Street Journal* columnist Daniel Henninger isn't sure the American public can take much more of the president.



Nancy Pelosi

Europe and Canada can't. Mitt Romney noted in his *Washington Post* op-ed piece that 16 percent of people in Germany, UK, France, Sweden and Canada believe the US president would "do the right thing in world affairs," down from 84 percent in 2016, according to the Pew Research Center.

Henninger credits Trump for an impressive first year of accomplishments (tax cut, deregulation, robust stock market and Neil Gorsuch Supreme Court confirmation) that would make any traditional Republican proud.

Year two was less stellar, capped by the successful fight to get Brett Kavanaugh on the High Court. The president got an incomplete on the 2018 issues, in which he took personal responsibility (Korea nukes, "tariffs on nearly everyone," trade negotiations, and The Wall).

The midterm results were Trump's day of reckoning. "Because Mr. Trump insists on being the hourly focus of the country's political life, the midterms were viewed as a referendum on him," wrote the WSJ columnist.

The upshot: Trump lost former supporters in purple states and large right-of-center suburbs. "They dislike the Trump persona, or are worn out by it," noted Henninger.

CNN reports that during a briefing with Democratic leaders, Trump told Chuck Schumer that he won't agree to reopen the government unless he gets funding for The Wall. "I would look foolish if I did that," he said.

Trump also came up with this doozy, tweeting that the 2020 presidential election is the reason 800K federal workers are not getting paid.

"The Democrats know they can't win based on all of the achievements of 'Trump,' so they are going all out on the desperately needed Wall and Border Security—and Presidential Harassment. For them, strictly politics!"

Now that sounds foolish. As foolish as the idea that Mexico is going to spend a single peso on The Wall.

The Hill reported that a Harvard CAPS/Harris poll found that 56 percent of respondents don't want a southern wall. Fifty-eight percent say Trump should drop his demand for border funding.

To maintain any relevance, Trump will have to quit whining about "presidential harassment" and deal with the Democrats under House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The country is desperate to move ahead. Trump has to jump on the progress train or get left behind. Henninger issued this warning to the president: "electorates desert politicians who wear out their welcomes."

### Apple CEO Tim Cook took the easy way out.

In a lousy PR move, Cook rocked Wall Street Jan. 3 with his announcement that the company's revenues would fall below guidance that he provided 60 days ago.

He blamed China, which generates 20 percent of Apple's revenues, for the financial woes, saying the company "did not foresee the magnitude of the economic deceleration" there.

In his Jan. 2 letter to investors, Cook noted that China's reported GNP growth during the September quarter was the second lowest in the last 25 years. "We believe the economic environment in China has been further impacted by rising trade tensions with the US," he wrote.

Apple has been hammered by China's lackluster growth and economic uncertainty posed by president Trump's tariff war—but it won't be alone. Kevin Hassett, White House Council of Economic Advisors chief, said Jan. 3 that "a heck a lot of US companies that have sales in China are going to be watching their earnings being downgraded next year until we get a deal with China."

Note to president Trump: that dire forecast is not good news for your prime economic indicator, the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

But back to Tim: Wouldn't it have been nice if Cook took some of the blame for Apple's predicament?

The lack of a breakthrough product surely contributed to Apple's not-so-hot outlook.

Apple stores once were event spaces with long lines of eager customers each time a product was launched. There's no buzz there now.

The Chinese apparently have been avoiding Apple stores in droves. "As the climate of mounting uncertainty weighed on financial markets, the effects appeared to reach consumers as well, with traffic to our retail stores and our channel partners in China declining" wrote Cook. "And market data has shown that the contraction in Greater China's smartphone market has been particularly sharp."

The company has milked its flagship iPhone for all its worth, introducing new generations of the smartphone that are barely different from their predecessors.

Cook admitted, "iPhone upgrades also were not as strong as we thought they would be."

I'm a long-time fan of Apple but my trusty 2013 MacBook Pro and iPhone 6s Plus work just fine.

There's no reason for me visit an Apple store. Tim has to reach into Steve Jobs' bag of tricks to get Apple back on track.

He hinted of better days ahead. "We are confident and excited about our pipeline of future products and services," wrote Cook. "Apple innovates like no other company on earth, and we are not taking our foot off the gas."

It's time to press the pedal to the metal, Tim.

—Kevin McCauley