



**Kevin McCauley**  
Editor-in-Chief

# O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of PR & Marketing Communications



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## POLANSKY TO RETIRE AT IPG DXTRA

Andy Polansky, CEO of IPG DXTRA and executive chairman of Weber Shandwick, will retire in June, wrapping up a nearly 40-year career in marketing communications.



**Andy Polansky**

"I wanted to leave while there is still a lot of gas in the tank," Polansky, who recently turned 60, told *O'Dwyer's*.

He has been thinking about retiring for a while and feels the time is ripe because the DXTRA operation is operating on all cylinders.

There is a strong leadership team in place, especially at Weber Shandwick, which is helmed by CEO Gail Heimann, that guided

DXTRA through the digital and pandemic-related disruptions, according to Polansky.

Upon leaving DXTRA, he plans to counsel nonprofits, continue to mentor young people and serve on boards.

Polansky assumed the helm of Interpublic's collective of 27 brands including Golin, Weber Shandwick, R&CPMK, Current Global and DeVries Global, in July 2019 following a seven-year run as CEO of Weber Shandwick.

Philippe Krakowsky, CEO of IPG, said the marketing services business is better for "Andy's humanity, integrity and vision."

## CNBC SNAGS WARNERMEDIA ALUM COCOZZA

CNBC has hired Keith Cocozza, a former executive VP of corporate communications and marketing at WarnerMedia, for the senior VP-communications post.

Cocozza exited WarnerMedia in August and launched Inwood Consulting, a PR and crisis management shop.

During his 19 years at Time Warner/WarnerMedia, Cocozza oversaw media relations, financial communications, network publicity and corporate social responsibility.



**Keith Cocozza**

Earlier, he was communications director at Cablevision Systems and deputy director of legislative affairs for NYC mayor Rudy Giuliani.

In a note to staff, CNBC chairman Mark Hoffman said Cocozza's more than 30 years of PR, communications and crisis savvy will be a huge asset to CNBC.

## CT SEEKS PR TO STAMP OUT LGBTQ+ SMOKING

Connecticut's Department of Public Health wants a PR firm to develop a campaign to reduce cigarette smoking in the LGBTQ+ community.

LGBTQ+ people have a higher rate of smoking than heterosexuals. A quarter of LGBTQ+ adults smoke vs. 16 percent of adults who identify as straight.

The Department of Public Health wants a campaign that makes the LGBTQ+ population aware that cigarette companies are targeting them to induce tobacco use and educate them about smoking cessation programs available in The Nutmeg State.

The PR firm will educate the targeted audience about "myths and misleading information that portrays tobacco use as common, normative, and a positive behavior." That effort will encourage LGBTQ+ people "to adopt tobacco free living policies in various areas including homes and events."

Connecticut has budgeted \$100K annually for the push, which will begin July 1 and run through April 28, 2025.

Proposals are due Jan. 27. Interested firms are required to register at <https://portal.ct.gov/DAS/CTSource/Registration>. [Read the RFP \(PDF\)](#).



## WEBER'S BERNSTEIN TO M BOOTH HEALTH

Stacey Bernstein, executive VP & global director of digital health at [Weber Shandwick](#), has joined [M Booth Health](#) as CEO. She succeeds Tim Bird, who is taking on the chairman role as he transitions to a consulting role at the Next 15 Communications Group unit.

Bernstein, who also served as general manager of Weber's Boston outpost, did a nearly dozen-year run at the Interpublic PR flagship.

Booth CEO Dale Bornstein praised Bird for "the leadership and vision that brought his agency under the M Booth umbrella."

Next 15 acquired Health Unlimited's US division, which was headed by Bird, in 2019. Health Unlimited and its specialist consultancy Corkery Group were rebranded as M Booth Health, which took [the No. 12 slot in O'Dwyer's rankings of healthcare PR firms](#) with \$14.4M in fees for 2020.



**Stacey Bernstein**

## **SAUDI ARABIA TAPS HEWITT FOR MEDIA WORK**

Saudi Arabia has hired Nicolla Hewitt Communications Corp. for outreach to broadcast, print and social media about the reforms and changes underway in the Kingdom under its de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.



**Nicolla Hewitt**

Nicolla Hewitt has more than 30 years of media experience, working for CBS, ABC, NBC and Yahoo!

On behalf of Saudi Arabia's Media Ministry NHCC conducted outreach to CNN's Nic Robertson, CBS' Norah O'Donnell/Margaret Brennan, Time's Dan Stewart, Fox News' Eric Shawn, Bloomberg's Vivian Nereim, BBC America's Sarah Robbins, Travel + Leisure's Paul Brady, New York Post's Paula Froelich, NBC's Natasha Lebedeva and Harper's Bazaar's Eleonore Marchand, according to its FARA filing.

The firm pitched a broad range of topics including energy, ARAMCO, tourism, fashion, economic reform, Yemen, defense, G20 summit, NEOM and Prince Turki's book.

## **PRU'S O'SULLIVAN CHECKS IN AT CITI**

Caitrin O'Sullivan, who was director of global communications for corporate social responsibility initiatives at Prudential Financial, has moved to Citibank.

She takes on the head of ESG, sustainability and diversity communications title.



**Katie O'Reilly**

At Pru, O'Sullivan led PR for its purpose-driven efforts. She implemented ways to promote the financial services giant's CSR mission and its social purpose narrative.

Earlier in her career, O'Sullivan did a three-year stint at Brunswick Group and a four-year run at Burson-Marsteller.

At B-M, O'Sullivan led digital and social media capabilities at the US PA & crisis practice and served as chief of staff to Pat Ford, who was global vice chairman.

## **KEKST CNC WORKS \$2B PERMIAN BASIN DEAL**

**Kekst CNC** is handling the \$1.9B merger of Desert Peak Minerals and Falcon Minerals to create a company with an extensive footprint in Texas' petroleum-rich Permian Basin.

Desert Peak shareholders will control 73 percent of the combined company that will be headquartered in Denver. It will produce 13,500 to 14,500 barrels of oil equivalents over the course of the first half of 2022. About three-quarters of that output will flow from the Permian Basin.

Chris Conoscenti, CEO of Desert Peak, said the merger creates a leading public minerals company with a strong growth trajectory.

His goal is to be the leading consolidator of high-quality Permian Basin assets.

Kimmeridge, a private investment firm, launched Desert Peak. Blackstone controls a 40.6 percent stake in Falcon.

Kekst CNC has Daniel Yunger, Hallie Wolff and Emma Cloyd repping Desert Peak.

## **ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT**

**WEILL (Geoffrey Weill Associates)** is tabbed to manage public relations activities for the **Turkish Culture and Tourism Board** in the US. Owner Geoffrey Weill says that the firm will focus on "widening Americans' knowledge not only of sites and vistas but of Turkish culture, cuisine and art." In response to the pandemic, Turkey has developed its Safe Tourism Certification Program, which defines and enforces an extensive series of measures with regard to transportation and accommodation, as well as including tourist- and accommodation-protection insurance that covers the costs of an extended stay in the country should visitors develop COVID during their visit.



**Bolt PR** is selected as agency of record for **Delivery Solutions**, which provides aggregation and orchestration software enabling last-mile delivery and fulfillment for omnichannel retail clients. The agency will work to elevate Delivery Solutions' thought leadership and brand presence in the retail and technology landscape through media relations, industry events and award opportunities.

**The Brandman Agency** is engaged to provide public relations services in the US market for **Hotel Metropole Monte-Carlo**. The agency's campaign strategy will consist primarily of targeted media and influencer relations. Built in 1886, the Belle Époque style property is less than 350 feet from Monaco's luxury boutiques and Casino Square. "The Brandman Agency will help to elevate our profile and perpetuate our legendary history through their proven track record of success in the luxury hospitality sector," said the hotel's general manager Serge Ethuin.

**Firecracker PR** signs on as agency of record for global clinical trial marketplace **Inato** and technology data market research provider **ETR**. For Paris-headquartered Inato, the agency will be creating and executing an educational campaign. Firecracker will be disseminating regular research data produced by New York-based ETR to key journalists.

**Red Lorry Yellow Lorry** is selected as US PR agency of record for **DanAds**, a customizable and scalable self-serve ad tech infrastructure for publishers. The agency will work to raise the profile of DanAds' software, which empowers publishers and brands to democratically monetize quality content while opening new demand channels and driving AdOps transparency. Led from the lorries' Boston and Los Angeles offices, the PR program will focus on media relations and content creation.



**Ink & Roses** has been retained to launch **MyEllevate by Cynosure**, a facial rejuvenation solution to define and enhance the jawline, which can be performed in an hour. In this role, Ink & Roses will provide support with MyEllevate brand positioning and messaging, as well as leading earned consumer and trade media relations to drive brand awareness.

**RMD Advertising** lands digital and social media services for **Daily's Premium Meats** to its roster. RMD will leverage its digital and social media expertise to bring increased awareness and expanded reach to the brand. Founded in 1893, Daily's Premium Meats has been known as the "Bacon Specialists" for many years, and now also offers hickory smoked hams, sausage links and patties, and other value-added pork products.

## **GETTING THE CDC ON MESSAGE ABOUT COVID**

After two years, one might think the messaging process at an organization like the CDC might have gotten easier and that the explanation of what Americans should do next about



**Seth Linden**

Omicron would be clearer and more succinct.

Not quite.

Long before the pandemic, major corporations and small businesses—not to mention governmental agencies—struggled to explain their positioning in a clear, concise and consistent way and not just in times of crisis.

As a so-called messaging expert, I see bright, capable and passionate people come up short when it

comes to explaining their policy positions, deep convictions and reasons for what they do and how they do it. That's why people in the PR field are brought into companies every day. To put it into a sound bite, clear messaging ain't easy.

The CDC has clearly stumbled in the last month as it has vacillated on quarantining and masking requirements and faced backlash from a confused public and media. The agency needs to step up its efforts and build public trust—which it can do if the following steps are taken immediately:

- **Conduct media coaching regularly (at least once a week—not occasionally).** If this is being done at the CDC, it isn't evident in the result yet. The agency should anticipate rightful media skepticism about new guidelines and protocols and have credible former journalists (who represent various political points of view) asking tough probing questions before “real” interviews take place. If journalists in mock sessions rip your sound bites to shreds, you're not ready to face the public.

- **Get on the same page.** Anyone who is out in public discussing the pandemic on behalf of the Administration should be speaking with colleagues daily and reviewing talking points. For example, if one official suggests—and this just happened—that vaccines could be required on domestic flights, all related agency heads need to be aligned on that point before the concept is floated in the public.

- **Assume you have a tired, angry audience.** When corporations are in the middle of a crisis, they need to factor in that public opinion is not on their side and message accordingly. The CDC and other federal agencies must communicate and shape sound bites with the idea they are speaking to a weary and distrustful public.

- **Repetition and brevity matter.** “Keep calm and carry on,” “stop drop and roll”—keep it simple for the public to remember. “Five days, test at home, and you're done.” Don't give long explanations to an American public that has been through so much. Patience and attention spans are short.

- **Avoid cliches.** At this point, few people want to hear an overused “we're in this together.” Assume cynicism and frustration. Humor, brevity, and acknowledging the other side of the aisle would go a long way.

The CDC has a chance to course correct, and it needs to do so now. We know that institutions at all different levels—private, public, federal, state, local—are facing enormous challenges of maintaining public trust and confidence. What is arguably the world's leading health organization can't afford

to be grouped into that category of mistrusted organizations.

This crisis, and indeed the pandemic itself, will eventually end. But other crises will occur—and as has been said about pandemic preparedness itself, we need to be ready for future pandemics. Hopefully then, messages will be clear and there will be a playbook to be followed.

*Seth Linden is president of Dukas Linden Public Relations.*

## **TECH B2B TARGETS CONTENT MARKETING, PR**

Tech B2B marketers will be looking to content marketing and PR to fuel their growth this year, according to a new survey from Boston-based Corporate Ink.

Almost three-quarters (72 percent) of the executives and marketing leaders surveyed in Corporate Ink's study said that they planned to increase their investments in content marketing in 2022, and the same number said that they intended to up the amount of money spent on PR.

The survey respondents were bullish overall on their 2022 expenditures. Almost seven out of 10 (68 percent) said they would increase spending on paid digital, 64 percent were planning to spend more on video and 48 said they would increase their product marketing investments.

Areas where expenditures are expected to drop were events (noted by 16 percent of respondents) and third-party sponsorships (eight percent).

In terms of marketing goals, lead generation was at the top of the list, with 76 percent calling it one of their top priorities. Increasing brand awareness was cited as a top concern by 48 percent and improving pipeline conversions was mentioned by 36 percent.

Those surveyed also are considering a wide range of strategies to up their content marketing aims. More than four in 10 (44 percent) are thinking about making an investment in interactive and experiential content, while 40 percent are looking into spending on customer experience and journey mapping, 38 percent are considering paid targeting and 32 percent said that their plans include podcasting.

When it comes to what kind of skills marketing execs are seeking to help them meet their goals, messaging and storytelling, campaign development and strategy, and writing and content development beat out such tech-related areas of expertise as data and analytics, SEO and digital.

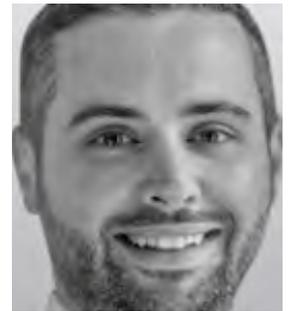
## **FGH'S JOHNSON HEADS TO GTCR**

Finsbury Glover Hering managing director Andrew Johnson has moved to private equity firm GTCR, where he takes on the newly created position of principal and chief of marketing and communications.

Johnson had been with FGH since 2017, serving as vice president and director before becoming managing director in April 2020.

He was previously director of public relations at legal firm Kirkland & Ellis and a vice president at Abernathy MacGregor.

At GTCR, Johnson will lead the strategic development and execution of all marketing and communications activities. He will also work on initiatives including ESG-DEI, community engagement, digital/social media and hiring and recruiting.



**Andrew Johnson**

## **MARYLAND SEEKS SEXUAL RISK AVOIDANCE PR**

Maryland's Department of Health is seeking a firm to develop a print and media campaign "focused on sexual risk reduction education" targeted at young people aged 10-19.



The goal, according to the RFP, is to reduce unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections with a primary focus on abstinence from sexual intercourse as the preferred prevention method.

The selected firm will create customizable, age-appropriate media for use on websites and hard copies that may be distributed in schools and community events.

The campaign requires materials to educate parents and caregivers about youth-focused sexual risk avoidance approaches.

The DOH's Prevention and Health Promotion Administration has budgeted \$50K for the push that will begin March 1 and run through September.

Proposals are due Jan. 25. They go to Dana Wright at [phpa.procurement@maryland.gov](mailto:phpa.procurement@maryland.gov) with PHPA 1726/BPM027363 as the subject line.

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

## **LIVINGSTON RESUMES IRAQ WORK**

The Livingston Group, which is headed by former House Speaker-designate Bob Livingston has signed a one-year contract worth \$500K to represent Iraq.



The firm will conduct outreach to the White House and Congress to boost Iraq's ties with the US.

It also will engage with US multinational companies, think tanks, policy institutes as well as Iraq's diaspora on behalf of the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Livingston, his former chief of staff J. Allen Martin, and Cathryn Kingsbury, a former consultant at The Solomon Group, handle the Iraqi business.

They report to Iraq's US ambassador H.E. Fareed Yasseen.

TLG had represented Iraq from December 2017 until March 24, 2021, before re-upping on December 22.

## **TENEO'S MCMILLAN MOVES TO FTI**

Graham McMillan has moved to FTI Consulting's strategic communications arm as a senior advisor after a six-year stint at Teneo.



**Graham McMillan**

In Teneo's London office, McMillan handled sustainability, ESG, public policy and political risk matters for clients in the UK and EU. Earlier, he co-founded and helmed Open Road, PA and corporate communications shop. McMillan sold Open Road to Blue Rubicon in 2014. Teneo acquired Blue Rubicon in 2015. During his more than 30-year career, McMillan has counseled clients such as Dow, National Grid, AstraZeneca and BHP.

John Waples, head of FTI's stratcomm unit in the UK, said the addition of McMillan reinforces FTI's commitment to providing clients comprehensive counsel in responsible business and sustainability areas.

## **CONSUMERS HIT SOCIAL MEDIA TO SHOP**

Consumers are shopping directly on social media channels more than ever, often bypassing traditional online retailers, according to a new study from the Influencer Marketing Factory.



The survey polled 1,000 people ages 16 to 54 between Dec. 9 and 14, asking them if they shop on social media, what their preferences are when it comes to social commerce usage and their preferences when shopping online or via a livestream.

More than eight in 10 respondents said they had discovered a product on social media and then purchased it directly through the related app, with 73 percent adding that they had done so during the 2021 holiday season. In addition, 41 percent said that they prefer to check out potential purchases on a social media app, rather than using a third-party site.

When it comes to the power of online influencers, IMF found that 90 percent of respondents think that influencer marketing is effective.

Apparel was the top choice (22 percent) when survey respondents were asked what type of product they bought most often via social media, followed by beauty products (15 percent), home products (11 percent) and food & beverage (10 percent).

The shift toward social media shopping is strongest among Gen Z consumers, IMF's research on social commerce shows, with 97 percent of Gen Zers saying that they use social media as their top source of shopping inspiration.

Livestreaming is also on the rise. More than half (57 percent) of the survey respondents said that they had made a purchase during a livestream shopping event. They also seem to like the livestream experience, with 72 percent giving it at least a nine on a scale of one to 10.

In-store shopping is continuing its downward trajectory. For consumers over 45, just 30 percent said they preferred making in-store purchases, with 38 percent opting to shop online and 31 percent using a combination of the two.

For younger consumers, the move away from brick-and-mortar is even more pronounced. Just eight percent of respondents under 18 said they preferred to shop in stores, and that number crawls up just slightly for those who are 18-24 (13 percent), 25-34 (14 percent) and 35-44 (nine percent).

## **EX-COLOMBIAN VICE PRESIDENT TO GSR**

The Global Situation Room, a crisis and reputation management firm that partners with Porter Novelli, has hired former vice president of Colombia Francisco Santos as executive vice president of global affairs. Santos was most recently Colombia's ambassador to the US. As vice president, Santos led Colombia's promotion of international trade, investment and tourism.



**Francisco Santos**

At GSR, he will work with an international roster of clients on their communications challenges. "Ambassador Santos' extraordinary experience at the highest levels of government and journalism will further enhance our team's capacity to provide clients with exceptional counsel," said GSR President Brett Bruen.

## HOW BAD APOLOGIES REFLECT ON PR PROS

People screw up apologies all the time. I've studied this for years and published the [6 As of apologies](#) in 2015 to help people remember to **Acknowledge** something happened; have an **Authentic** expression of regret; use **Appropriate** tone and language; choose an **Acceptable** venue; **Act** in the right timeframe, and **Announce** next steps.



**Paul Oestreicher**

This advice could have come in handy to those profiled in a recent *Washington Post* article: [The 10 Weirdest Celebrity Apologies of 2021](#). These serve as reminders of how botched apologies can

make situations worse and keep them in the news longer.

It's hard to find an excuse for the self-inflicted wounds caused by thoughtless, hurtful, and unnecessary language. You'd think celebrities (and politicians and business leaders), who have access to staff and outside advisors, could avoid the avoidable. The *Post* piece noted how "plenty of stars... [were] calling their publicists" to deal with their messes.

So, here's the question: If professional publicists were involved, how did these celebrities compound their mistakes and create even more problems? Possible answers include:

1. They said they were seeking counsel when they were not
2. They received bad advice and used it
3. They received good advice but refused to implement it

We'll never know, of course. But if the celebs (or others) received good advice and didn't use it, could the PR counselors have been more persuasive? Did they have the trust of their clients? Did they build support or alliances to bring additional, competent, compassionate voices to the table?

I've faced scenario #3 many times and tried my best, and I'm sure many who are reading this can say the same. At the end of the day, though, the clients did what they wanted; the outcome didn't match what we got paid to do. If people knew we were involved, well, it didn't look good for anyone.

A phenomenon seen in too many public pronouncements is when one can see right through an apology—the work of a PR advisor being so obvious. Here are a few examples where good apologies are undermined because they're either visibly forced or fake, or both:

- Heather Chase from Bravo's "reality" series *Below Deck* apologized for saying the N-word (more than once) in front of her Black co-star Rayna Lindsey. Her statement posted on Instagram: "I am sorry for the hurt my ignorance caused Rayna in tonight's episode... Over the past nine months since this episode was filmed, I have learned how my words and actions can affect others and I vow to do better in the future."

- Justin Timberlake apologized to his wife, Jessica Biel, after being seen holding hands with *Palmer* costar Alisha Wainwright. His statement was posted, like the example above, on Instagram: "I apologize to my amazing wife and family for putting them through such an embarrassing situation, and I am focused on being the best husband and father I can be. This was not that."

- A contestant on "reality" TV's *The Bachelor*, Rachel Kirkconnell, came under fire for past racist behaviors. Her statement was posted—you guessed it—on Instagram: "I'm here to say I was wrong. At one point, I didn't recognize how offensive and racist my actions were, but that doesn't excuse them. My age or when it happened does not excuse anything. They are not acceptable or okay in any sense. I was ignorant,

but my ignorance was racist... I don't think one apology means that I deserve your forgiveness, but rather I hope I can earn your forgiveness through my future actions."

If you're going to write an apology for someone, it should be made in their voice. And do more than release a prepared statement on social media (for crying out loud) and do it quickly, not days or weeks later. Bottom line: If you truly want to try and right a wrong, do more than check a box.

*Paul Oestreicher, Ph.D., is a recognized expert in strategic communication, public affairs and issues, crisis and reputation management.*

## ON THE MOVE

[Reevemark](#) promotes **Nicholas**

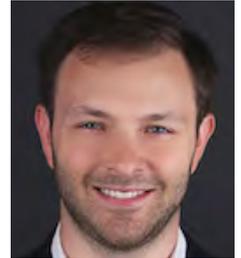
**Leasure** to managing director. Leasure previously served as senior vice president at the firm. Before that, he was a director at both Finsbury and Joele Frank. Since joining Reevemark, Nick has contributed to the firm's financial communications and special situations practice, particularly in matters involving shareholder activism and corporate transactions, and has helped lead the firm's marketing efforts.

[Weber Shandwick](#) names Michael Byrnes general manager of its Boston office. Byrnes, who was previously SVP, client experience, succeeds Stacey Bernstein, who left the firm to take the CEO spot at M Booth Health. Before coming to Weber Shandwick in 2020, Byrnes was a vice president at Matter Communications. Before that, he was vice president communications and account services at PointAcross. In his new role, he will work to deliver solutions for clients across sectors while recruiting and retaining talent and bolstering the office's culture.

[BCW](#) hires **Diego Bertagni** as executive creative director, North America, based in Chicago. Bertagni was most recently executive creative director at draftLine YYZ, the in-house agency for Anheuser-Busch, where he built the Toronto office from scratch. He has also held creative director posts at Flipp Corporation, Tribal Worldwide and OgilvyOne Worldwide. At BCW, Bertagni will be responsible for leading and building the region's team of creative professionals.

[Summit Strategy Group](#) brings on **Leslie Llewellyn Capstraw** as its first COO. Capstraw spent three years as EVP & GM of Weber Shandwick's Los Angeles office. She has also been group director, brand marketing and Los Angeles office head at Ogilvy. Most recently, Capstraw was president/strategic advisor with online education firm Genius Produced. At Summit Strategy Group, she will work with founder and CEO Michael Law and the leadership team to optimize business operations, enhance client engagement, and recruit and retain talent.

[imre](#) hires **Anna Kotis** as president of imre Health. Kotis most recently served as managing director of Havas Health & You's H4B Chelsea. Her previous posts include director, worldwide commercial development at Pfizer and senior product director at Forest Laboratories. She will report to imre partner Jeff Smokler. "As we look to the future and to how we can expand our service offerings and increase value to our client partners, we need a leader like Anna," said Smokler.



**Nicholas Leasure**



**Anna Kotis**

## COMMENTARY



**How about a nice PR accessory to go with the hat?** Vanessa Friedman, chief fashion critic of the *New York Times*, [ridiculed Melania Trump's decision to auction off the over-the-top hat that she wore during the first formal visit of French president Emmanuel Macron and his wife, Brigitte, to the White House on April 24, 2018.](#)

That ostentatious topper overshadowed the Macrons and the pomp of the day. Trump stuck out like a sore thumb. Or perhaps, the millinery signaled a desperate need for attention.

The nation's eyes were glued in fascination to Melania's lid, which is described as ["the iconic white broad-brimmed, high blocked crown hat" on her website.](#)

She commissioned the creation of that one-of-a-kind chapeau to mark the "important moment for the country," apparently referring to the French couple's visit to DC. More likely, the headgear helped Melania redirect the spotlight from her husband, even if just for a moment.

Friedman sniffed that Trump's auction flies in the face of tradition as First Ladies generally donate the clothes they wore to a special federal event to the National Archives or the Smithsonian.

Melania, of course, was not a traditional First Lady. In raffling off her headdress, she is carrying out the Trump family tradition of squeezing every penny that it can from its four-year run in DC.

What's next for Melania?

How about auctioning another item of the outfit she wore on that festive April day, a "pair of Christian Louboutin stilettos in blue denim, white trim and a red sole, symbolic of her country's flag."

USA, USA, indeed.

**Calling out the heavy PR artillery.** Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the beleaguered director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has reached out to media guru Mandy Grunwald for communications guidance.

Grunwald, who cut her PR teeth at the legendary Sawyer Miller Group shop, was Bill Clinton's ad director during his 1992 presidential campaign. She has a reputation of being a hard-nosed and somewhat brusque PR counselor who gets the job done. In other words, she is just what the doctor ordered.

Walensky has been unfairly criticized for offering shifting guidance concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

The real problem: the public is "worn out" by the pandemic and wants a magic bullet to kill Omicron once and for all. But there is no single bullet in the communications holster.

Unfortunately, Omicron is a fast-moving pandemic with a quickly-evolving nature that requires the CDC's 12,000 scientists to update and frequently change their recommendations.

The public may get the impression that the CDC's shifting recommendations show the healthcare watchdog doesn't have a clue about dealing with Omicron. The reality: the CDC must retain flexibility to keep a step ahead of the virus.

Xavier Becerra, Health and Human Services secretary, said Walensky, who is an expert in infectious diseases, is the right person to lead the CDC. He conceded though that she "has a degree in public health and not in marketing."

That's where Grunwald, a doctor of PR, comes in.

**Dr. Fauci says 'good riddance' to Capitol Hill posers...**

As the light at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic tunnel shines a bit brighter each day, you can bet Anthony Fauci, America's indispensable man during the pandemic, can't wait for retirement. The 81-year-old Fauci would no longer be hauled in before Congress to deal with attacks from nitwits such as Rand Paul and Roger Marshall.

Paul's repeated attacks on Fauci (e.g. part of a conspiracy that led to the creation of COVID-19 in a Chinese lab) has triggered death threats against the good doctor.

A man traveling to DC with an AR-15 rifle and multiple magazines of ammunition was arrested in Iowa in December. He had a "hit list" with Fauci's name on it.

When Fauci accused Paul of riling up "the crazies," the Senator said he was disappointed that the doctor suggested "that people who dare to question you are responsible for violent threats." Did you hear about the AR-15, Rand?

Grandstanding Marshall accused Fauci of ginning up fear of COVID to a craven bid to line his own pockets. He hoisted an oversized check as a prop that showed earned Fauci \$434K during 2020, which was Trump's last year in office. Did that include combat pay?

On Jan. 11, clueless Marshall demanded that Fauci make full disclosure of his compensation, though he has done so for each of his 37 years in government service.

Did Fauci really think he was off mic when he called Marshall "a moron"? Probably not.

**Robinhood has solved the return to work crisis...** It told workers to stay home for good.

The online stock trading platform announced Jan. 12 that Robinhoodies (e.g. staffers) can work remotely forever.

Robinhood promises to find new ways to cultivate community and create a consistent experience within its offices and remote hubs. The goal is to disrupt "proximity bias," in which workers who show up at the office stand a better chance of advancement.

What PR firms will follow in Robinhood's footsteps?

**Backlash against ESG.** Unilever, a leader in corporate sustainability, is under attack for putting climate and social responsibility ahead of dollars and cents.

Terry Smith, founder of Fundsmith, a top 10 stockholder in Unilever, wrote in his firm's annual report:

"A company which feels it has to define the purpose of Hellmann's mayonnaise has in our view clearly lost the plot. The Hellmann's brand has existed since 1913 so we would guess that by now consumers have figured out its purpose (spoiler alert—salads and sandwiches)."

Smith's message: Don't go overboard with the ESG.

—Kevin McCauley