



Jack O'Dwyer  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's Newsletter

The Inside News of  
PR and Marketing  
Communications

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## UAE EXTENDS HARBOUR GROUP'S \$10M PACT

The Arab Emirates has extended its public diplomacy and communications program at The Harbour Group for another two years.

Fees and expenses for the effort are capped at \$10M, making it one of the richest US PR campaigns bankrolled by a foreign government.

The extension kicked off Jan. 1.

THG will support the UAE's DC embassy in the development of a communications program "to sustain and enhance public awareness and understanding of the UAE among US policymakers and opinion leaders."

It also will support the PR of UAE consulates in New York, Boston, Houston and Los Angeles.

Richard Mintz, THG managing director and former PA global chair at Burson-Marsteller, handles the UAE business.

Saudi Arabia, a close ally of the UAE, also works with THG. Both nations are involved in military action in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia has an \$80K per-month contract with THG for strategic communications counsel and support on general foreign policy matters and US-Saudi relations.

That one-year agreement began May 1, 2017.



## BIG PUBLIC HOUSING GROUP WANTS PR AUDIT

Council of Large Public Housing Authorities is looking for a firm to conduct a communications audit to assess its PR effectiveness and recommend improvements to its outreach, according to its RFQ.

The 70 members of the DC non-profit manage 40 percent of the nation's 1.1M public housing units and handle 2.2M Housing Choice Vouchers.



The group advocates for adequate assisted housing funding, analyzes policies affecting membership and educates on the critical role public housing and the voucher program play in meeting America's affordable housing needs.

According to CLPHA communications objectives are focused on 1) effective membership retention/recruitment; 2) create awareness of key issues; 3) impart knowledge; 4) strengthen brand identification; 5) shape and change attitudes, and 6) stimulate action.

CLPHA's Kirsten Greenwell wants to receive qualifications by Jan. 24. She's at [kmackay@clpha.org](mailto:kmackay@clpha.org).

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

## HIGHWIRE SCOOPS UP INNER CIRCLE LABS

**Highwire PR** has acquired Inner Circle Labs, a firm that focuses on cutting-edge technologies in robotics, artificial intelligence and connected consumer.

Julie Crabill and Jonathan Neri founded ICL in 2010 with the aim of translating complex technologies into mainstream narratives. Building off of such early clients as social analytics tool Topsy (acquired by Apple) and personal news aggregator Zite (acquired by CNN and Flipboard), ICL has continued to execute campaigns for future-making companies.



Emily Borders

"When we started Inner Circle Labs, we wanted to be both an incredible place to work, learn, and grow and a truly exceptional partner to cool companies," said Crabill. "We saw this same ethos at Highwire and recognized the inherent benefits of greater scale in location and services." Crabill, who will be a strategic advisor to Highwire, is taking on the role of CMO at Descartes Labs next month.

Emily Borders, principal at Highwire called ICL "a natural fit for our culture, our clients, and our ambitions."

With the addition of ICL, Highwire has about 100 employees in San Francisco, New York, Boston and Chicago.

## SV&C, JF WORK COLLAPSED MONEYGRAM BID

Sard Verbinnen & Co. and **Joele Frank, Wilkinson Brimmer Katcher** work the fallout from the collapse of China-based Ant Financial Services Group's \$1.2B bid for MoneyGram, money transfer operation.

The partners pulled the plug on the deal Jan. 2, citing inability to get the blessing of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US.

That rejection comes as tensions rise between China and the US, and the Trump Administration's growing concern about the theft of American intellectual property.

In announcing the deal's death, MoneyGram CEO Alex Holmes noted the "geopolitical environment has changed considerably" since the merger was announced Jan. 26, 2017.

The potential for China's investment in the US appeared to be bright following the US election. Jack Ma, the Chinese Internet baron who controls Ant Financial, appeared with president-elect Trump at a Trump Tower photo-op and promised to create one million jobs in the US.

SV&C's Paul Kranhold, Reze Wong and Andrew Duberstein represent Ant Financial in the US, while Rick Carew and Yin Ai handle China.

JFWBK's Michael Freitag, Joseph Sala and Viveca Tress work the MoneyGram account.

## STONE BACK INTO FOREIGN LOBBYING GAME

GOP political operative Roger Stone is back in the foreign lobbying game, registering Capstone Financial as a client advocating for “commodity rights and security” in Somalia, according to his federal filing dated Dec. 29.

Capstone is a western New York State operation that serves as a middle-man for the sale of African livestock.

Stone told *The Daily Beast* that his work also focuses on US military and foreign policy as it pertains to Somalia.

The US has about 500 troops in Somalia who battle terrorist organizations affiliated with Al-Shabab and the Islamic State.

The Trump Administration has stepped up drone strikes in Somalia. The *New York Times* has reported that American forces carried out 30 drone strikes in Somalia during 2017, double the amount conducted in 2016, A November strike killed at least 100 militants tied to al-Sjabab.

The Pentagon last month submitted a plan to the Trump White House, calling for at least two more years of military involvement directed at Islamic militants in Somalia.

Former New York Senator Al D’Amato’s Park Strategies represents the Government of Somalia for outreach to the US Congress.



**Roger Stone**

## RUDER FINN ROPES IN RYAN

Ruder Finn has hired Laura Ryan, a 20-year PR veteran, for the executive VP post in its corporate communications practice.

Most recently running LKR Communications, Ryan has big firm expertise earned from stints at **Cohn & Wolfe**, Ketchum and **Burson-Marsteller**. She has handled pharma, food & beverage, consumer, finance and hospitality clients.

RF CEO Kathy Bloomgarden praised Ryan’s extensive corporate experience and ability to work across a broad range of disciplines including crisis PR.

She expects Ryan to strengthen the independent firm’s executive thought leadership, issues and financial communications offerings, as well as its business development push.

The New York-based Ryan reports to Bloomgarden.



**Laura Ryan**

## PODESTA ALUM JOINS GSG

Erin Billings, who was principal at the now defunct Podesta Group, is now at Global Strategy Group in the senior VP position.

During a nearly six-year stint at Podesta, Billings handled PR duties for a range of corporate, non-profit and association clients.

The journalist-by-training broke into the advocacy sector at BGR Group, where she provided media and communications counsel for US and international clients.

Billings spent a decade at *Roll Call*, rising to the deputy editor position.



**Erin Billings**

## IS TRUMP DRIVING A PRINT NEWS COMEBACK?

By Jon Gingerich, editor of *O’Dwyer’s* magazine



We’re not even a year in, and already the Age of Trump has changed everything from the tax code to America’s standing on the world stage to regulations protecting the environment and the Internet. Even the office and role of the President himself has been redefined. But there’s another institution Trump appears to be transforming before our eyes, even if he doesn’t realize it: the press.

We talked about our nutty leader nonstop for the duration of last year. While Trump has been the most unpopular first-year President in modern history — his polling has consistently hovered between 30 and 35 percent — it’s equally clear that he’s enlivened the headlines.

It’s no secret that Trump has continued to make gold for the cable news networks, and the most recent ratings figures prove it. Fox News, which has remained the most-watched cable news network for 191 consecutive months now, wrapped up 2017 as its most watched year ever in terms of total day views. MSNBC climbed 47 percent in year-to-year total viewer gains, growing more than any basic cable network and topping CNN in this category for the first time since 2012. CNN also saw its highest rated year on record in terms of total day views.

It appears the Trump era has driven an increased interest in all matters political from the public. This is a great thing, and while it’s no surprise that it’s precisely why 2017 has been such a banner year for the news networks, what’s more impressive is that, by all indication, the Trump effect also seems to have resurrected the public’s interest in print media, or at least stalled its years-long demise for the time being.

The New York Times Co. in November reported **third-quarter revenue growth** of 6.1 percent to \$385.6 million, as well as \$33 million in operating profit compared to \$8.9 million a year ago, growth the newspaper of record attributed to a 13.6 percent gain in subscription sales, much of which was accounted for by digital subscription revenues. The *New York Times* counted 2.5 million paid digital-only subscribers by the end of the third quarter, a net increase of 154,000 from Q2 alone and a 60 percent hike from a year ago. Digital advertising, which now accounts for more than 43 percent of the Times’ total ad revenues, gained 11 percent to \$49.2 million.

The *Washington Post*, meanwhile, recorded 89 million unique readers in October, continuing to surge skyward from its previous record of 81 million readers in May. Page views also exceeded a billion for the first time, accounting for year-over-year gains of 33 percent.

Finally, News Corp. flagship the *Wall Street Journal*, which is currently gearing up to undergo a digital reorganization, blew past all performance and earnings expectations in November, with total subscribers across its print and digital editions up more than 13 percent year-over-year to 2.2 million. The Journal’s digital subscribers alone increased to more than 1.3 million during the same period, compared to 967,000 in 2016.

These are big numbers, and they’re just a few of 2017’s print success stories. But why the sudden uptick

(Continued on pg. 3)

## IS TRUMP DRIVING A PRINT NEWS COMEBACK?

(Continued from pg. 2)

among these dinosaurs, as opposed to the countless blogs and online opinion sites that have dominated the media landscape for the last decade?

As it turns out, the fourth estate wields a particular influence others don't. New research by San Francisco-based tech PR firm Bospar found that a [news article from a trusted outlet is likely to change a closely held conviction](#) — a position for or against climate change, for example — among a third of the U.S. population, thereby making that medium more effective at changing Americans' minds than any other, even peer-reviewed research.

Why is that? A recent consumer survey commissioned by non-profit Two Sides found that trust in digital media has collapsed in light of a scourge of fake "news" reports and hoax items shared over the Internet in recent years, and as a result, Americans find print media to be a safer, more secure and trusted medium than its digital counterpart in virtually every way.

Poynter Institute's 2017 Media Trust Survey found that overall trust and confidence in the media has actually increased since President Trump took office, to the highest levels since 2001. Trust in the press was markedly lower among those who identify as Republican, however, with 44 percent claiming they believe the media fabricates stories about Trump on a regular basis. Alarming, 25 percent of those polled also support limitations on press freedoms. I guess there's always room for improvement.

As it turns out, Trump could be redefining the current U.S. media landscape in other ways as well. Perhaps in light of the fake news furor that gripped the Presidential election last year, recent data from research firm Verto Analytics showed that U.S. Facebook users spent less time on that social platform in 2017 than they did the year prior. That's not necessarily a bad thing either.

## EDELMAN'S GELLER MOVES TO PROSEK

Mike Geller, executive VP in [Edelman's](#) financial & capital markets practice, has joined [Prosek Partners](#) as managing director.

He joined Edelman's financial practice in 2011 as senior VP with a focus on providing strategic communications counsel to founders, corporate executives and leaders of private investment and publicly traded institutions.

Geller helps companies manage communications in such special situations as M&A, divestitures, leadership transitions, complex litigation, creditor rights, enforcement actions and regulatory matters.

Prior to Edelman, Geller led PR for Royal Bank of Scotland's Americas investment bank and held corporate communications jobs at Pershing LLC and Cantor Fitzgerald. He began his career at Moody's.

Jennifer Prosek, managing partner, had Geller as a client from his work at RBS. "Mike is someone that we have gotten to know over the years and come to admire for his strong work ethic, leadership abilities and for his skills as both a communicator and counselor," she said.



**Mike Geller**

## LCWA FOUNDER LOUIS C. WILLIAMS, JR. DIES

Louis C. Williams, Jr., founder of Chicago-based agency [L.C. Williams & Associates](#), died on December 27. He was 77 years old.

Williams founded LCWA in 1985. The mid-size, full-service PR and research agency currently employs about two dozen and specializes in corporate relations, crisis, financial relations and public affairs. The firm, which has acquired a number of agencies during its three-plus decades in business, bought Oakbrook Terrace, IL-based food and beverage shop JSH&A Communications last year.



**Louis C. Williams, Jr.**

Williams retired from LCWA in 2009 and assumed the role of chairman. The agency is now led by president and CEO Kim Blazek Dahlborn. LCWA accounted for more than \$4.5 million last year and was ranked by O'Dwyer's as one of the [largest PR shops in the Chicago area](#) by net fees.

Williams formerly served as chairman of the International Association of Business Communicators and was also named a fellow in the organization. He also was a fellow of the Institute for Public Relations and its Measurement Commission.

In 2003, Williams authored the best-selling IABC book, "Communication Research, Measurement and Evaluation: A Practical Guide for Communicators," and was partially responsible for the creation of the research project "Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management," the largest such project ever conducted on the value of PR.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Moster, as well as two daughters and a son, five grandchildren and a sister.

A [tribute page has been set up](#) in his honor, where expressions of sympathy and photos may be shared.

## UNDERGRAD COURSE OFFERED ON DBT

SapientRazorfish global head of PR and media relations John Casey and New York's Wagner College have launched one of the first college courses in digital business transformation. The class will be part of Wagner's media management masters program.

While both Columbia University and Carnegie Mellon currently offer graduate courses on DBT, the offering at Wagner will be the first available to undergraduates, as well as the first to focus on the media industry.

"The impetus for this class came from the students in my Digital Marketing class this fall," says Casey. "As part of the course, we discussed DBT, and the students were not only unfamiliar with the tectonic DBT shift taking place in the business world, but their curiosity was wildly piqued! As a result, it felt like the time was now to start explaining to students what DBT is all about."

"We realize that businesses from every industry are quickly engaged on a battleground where legacy business models are bound to fail or stay behind," said Stephen Greenwald, founder of Wagner's media management program and former CEO of DeLaurentis Entertainment.

## FB PUTS SPIN ON PROPAGANDA ALLEGATIONS

By Ronn Torossian, CEO of 5WPR



It could end up being a time waster or simply a way to assuage idle curiosity, but Facebook is touting its new “troll tool” as a way for users to protect their social media accounts from being scammed.

The company recently launched the tool that purportedly allows users to see if they liked or followed any accounts or posts from the Internet Research Agency, a troll farm with reported links to the Russian government. The idea behind the new tool is that it allows users to learn if they got e-conned by the group.

According to various unconfirmed media reports, the IRA intended to sow chaos in American politics during the 2016 election. Facebook says the tool, which is available through its help center, will assist users in identifying the sorts of posts and pages that may be coming from propaganda farms and troll centers.

It's an interesting move for Facebook, which, along with Twitter, spent the last part of 2017 getting grilled by Congress over “social media-based interference” in American politics at the highest level. As a result, the social media giant was compelled to share more than 3,000 adverts purchased by certain accounts linked to the IRA.

Facebook also admitted that up to 10 million people may have viewed the ads, and that up to 150 million Americans may have seen content generated by the Internet Research Agency. The social media platform argues that many millions may not have any idea they were scammed by the propaganda pages.

What users are not able to learn using the tool — at least not yet — is how the content got to their page. Was it through a recommended Facebook ad, was it shared by a friend? This tool won't tell them, and that's likely what most people want to know most.

The idea here is culpability. If it was a friend who shared the bad information, the user can be more selective about what they view and share from that friend. And, if the ads or other content came directly from Facebook that puts the onus back on the social media platform to do a better job filtering advertising content.

And it's this, really, that people are looking for and what Facebook is not yet delivering. Ad content is still all over the place on Facebook. People can block certain ads or certain advertisers, but chances are they will still see something similar based on their social media profile and the company's algorithm. If they really want their users to feel more confident and scroll or click more freely, that's what they need to worry about.



## PR OPINION

Since unemployment is the lowest since 2000, the stock market is setting records, and businesses talk of expanding, Americans are perplexed at the continued sniping at President Trump.

Trump and his staff are battling a wave of negatives in Michael Wolff's new book, “Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House.” Trump used a press conference and Twitter to denounce the book and slam the media for focusing on it.

Trump's “shoot from the hip” communications habits give the media plenty to write about.

Conservative economists, including David Harsanyi, senior editor of *The Federalist*, says not enough credit is being given to deregulation and corporate tax cuts as factors that have resulted in a 4.1% jobless rate including driving unemployment among blacks to 6.8%, lowest in 44 years.

Employment gains for 2017 totaled 2.1 million according to the Jan. 5 report of the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. This was the seventh straight year of increases of two million-plus, it noted.

The Dow-Jones average rose 220 points Jan. 5 to a record 25,295.

“The first year of Trump, coupled with the end years of Obama, will go down as one of the greatest periods of job growth in recent decades,” Prof. Joseph Foudy of New York University told the *New York Post*.

Admittedly, helping the low jobless rate is that some workers have given up seeking jobs at the present time.

The business community, however, is solidly behind the Trump Administration and will do everything in its power to back policies that spur economic growth. A growing economy is good for PR, marketing and advertising.

### Regs Blocked or Taken off Table

Hundreds of Obama Administration regulations have been blocked from implementation and “thousands of others” will never even be considered, says Harsanyi.

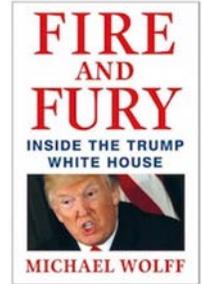
His complaint is that the liberal-oriented press “props up economists who tell them what they want to hear. Economists who obsess over ‘inequality’ rather than economic growth, about the future of labor unions, or climate change,” are the ones whose comments get picked up, he says.

“Plenty of economists are making good arguments for the free market but will never be members of the ‘economists say,’ clique” that gets quoted, he adds.

### NYT Schizoid on Trump and Economy

Harsanyi is mystified at the contradictory messages that mark *New York Times* coverage of Trump and the economy.

He notes that after “having bombarded readers with news of a homicidal Republican tax plan for so many weeks,” NYT then said, at the start of a page one article: “A wave of optimism has swept over American business leaders and is beginning to translate into the sort of investment in new plants, equipment and factory upgrades that bolsters economic growth and spurs job creation—and may finally raise wages significantly.”



— Jack O'Dwyer