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O'Dwyer's

The Inside News of PR & Marketing Communications



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June 1, 2020 Vol. 53 No. 22

UT'S PARSONS RETURNS TO H+K

Kelli Parsons, senior VP & chief communications officer at United Technologies, is returning to Hill+Knowlton Strategies as global chair, corporate affairs on June 15.



Kelli Parsons

She'll be in charge of corporate brand & reputation, financial PR, crisis & issues management, employee engagement and environmental & social governance matters.

Parsons did a 10-year stint at H&K, exiting in 2008 as executive VP-corporate & technology practice leader.

Upon departure, she served as head of global communications & marketing at Warburg Pincus, senior VP & CCO at Fannie Mae and senior VP & chief

communications officer at New York Life Insurance.

H&K also recruited Philippe Maze-Sencier as global chair, public affairs. The more than 25-year policy veteran will join June 8 from McLarty Associates, where he worked in its Brussels and DC offices.

Earlier, he was executive director at APCO Worldwide, heading its global government relations practice; staffer at LVMH's spirits division, and was at the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva.

SHIRLEY & MCVICKER FIGHTS LOCKDOWN

Shirley & McVicker Public Affairs is promoting the push against Michigan's lock-down strategy designed to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Erik Kiilunen, founder of Neuvokas, rebar manufacturer, hired the Alexandria, VA-based firm to bolster visibility for his "All Business is Essential" campaign.



Claiming that he lost \$600K in business due to the lockdown, Kiilunen, paid for 23 billboards across the state to display the All Business is Essential message. He also declared May 21 "Take Yourself to Work Day."

Kiilunen has been

booked by local radio/TV stations and scored coverage by the Associated Press, Reuters, *New York Times* and *USA Today*.

Kevin McVicker, who supervises the campaign, said Kiilunen's "leadership is an example to business owners who want to survive and continue to provide jobs."

MI TRANSIT AUTHORITY SEEKS PR PARTNER

The Capital Area Transportation Authority, the public transit service operating within the metro Lansing, Michigan area, is seeking a public relations partner for a range of PR planning and consultation services.

Scope of work includes developing public and media relations planning and strategy; crisis management, planning and communication; market research; reviewing and updating crisis communication, continuity of operations and homeless/vulnerable populations plans; assisting with issues, brand and reputation management; and providing communications and media relations advice.



Terms of the proposed contract begin in July and run for a five-year period with the option to renew for an additional five years, subject to CATA's approval.

Proposals are due by 2:00 p.m. (EST) on June 8, and should be emailed to nwilson@cata.org.

Subject line of email submission must be labeled "FINAL-REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS SERVICES RFP #2020-108".

All questions/inquiries should be directed to purchasing and contracts manager Nicole Wilson, at: nwilson@cata.org.
[Download the RFP \(includes a May 28 amendment\) PDF.](#)

KWT GLOBAL, HL GROUP MERGE

KWT Global (formerly known as Kwittken) and HL Group, both MDC agencies and part of the Doner Partner Network, have combined leadership and operations effective June 1. Each agency will continue to operate under their respective trade names through the remainder of this year, and the combined firm will occupy headquarters in New York at the end of the year, with offices in Los Angeles, London and Toronto.

KWT Global co-founder and CEO Aaron Kwittken will be global CEO of the combined firm. HL Group co-founder and CEO Lynn Tesoro will transition to founding partner of HL Group, and KWT Global co-founder and president Gabrielle Zucker will be president.



Aaron Kwittken

The agency will have a client roster that includes Deloitte, American Express Global Business Travel, Four Seasons, Bonobos, Eataly and BLINK Fitness. "HL Group's deep and unparalleled expertise in consumer, lifestyle, luxury, fashion and beauty will significantly bolster our global capabilities," said Kwittken.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS WIN AT CHEVRON

Environmentalists scored a major victory at Chevron's May 27 annual meeting as 53 percent of shareholders voted in support of a resolution requiring the energy giant to issue a report on its climate change-related lobbying effort.

Specifically, the resolution's goal is to gauge whether Chevron's lobbying aligns with the Paris Climate Change Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to well below two degrees Celsius.



"Corporate lobbying activities that are inconsistent with meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement present regulatory, reputational and legal risks to investors," according to the resolution's supporting statement.

The resolution sponsors believe Paris-aligned climate lobbying helps to mitigate these risks, and contributes positively to the long-term value of their investment portfolios.

They also want Chevron to spell out its participation in trade associations and other politically active organizations "that speak for business but, unfortunately, too often present forceful obstacles to progress in addressing the climate crisis."

Chevron's board had urged shareholders to reject the proposal, saying the company's lobbying activity is already transparent through existing disclosures.

The board shares the concerns of governments and the public about climate change risks. "Chevron recognizes that the use of fossil fuels to meet the world's ever-growing energy needs is a contributor to the rising levels of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere," according to the board's statement opposing the proposal.

The directors also noted that Chevron takes its fiduciary duties to stockholders very seriously, and believes it would not be doing so if it based "decisions on what a particular constituency believes the appropriate exercise of these fundamental rights to be."

SF SEEKS PR FOR COMMUNITY GRANTS

San Francisco is seeking a firm to handle community outreach/engagement and social media marketing for its community challenge grant program, which provides funding for nonprofits, businesses and schools to make physical improvements in the city's neighborhoods.

Formerly known as the Neighborhood Beautification and Graffiti Clean-Up Fund, the program "focuses on projects that directly engage residents and businesses in creating green spaces, gathering places, gardens, mini-parks, public art, and other neighborhood amenities featuring and applying ecologically friendly amenities and practices," according to San Francisco's informal solicitation document.

The City calls the program an "important tool for building strong San Francisco neighborhoods by facilitating community participation, stewardship, and responsibility."

The desired firm will attend community events, host workshops, handle website administration, create & distribute an electronic newsletter and oversee desktop publishing.

Work on the one-year \$100K contract begins July 1. Responses are due June 5. They go to Joan.Lubamersky@sfgov.org.

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



PR CONSULTING CLOSES L.A. OUTPOST

PR Consulting, a New York fashion shop with such clients as Narciso Rodriguez, Dries Van Noten and Raf Simons, has closed its Los Angeles office, according to a report in *WWD*.

The shuttering of the L.A. office, which opened in 2013, follows changes at the agency's headquarters in New York.

In late March, the company laid off 32 staffers in order "to keep the company running under the current circumstances." PR Consulting also has an office in Paris.



With the red carpet closed for the foreseeable future and no LA fashion shows on the horizon, business for many fashion-focused agencies in the city has dwindled.

Other firms that have cut staff include Spring (which has also closed its LA office), Krupp Group and BPCM.

JDE PEET'S COUNTS ON 193 GROUP

The One Nine Three Group handled the IPO of JDE Peet's, the world's No. 1 pure-play coffee company based on revenues, which raised \$2.5B in one of the biggest stock offerings of 2020.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the sale of a 14 percent stake in JDE Peet's is a bet by Netherlands-based parent company JAB Holdings on the resilience of coffee demand.

Olivier Goudet, JAB CEO, said JDE Peet's is well-positioned to be at the forefront of the IPO market, since its attractive growth prospects, business focus and commitment of the global team can help provide clear visibility for investors.

JDE Peet's brands include Douwe Egberts, Jacobs Coffee, Peet's Coffee, Kenco, Senseo and Tassimo, of which 80 percent of sales are for at-home consumption.

Launched with a valuation of \$17.3B, JDE Peet's began trading May 29 on the Euronext Amsterdam stock exchange. Shares closed up about 15 percent to \$39.78

Zach Siegel, co-founder of New York-based One Nine Three with Matthew Freud, worked the JDE Peet's IPO.

He launched the One Nine Three in November after an eight-year run at Teneo and stints at Edelman and Cohn & Wolfe.

BOSTON PR PRO MORRISSEY DIES AT 51

Donna Morrissey, who served as spokeswoman for the Boston Archdiocese during the sex abuse scandal, died May 22 from complications related to COVID-19. She was 51.

Most recently, Morrissey was spokeswoman for the east division of the American Red Cross blood services unit.

She was deployed during disasters and mass casualty events such as Superstorm Sandy, Sandy Hook, Boston Marathon bombing and the Pulse Night Club shooting.

Morrissey "never hesitated to do whatever she could to help those in need during their most devastating moments" according to a statement from the American Red Cross.

After launching her career as a reporter at WBZ-TV in Boston, she shifted to Regan Communications, where she worked from 1998-2001.

George Regan called Morrissey "a tornado-like force who helped make Regan Communications what it is today."



Donna Morrissey

AMAZON VNR FIASCO

Last week, an Amazon VNR is being called propaganda. The segment about Amazon's safety measures around COVID-19 was timed in advance of a shareholder meeting. It ran in almost identical stories across a number of local TV stations where it looked like original reporting because the newscasters ran the b-roll and read from Amazon's script.



Beth Andrix Monaghan

An excerpt from Amazon's response: "This type of video was created to share an inside look into the health and safety measures we've rolled out in our buildings and was intended for reporters who for a variety of reasons weren't able to come tour one of our sites themselves."

Critics blasted the stations for not providing disclosures. There is finger-pointing at "young producers" who didn't carefully vet the segment. But VNRs are easy fill-ins for strapped local news stations, especially now. Despite a climb in viewership since the outbreak of COVID-19, ad revenue for local TV stations has dried up.

The TV news industry has also been turned on its head with the inability to shoot in-person, in-studio or on-site. In a press panel hosted by InkHouse, NBC Bay Area anchor Scott McGrew talked about the new normal of remote interviews. He said that stations need video to accompany segments and increasingly have to rely on sources for footage.

The Amazon VNR entered a turbulent atmosphere in which the stakes for transparency have been raised. Alongside COVID-19, there are strong currents of trust erosion. Consumers aren't sure which information to believe. They hear conflicting advice from supposed experts about the economy and their health. And they see the "fake news" accusations being thrown at the media. Local news has hung in there as the trusted source for most adults, but this could damage that too, which helps no one.

So how can PR professionals walk the line of providing useful materials while not being overly-promotional or compromising the integrity of news? Self-promotional video footage has a logical home: your website and social channels. I've been watching Amazon's on its social channels and as an avid Prime member, I'm interested.

And of course, PR people are supposed to place good stories in the news. If we must do VNRs, we should clearly credit images, quotes, and video. Notably, in this case, Amazon's video assets did not have an on-screen credit saying that they came from the company. By working collaboratively with a producer and asking what assets they need to help enhance a story, you not only avoid a situation where lack of communication could end up in an embarrassing situation for both parties, but you also build a working relationship that could lead to long-term access.

We also need to understand the media landscape without taking advantage of it. Be empathetic to the reporters, editors and producers we work with (many of whom, by the way, have been deemed essential workers), and recognize the challenges they are facing in the current environment. We can do this by offering relevant, authentic, compelling stories that resonate for the right reasons—it's called "earned media" for a reason.

This atmosphere is asking us to reconsider some old PR tactics, which, candidly, should have been sidelined a long

time ago for the very reasons we're discussing now. We have to try harder than ever to be clear, transparent and non-promotional. We must remember our mission: to create authentic and loyal relationships with our audiences that are mutually beneficial. PR people have a responsibility to the truth.

Beth Andrix Monaghan is the CEO and founder of InkHouse, an integrated PR firm with offices in Boston, New York, San Francisco and Seattle. Find her @bamonaghan on Twitter.

EDELMAN WORKS TUESDAY MORNING

Edelman is handling the Chapter 11 filing of Tuesday Morning, Dallas-based off-price retailer, that is restructuring due to the "insurmountable financial hurdle" triggered by the forced prolonged closure of its 687 stores in 37 states.

Tuesday Morning CEO Steve Becker said the "complete halt of store operations for two months put the company in a financial position that can be effectively addressed only through a reorganization in Chapter 11."

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Tuesday Morning earned \$1.3M on \$548M revenues for the six-month period ended Dec. 31.

The company plans to use the bankruptcy filing to realign its store footprint, a move that will shutter 230 of its stores over the summer.

As the country reopens, Tuesday Morning has resumed operation of more than 80 percent of its high-performing stores.

Becker is "encouraged by the very positive performance of the business as we reopen our doors and welcome back our dedicated customers."

Edelman's Allison McLarty and Ted McHugh work the Tuesday Morning account.



PR PROS TALK COVID-19 WITH DOUG SIMON

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital director of media relations Marvin Stockwell chats with D S Simon Media's Doug Simon about the challenges facing communicators in the non-profit space in the latest installment of "Navigating COVID-19 with PR's Top Pros," the video interview series produced by D S Simon in partnership with O'Dwyer's.

Stockwell's main piece of advice is for communicators to "be flexible." The COVID-19, he says, is something that affects us all, so "we need to realize that no one could have foreseen this and no one has all the answers."

St. Jude faces some unique communications issues, he adds. In addition to reducing the anxiety of the hospital's young patients, St. Jude also must maintain its focus on what's happening to children with cancer during the crisis, and make sure its research mission remains a primary goal.

Another effect of the COVID-19 is that it has increased the desire of mainstream audiences for deep discussions of topics related to science and medicine. "The kind of scientific expertise of St. Jude," he says, "is just being sought out at a much higher level than is normal."

All of the interviews in the "Navigating COVID-19 with PR's Top Pros" series can be seen [here](#).



Marvin Stockwell

NY ASSN. ON INDEPENDENT LIVING SEEKS PR

The New York Association on Independent Living is seeking an agency that can develop and implement a 2020 media campaign.



The Albany-based non-profit, which promotes the rights and quality of life for New Yorkers with disabilities, needs an agency that can create a comprehensive, statewide paid and earned media campaign—utilizing both traditional and online media—that focuses on messaging that supports independent living and highlights NYAIL's statewide network of independent living centers.

Proposals, which should cover both a three- and six-month timeline, will have messaging that challenges the public on 1) Who can live independently in the community (based on age or disability); 2) Living in an institutional setting is not always a choice; and 3) How funding must be in place to support the choice to live independently. The effort will “incorporate an awareness of the fundamental and current environment of safety and wellness risks to those living in congregate settings like nursing homes,” according to its RFP.

Scope of the work includes creating a campaign message; developing a plan of action for the campaign; designing graphics for online and print; writing copy; video production for online advertising and organic social media distribution; media relations work resulting in press coverage; providing toolkits and other resources to be made available to independent living centers to spearhead local engagement.

Electronic proposals are due June 5 and should include a monthly base fee and projected costs.

Send them with subject line “NYAIL RFP 2020” to communications specialist Alex Thompson at athompson@ilny.org. All bidding agencies should send their submissions in PDF or DOC/X format.

MY TIME WITH LARRY

Larry Kramer, the playwright and AIDS activist, died yesterday at age 84. He left his mark in two different worlds—the arts and healthcare. He changed me, too.



Paul Oestreicher

I was sad to read of his passing but this is not an obituary covering all the details of his dynamic life; it's a brief reflection starting when we met in 1988. I was the chief representative to the HIV/AIDS and oncology patient communities at drug giant Hoffmann-La Roche and he was on the other side of a conference room table. His first comment to me was, “Bristol-Myers met us in a nicer hotel.”

The year before, I joined the company's Public Affairs department from the R&D group.

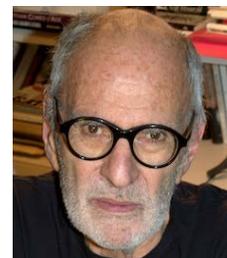
There was a need for someone with a technical background to help explain what was coming out of the labs to the general public. I landed in the role and immediately found myself in the middle of history. Roche was one of only three companies at the time that had a late-stage anti-HIV drug development program. Burroughs Wellcome (now part of Glaxo) had the first marketed product, Retrovir®/AZT.

Bristol-Myers (now Bristol-Myers Squibb) and Roche had retroviral analogs in the pipeline.

Burroughs Wellcome was reviled by the AIDS community Larry helped to organize. Drug prices were high and communication from the company was absent. There were no best practices, no case studies on how to communicate with patients. It simply wasn't done. Companies would inform the “learned intermediary”—the physician—and he or she would communicate with the patient.

Today, there's at least one patient advocacy organization for any disease. There were only a handful of AIDS groups in those days. Larry and others paved the way for all the rest.

Bristol-Myers decided to meet with the AIDS groups and I began my campaign to convince Roche management to do the same. I remember making a presentation to the Executive Committee and quoted Lincoln: “As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.” It wasn't the easiest sell. But people realized there were ethical and business considerations at play—many of the activists were patients trying to save their own lives, and they were phenomenally organized and well informed. The potential benefits of hearing their point of view and adjusting our own plans were new and valuable concepts.



Larry Kramer

A letter from Larry's organization, ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was the catalyst for our first meeting. He once said, “If you write a calm letter and fax it to nobody, it sinks like a brick in the Hudson.” The demands in the letter were copied to a list of top-tier news media, members of Congress, AIDS activists, and health care policy makers. I wrote back, explained our research initiative, agreed to meet, and copied back the entire list. Then, my phone rang. “What are you doing writing back to all my constituents?,” he barked. I said, “They're our constituents, too.”

That was a pivotal moment. I gained some respect by coming right back at him but the important piece was that first step we took into a common ground. Our constituency was their constituency and everyone wanted new, effective medications in the hands of patients as soon as possible. The two “sides” worked to expand access to experimental therapeutics, enroll patients into clinical trials, support NIH funding, and lobby for FDA reform to speed drug reviews and approvals.

The world was changing. The normal course of business—the normal course of life—was disrupted. But progress was made—advancements in understanding and equality, as well as advancements in medical science.

Larry was called a troublemaker and much worse. But at least there was talk back then and a respect for science. It's worth noting that ACT UP's slogan was Silence = Death. With COVID-19, I'm afraid Silence has been replaced by Division and Ignorance. Maybe a little Larry Kramer-style agitation wouldn't be such a bad thing to get people to think about the state of our society and the status of our healthcare system.

Paul Oestreicher, PhD is a recognized expert in strategic communications, marketing and public affairs, and crisis, change and reputation management. He is the author of Camelot, Inc.: Leadership and Management Insights from King Arthur and the Round Table and the blog C-O-I-N-S: Communication Opinions, Insights and New Strategies. Follow him @pauloestreicher.

SOCIAL DISTANCING HELPS INFLUENCERS

Social distancing appears to be having a positive effect on the power of influencers, according to a new study from Matter Communications. Online brand communications, however, are lagging behind.



With consumers spending more time on social platforms, their contact with influencers and their messages is growing. Over half of the more than 1,000 consumers that Matter polled last month (58 percent) said that they are noticing more sponsored content from influencers than they did before

social distancing restrictions started. And 63 percent have spent more time viewing and/or posting content across social platforms while social distancing.

Survey respondents also said they trust the information they are getting from influencers. Sixty-one percent of respondents said they are likely to trust online recommendations that come from influencers, friends or family members. Online recommendations from a brand only registered a 38 percent trust level. In addition, only 19 percent said they feel that the influencer content they have seen has been “tone-deaf and/or unhelpful.”

More than eight out of ten respondents (82 percent) said they have purchased, researched or considered purchasing a product or service after seeing friends, family or influencers post about it. More than half (56 percent) were particularly interested in seeing influencer posts about food and beverage products, with health and wellness (48 percent) and personal technology (45 percent) close behind.

Celebrity influencers did not rank all that high, though. Only about a fifth of respondents (from 17 to 22 percent across all product categories) said they prefer celebrity influencers over personalities seen as either aspirational, relatable, expert, “just for fun” or well-known non-celebrity individuals, such as authors or public figures.

“Our data makes one thing clear: influencer marketing presents a unique and timely opportunity for companies to engage with a thoughtful, nuanced approach,” said Matter president Mandy Mladenoff.

PORTLAND STATE SEEKS TO ENROLL PR FIRM

Portland State University is looking for a firm to promote awareness of its Center for Executive and Professional Education program.



The Oregon-based school wants a partner to develop an integrated marketing program to acquire leads, and deliver a supply of enrollments and custom training contracts.

The firm will provide strategic recommendations for brand messaging and market differentiation; align marketing tactics with target audiences, personas and messaging pillars and refine messaging based on existing brand identity work.

PSU plans to offer a one-year contract, capped at \$140M with two additional one-year options.

Proposals are due June 8 and are to be submitted to PSU's Bonfire portal at <https://pdx.bonfirehub.com/opportunities/27757>

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

NEWS OF FIRMS

MWWPR has launched its Social CEO Playbook, which is intended to help companies meet the increasing customer demand for transparency and dialogue from businesses. The offering incorporates audience insights and behavioral analytics to create a customized formula for an executive's social presence, platforms and profile.

It also uses predictive analytics to monitor news and social conversation and ensure that stories and messages can be created and amplified in real-time.

MWWPR says research it has conducted indicates that the visibility of the CEO is among the top criteria for judging a company's trustworthiness.

History Factory, an agency that helps companies leverage their history and heritage to transform their brand positioning, marketing and communications, has launched the COVID-19 Corporate Memory Project. The project is a free archival resource that spotlights corporate responses to the crisis as well as offering guidance on how to prepare for and respond effectively to the next crisis. It combines crowd-sourced content from corporate contributors with publicly available media coverage, press releases, social media posts and statements, documents, photography, video and a range of other digital materials related to the pandemic's impact on the business world. Those wishing to contribute content for the project can [click here](#).

Wunderlich Kaplan dropped Thrive Philanthropy as a client after it was revealed that a purportedly celebrity-studded conference that Thrive was organizing had never confirmed any of the celebrities it was using to promote the event. The Connect Summit, scheduled for June 23 and 24, touted the participation of George and Amal Clooney, Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively, Charlize Theron, and Steph and Aisha Curry. Deadline has confirmed that none of them said they had agreed to appear at the conference. Tickets for the event were going for as much as \$1799. “Due to fraudulent information provided to us by our client Stephanie Lapensee the founder of Thrive Philanthropy, the creator of the Connect Summit, our agency, Wunderlich Kaplan Communications no longer represents this project,” Wunderlich Kaplan president and partner Dara Kaplan said in a statement.

Weber Shandwick is offering college students and recent grads a way to combine the media savvy they already possess with an understanding of the real-life implications of developing media technologies and the issues facing digital communicators. Hosted by chief innovation officer Chris Perry, the Fellows Edition of the agency's Media Genius Master Class aims to raise the “media IQ” of participants through insights from its media experts, interviews with special guests and interactive experiences. The five-week online class will address such topics as the impact of disinformation, emerging media formats, the shifting influencer landscape, the role of culture in PR and marketing, and how brands are navigating major industry changes. The one-hour sessions will run Wednesdays at 11 a.m. from June 24 through July 22. Prospective students can apply for spots in the class until June 5 by clicking here. Those who are accepted will be notified by June 12.



COMMENTARY

President Trump has called Minneapolis protestors who were exercising their Constitutional rights “thugs,” threatened military intervention and predicted looting could lead to shooting, all in the name of solidifying support among



his ardent political base and boost his diminishing chance of re-election.

As demonstrations spread throughout the US, Trump is focusing on the violence rather than addressing the underlying causes of police brutality toward blacks and racial inequality.

It's Trump's most desperate move yet to divert attention from his dismal record, which features more than 100K dead Americans because he waited two months before taking the threat from COVID-19 seriously.

That delay triggered a near economic collapse. The public health emergency forced the country into lockdown, wiping out the jobs of 40M Americans and dealing a body blow to US leadership on the world's stage.

Trump, who delayed action on COVID-19, may now be reopening the economy too soon, which could trigger a second wave of the virus.

His ineptitude has rallied US adversaries such as China, which has reneged on its promise to allow Hong Kong to operate somewhat autonomously from the Mainland.

Twitter moved against Trump's thugs tweet, attempting to hide it and preventing others from sharing it. The president vows retaliation.

Meanwhile, America is in flames. These are perilous times for the US, which looks for a national leader who can bind the battered country together.

It won't come from Trump, who thrives on divisiveness and confrontation, and is now posing as the “law and order” president, the reincarnation of Richard Nixon during the terrible rioting of 1968,

The tweeter-in-chief has lost his grip as it becomes clear to millions of Americans that his presidency is a failure.

The election is six months away, which gives Trump plenty of time to do more mischief.

The cheerleader-in-chief has told America that he hopes to have a COVID-19 vaccine in production “by the end of the year or shortly after.”

His “Operation Warp Speed” crash program to develop a quickie vaccine is supposed to transform Trump's magical thinking about the vaccine into reality.

The public isn't buying it.

Only 20 percent of Americans think a vaccine will be available by the end of the year, according to a May 27 poll from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. More than six-in ten (61 percent) of respondents think 2021 will be the year of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 17 percent say it will take longer than that.

The AP-NORC poll found that only 49 percent of respondents said they currently would get vaccinated if a vaccine were available. Thirty-one percent aren't sure and 20 percent

said they wouldn't get vaccinated.

Public confidence is as important as science when it comes to creating a vaccine to counter coronavirus. PR will play a role in building that confidence.

Does Fox News, which downplayed the threat posed from COVID-19, bear any responsibility for the deaths of 100K Americans who perished from the disease? A study from the National Bureau of Economic Research (Cambridge, MA) released May 26 provides grist for that argument.

Conducted by researchers at Columbia University, University of Chicago and SafeGraph, a geospatial company, it found that exposure to Fox News during the early stages of the pandemic substantially lowered compliance with social distancing regulations.

The research shows that a one percent increase in Fox News viewership reduced adherence to stay-at-home guidelines by about nine percent.

The analysis was based on data from SafeGraph social distancing data compiled from GPS pings from 45M mobile devices measured along with Fox News viewership rates.

The researchers make it clear they “do not attempt to attribute the Fox News effects to health outcomes, namely cases and deaths.” They do point out that after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 an international public health emergency on Jan. 30, Fox News played down the potential risk throughout March.

Sean Hannity urged viewers to be more concerned about gun violence in Chicago than COVID-19. He offered a sympathetic platform to president Trump, who told him on Feb. 2: “We pretty much shut it [COVID-19] down coming in from China.”

The study did not test the exact mechanism through which Fox News viewership persuades individuals against complying with social distancing.

The authors argue that the findings are likely the result of contrarian and misleading broadcasts made in early March regarding the effectiveness of social distancing.

“These findings are indicative of the ‘advice discounting’ phenomenon through which media outlets override expert opinions,” they said.

There has been recent coverage of social distancing on FOX News Channel's news and opinion programs, including America's Newsroom, Hannity, Cavuto, Bill Hemmer Reports and FOX & Friends, a Fox News spokesperson told O'Dwyer's.

FOX News medical contributor Dr. Marc Siegel told America's Newsroom co-anchor Ed Henry he is “deeply disturbed” by images of parties at Lake of the Ozarks and called on the Missouri Memorial Day weekend parties to self-quarantine after not social distancing.

Hannity scolded the Ozark partygoers, saying their failure to self-distance “could be a disaster” for vulnerable Americans.

He was right. Missouri officials have asked the partygoers to monitor themselves for COVID-19 after one of them came down with the virus.

—Kevin McCauley