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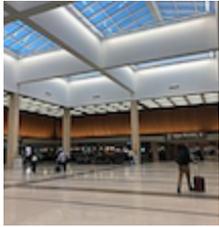
The Inside News of
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NORFOLK INT. AIRPORT FLIES MARKETING RFQ

Norfolk, Virginia's Norfolk International Airport is seeking quotations from qualifying agencies for a three-year contract to assist in the planning, development and implementation of advertising, marketing and PR services.



The services sought include developing a comprehensive messaging and strategy program to drive passenger traffic and position the Airport as the premier gateway to Hampton Roads and Northeast North Carolina.

Quotations are due by 2:00 p.m. (EST) on May 31 and should be mailed to: Steven C. Sterling, Deputy Executive Director; Administration and Operations; Norfolk Airport Authority; Norfolk International Airport; 2200 Norview Avenue; Norfolk, VA 23518-5807

All respondents must submit one PDF copy of their proposals (on CD or a thumb drive) as well as an original hardcopy and four additional copies.

Email questions by 4:00 p.m. (EST) May 10 to ssterling@norfolkairport.com. Answers will be posted on the [Authority's website](#) as an addendum to the RFQ.

Bids for the subsequent RFP will be due by June 7, with the contract date to begin August 1.

Terms of the contract will run for three years, with the option to extend annually up to two additional years.

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

BGR ADVISES VENEZUELA

BGR Group is representing the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on a pro bono basis, providing strategic government affairs and PR services in the US.

"BGR is proud to work on behalf of the people of Venezuela to assist the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Ambassador Carlos Vecchio and his team," said a statement from the firm's president Jeffrey Birnbaum. "We are acting in support of the legitimate government of President Juan Guaidó in the United States."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told ABC News May 5 that President Nicolas Maduro "can't be part of Venezuela's future." He said Maduro's exit could be in "two weeks or could be four weeks." Pompeo did not rule out an American invasion to oust the Venezuelan leader.

BGR has agreed to work for an initial six-month term "without any expectations or promises of payment in the future," according to chairman Lanny Griffith's letter to Vecchio.

BGR or the Embassy may terminate the arrangement for any reason upon 30 days written notice.

MERCURY REPS GOVERNMENT OF LIBYA

Mercury Public Affairs has inked a \$1.8M one-year contract with Libya's Government of National Accord, which is under assault by a rebel group fronted by 75-year-old warlord Khalifa Haftar, a US citizen.

Though the United Nations and the US recognize the GNA as the legitimate ruler of Libya, president Trump made a phone call to Haftar on April 19 to discuss "ongoing counterterrorism efforts and the need to achieve peace and stability in Libya," according to a White House statement.

Mercury is providing strategic consulting, government relations, lobbying and media outreach for the office of Libyan prime minister Fayez al-Serraj.

The Omnicom unit received a \$500K upfront fee when it launched its effort for Libya on April 22. Future monthly fees of \$150K are payable in advance.



Khalifa Haftar

FIVE PR FIRMS SWEAR OFF TOBACCO CLIENTS

Only five PR firms have joined the Quit Big Tobacco Campaign and pledged not to represent tobacco and e-cigarette clients.

Ketchum, Golin, Fenton, Finn Partners and Hager Sharp are the PR firms that signed the pledge, according to the QTC website.

MDC Partners (parent of Allison + Partners, Sloane & Co, KWT Global and Hunter PR) also is on the list.

Organized by New York-based Vital Strategies, global public health organization, QBTC takes aim at Big Tobacco (Altria, Philip Morris International, Reynolds American and Imperial Tobacco) and its promotion of e-cigarettes to counter the decline in smoking.

JP MORGAN'S COHEN MOVES TO ABMAC

Eileen Cohen, managing director of JP Morgan's asset management unit and chair of its North America governance committee has joined Abernathy MacGregor as senior counselor.

During a nearly 20-year run at JP Morgan, Cohen also served as a senior client portfolio manager, handling investment consulting and financial communications.

She joined JP Morgan from Chancellor Capital (now Invesco), where she worked as portfolio manager, head of asset allocation and chief of client services.

At AbMac, Cohen will play a key role in advising clients on enterprise risk management, succession planning, sustainability, diversity and compensation.

BALLARD FRONTS PEBBLE MINE

Ballard Partners, which has close ties with the Trump White House, is handling environmental lobbying duties for the Pebble Mine Partnership.

Vancouver-based Northern Dynasty Minerals is behind the PMP, which wants to build a "world-class" 5.3 square mile open pit copper/gold/silver mine at the headwaters of Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed.



Brian Ballard

Environmental and local groups have attacked the project, which the Natural Resources Defense Council says would devastate "the greatest wild salmon fishery in the world and the region's economic engine." The \$1.5B fishery supports 14K jobs.

The Justice and Corporate Accountability Project filed a compliance request against NDM with the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the British Columbia Securities Commission. It claims NDM lacks the financial resources to build the mine and is "trying to drum up cash by providing incomplete and misleading information to investors."

Brian Ballard, chair of the Trump Victory fundraising team in Florida, represents PMP with Susie Wiles, who was senior strategist for Trump's Sunshine State campaign, and Syl Lukis, managing partner of Ballard's Washington office.

FACEBOOK'S BRESSEALE TO MICROSOFT

Microsoft has hired Todd Bresseale to serve as director of public affairs and communications.

Bresseale comes to Microsoft from Facebook, where he was responsible for messaging around its community partnership programs. Before that, he served as an assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security during the Obama administration.

An Army veteran, Bresseale has also served as a spokesman for the Department of Defense and chief of public affairs for the U.S. Army's Fifth Corps in Heidelberg, Germany.

EDELMAN WORKS TEXTBOOK MERGER

Edelman is working the \$5B merger of giants McGraw-Hill Education and Cengage Learning to create the No. 2 college textbook publisher behind Pearson.

The combined company, called McGraw-Hill, will feature more than 44,000 titles from Pre-K through 12th grades, higher education, English language teaching, professional, medical and library reference markets.

Boston-based Cengage is known for its focus on affordable access to learning.

Michael Hansen, CEO of Cengage, will lead the merged company, while Nana Banerjee, who played a key role in facilitating the deal, will continue to head McGraw-Hill through the transition. The merger is expected to close early next year.

Arielle Patrick, Edelman's senior VP-financial communications & capital markets, handles media with Susan Aspey (Cengage's senior VP-external affairs) and Catherine Mathis (McGraw-Hill's chief communications officer).

ACCOUNTS IN TRANSIT

Padilla has been named PR agency of record by Irving, TX-headquartered **Avocados From Mexico**, which works to drive U.S. consumption of the fruit. The agency's efforts for AFM include consumer, corporate and crisis communication programs. It will also create brand awareness PR campaigns supporting such events as the Super Bowl and Cinco de Mayo, as well as identifying and developing cultural events that AFM could leverage. Through its work, Padilla will utilize AFM's Culinary Innovation Center in Irving, Texas and The Cookery, Padilla's New York culinary studio, to showcase the versatility of Avocados From Mexico.



Rubenstein Public Relations has been retained as agency of record for **Interos Inc.**, the developer of a software-as-a-service platform that uses artificial intelligence to map, model and visualize global supply chains. The agency will work to carve out a position for Interos as an innovator in the SaaS, supply-chain management and cybersecurity marketplaces by generating national, cross-platform exposure for the brand—specifically in the areas of food, consumer products, finance, defense, intelligence, manufacturing, retail, and technology.

The Brandman Agency has added **Resort Pass**, a new hotel booking platform, to its roster of luxury travel and lifestyle clients. The company offers guests daytime access to hotels and resorts for use of the pool, spa, fitness center, and additional amenities, without the commitment of an overnight stay.

Hawkins International PR is representing the **Novotel Miami Brickell**, the second Novotel in the U.S. The hotel, formerly known as the Atton Brickell Miami, rebranded under the Novotel name following the acquisition of Atton Hotels by Accor, which owns the Novotel brand. Accor, whose holdings encompass 4,800 hotels, resorts and residences in 100 countries, also operates such properties as Raffles, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts and Banyan Tree.



Diffusion has been named AOR for talent experience platform **Brightfox**. The firm will handle the U.S. introduction of the platform, which will kick off with a strategic launch program. Diffusion is also tasked with continuing to build awareness and attract a customer base for Brightfox post-launch. An ongoing media relations program will showcase the company's founding story and vision for the future, and Diffusion will also implement a tailored thought leadership program.

Zapwater Communications has added **The Revel Group** to its roster of hospitality clients. Zapwater's scope of work will include media relations, influencer relations, marketing and events for the company, encompassing all aspects of their business. The Revel Group is an event-centric agency that provides venues, décor services, curated food offerings and planning expertise. The Chicago-based company includes Revel Global Events, Revel Décor, Limelight Catering, Spotlight, Revel Space and Revel Cares.

HOW TO COMBAT 'TRUTH DECAY'

Once upon a time, the world was black and white; we knew the good guys from the bad. At least we thought we did, and we enjoyed that clarity. We trusted our information sources to provide us with facts.

Technology now makes it easier for our eyes to deceive us and has accelerated the rate of “truth decay,” a term coined by the RAND Corporation. This gradual decline of the ability to know what’s true and what isn’t presents serious challenges for organizations worldwide. What is truth decay and what can be done to protect the relationship brands have with stakeholders?



Christine Barney

First let’s look at what contributes to this phenomenon. It can be narrowed down to two trends:

Society’s growing hunger for the sensational. The expression “if it bleeds, it leads” has existed for decades. In a chicken-or-the-egg scenario, the debate continues as to whether news media outlets overemphasize negative news to attract audiences or if they’re just serving up audience preferences. The sensational headlines known as clickbait are just a new variation on an old theme. About four years ago, I started hearing reporters ask for support in promoting their stories, because clicks were part of their performance metrics. Remembering that at the end of the day, most information sources are also businesses looking to make a profit makes it easier to understand why they mirror back the news consumers want. And the news we want is visual, dramatic and served up in small bites for easy consumption. The 24/7 news cycle creates a constant need for content, and the reduced resources at news sources means fact checking falls by the wayside. So, with less scrutiny, there’s likely to be less truth even from trusted sources.

Technology makes it easy to manipulate stakeholders. At a recent Page Society event, I heard RAND Corporation Deputy Chief Technology Officer Dr. Rand Waltzman make the audience very uncomfortable by showing examples of both simple and Mission-Impossible-like techniques to create news. The simple technique included clever editing such as a video cut short to show a brand spokesperson seemingly ignoring victims after a tragedy. Or consider the misleading copy from captions on actual photos like the hoax about the Sphinx in Egypt being covered in snow when the photo was actually of a miniature Sphinx in Tokyo. This sophisticated technique includes manufactured images and sound. Photoshop has been around a long time, but it’s getting harder and harder to detect image doctoring in photos, not to mention video. With fewer than 15 seconds of someone’s image and voice, you can now create avatars that say or do whatever you want. These deepfake videos were first reported in 2017, and soon fake celebrity porn was making news and being banned on social channels. In April 2018, Jordan Peele and Jonah Peretti created a deepfake using Barack Obama as a public service announcement regarding the danger of deepfakes. While the phenomenon of creating fakes isn’t new, it’s the realism of the evolving techniques

that makes their impact more powerful. As artificial intelligence continues to advance, the ability to identify and control fakes will become even more of a challenge.

There are numerous examples of how manufactured and forced perspective erodes trust and impacts situations in everything from elections to healthcare. The increasing ease of these techniques is what has accelerated the rate of truth decay. So, what can ethical communicators do to combat this wave of misinformation and protect their brands? Consider these five guidelines.

Don’t blame the platforms or the government or expect them to solve the problem. We may shake our heads when news media run a hoax photo or if a social media platform helps a fake video go viral, but regulation isn’t going to make these issues go away and the platforms themselves can’t police the quantity of content that goes up each second. Expecting someone else to fix the problem means a very long wait. You can’t regulate your way to ethical behavior. But just like with anti-bullying programs, brands are in a unique position to put a spotlight on the problem and model good behavior.

Keep your head out of the sand. Don’t assume people won’t be influenced by “fakes.” We’ve spent a long time accepting that “seeing is believing” and it will take time for people to adjust to a new era where they can’t trust what they see. Take them seriously. Monitor and track attacks on your brand and be prepared to not just respond but anticipate.

Go on the offensive. Protect your brand by proactively telling your story to build a wall of positive perception and trust. For example, if you transparently and consistently put out video of your manufacturing process, stakeholders are more likely to question a fake that says you rely on child labor. Be prepared to fight fire with fire—or video with video—and aggressively debunk myths. Just being right isn’t enough. If given the choice between watching a two-minute video of a car on fire versus reading your brand’s press release on how safe your cars are in terms of fire injuries, we all know what people will choose. And think about clickbait strategies with your message. For a company focusing on energy efficiency, we saw a dramatic difference in response to the phrase “are you losing money” vs. “how to save money.”

Predict the future. Technology is changing rapidly; your job will never be done. Anticipate the next possible attack on your brand. What new apps are out there that might present an opportunity or a challenge for you?

Make friends. Being on the defensive is hard. But a tried and true public relations strategy still works today: have other people say good things about you, and the rewards will follow. So, ensure you have a strong circle of third-party supporters who can come to your aid, help tell your story and act as truth protectors for your brand.

Are the days of absolute truth over? Perhaps. But the news isn’t all bad. We too have more tools and more technology to use in the fight to tell our stories. Ultimately, in this new gray world, communicators have a bigger job than ever in shaping stakeholder perceptions and slowing the rate of truth decay.

Christine Barney is CEO and Managing Partner of rbb Communications.

COTE D'IVOIRE TAPS AVENUE STRATEGIES

Cote d'Ivoire has hired Trump-connected Avenue Strategies Global for support ahead of the 2019 African Growth and Opportunity Act Forum slated in August.

President Clinton signed AGOA into law in 2000 to enhance US market access to sub-Saharan countries that comply with legal, labor and human rights standards.

Cote d'Ivoire wants ASG's help in increasing American investment, especially in its textile and cashew nuts sectors, negotiating a free trade agreement with the US and paving the way for the sale of more artisan hand-crafts here.

Corey Lewandowski, Trump's former campaign manager, and Barry Bennett, advisor to the Trump campaign and head of Ben Carson's presidential run, launched ASG.

The firm will lobby the administration and Congress and pitch the media on behalf of Cote d'Ivoire, according to its six-month contract worth \$120K.

Zimbabwe in April hired ASG to a one-year to \$1.1M contract to improve its relations with the US.

FRENCH DOD SPOKESPERSON JOINS H+K

Valérie Lecasble, spokesperson for France's Ministry of Defense, has joined Hill+Knowlton Strategies as managing director of its Paris office.



Valérie Lecasble

Beginning her career as a print and broadcast journalist, she moved to the managing director job at I-Télé, the all-news TV channel.

Lecasble left the media in 2008 for the VP slot at TBWA Corporate, a position she held for eight years before being appointed to the director of France's defense information and communications delegation.

Lars-Erik Grønntun, H+K's global president, expects Lecasble to be a "great leader" of the Paris operation.

CISCO RECRUITS DELL ALUM LOW AS CCO

Cisco Systems has hired Stella Low, who was senior VP & global communications head at Dell Technologies following its acquisition of EMC, as its CCO.

CEO Chuck Robbins wrote a blog to welcome Low to his executive leader team, "given the strategic importance of communications in this digital age and our belief in transparency, how and when we share our story will be a key factor in our future, the success of our customers, and the impact we will have around the world."



Stella Low

He's excited about hiring Low due to "her passion for great storytelling, building strong communities and her inclusive, solutions-oriented approach"

Low joined Dell following its \$67B 2016 acquisition of EMC, where she was VP-global communications director after serving as EMEA communications & PR director. She joined EMC from the EMEA PR group at Unisys in 2010.

DC AWARDS HONOR FEMALE REPORTERS

Four top female political reporters were honored at the sixth annual Washington Women in Journalism Awards on April 26.

The annual event, which kicked off the 2019 White House Correspondents' Dinner weekend, was hosted by Story Partners founder and chairman Gloria Story Dittus and Washingtonian CEO Cathy Merrill Williams.



Andrea Mitchell

Andrea Mitchell, chief foreign affairs correspondent for NBC and host of MSNBC's "Andrea Mitchell Reports," received the Lifetime Achievement Award. "A great deal has changed since I began reporting in Washington for NBC News more than forty years ago," Mitchell told the crowd. "The old boy's network on the 1972 campaign that Timothy Crouse chronicled in *The Boys on the Bus* is no more. NBC's News' campaign team in 2016 of Hallie Jackson, Katy Tur, Kristen Welker, Kasie Hunt and me—yes, along with an occasional male colleague—was a breakthrough for our gender."

Ashley Parker, White House reporter for the Washington Post, was named Outstanding Journalist in Print. "Covering the White House means working to report not just the administration's message of the day or spin, but also to unearth the story they might not want us to tell," Parker said. "These are, after all, the stories that often affect the lives of everyday Americans."

CNN White House correspondent Abby Phillip, who was named Outstanding Journalist in Broadcasting, described the moment she faced president Trump's intimidation as she tried to ask him a question. Huffington Post Washington bureau chief Amanda Terkel, named Rising Star, recalled being the only woman in the newsroom.

"During the week of the White House Correspondents' Dinner, Story Partners and Washingtonian host our annual Washington Women in Journalism Awards to honor women journalists in our nation's capital," said Dittus. "And this year we are truly honoring the A-team. Today's media landscape is one of the most challenging environments we have ever seen, but Andrea, Ashley, Abby, and Amanda rise above and beyond every day to report the news."



From left: Amanda Terkel, Abby Phillip, Ashley Parker, Andrea Mitchell, Gloria Dittus and Cathy Merrill Williams

PEERS, INFLUENCERS REACH MILLENNIALS

Peers on social media and the use of online influencers are far more effective in reaching Millennials than older audiences, according to a report by real estate marketing company Clever.

The report, which surveyed Americans on their online media habits and overall sentiment toward online marketing, discovered that only slightly more than a third of consumers (37 percent) have bought a product or service this year due to an ad on social media. Nearly twice that number of Millennial respondents (65 percent) admitted they're more likely to buy a product or service if it's recommended to them by a friend via social media, compared to only 40 percent of Baby Boomers.

Millennials also appear to be uniquely receptive to influencer marketing campaigns. According to the survey, Millennials are 54 percent more likely than their elders to buy a product or service recommended by an influencer. Nearly half (44 percent) of Millennials admitted they've already bought a product or service because of an influencer, compared to 28 percent of Boomer and Gen X respondents.

Facebook remains the dominant social media platform, according to the survey, but for younger Americans its influence appears to be slipping. While 58 percent of Millennials said they've bought a product from Facebook, video- and photo-driven sites are closing the gap in becoming Millennials' go-to social channels for purchases, as 55 percent and 51 percent of Millennials said they've bought a product via YouTube and Instagram, respectively.

The survey also found that Millennials are less inclined to divulge their personal information online: only 32 percent said they'd provide their name, email and phone number in exchange for an informative downloadable guide or resource.

Clever's report surveyed nearly 1,140 U.S. adults in March. The survey was conducted by online polling platform Pollfish.

APCO ADDS HHS' KALAVRITINOS

APCO Worldwide has recruited Jack Kalavritinos, who was director for intergovernmental & external affairs at the Dept. of Health & Human Services, for a senior director slot. He will join the Washington-based firm on May 28.



**Jack
Kalavritinos**

At HHS, Kalavritinos guided Secretary Alex Azar on communications and outreach and promoted the department's efforts to combat the opioid crisis, reduce drug prices and engage with healthcare providers.

Earlier, he served in the Food and Drug Administration as associate commissioner for external affairs and counselor to then-commissioner Scott Gottlieb.

Prior to joining the Trump team in 2017, Kalavritinos handled domestic and international policy issues for Covidien, which is now Medtronic, for more than seven years.

MEDIA MANEUVERS

The number of commercial breaks on Fox's broadcast of next February's Super Bowl LIV will drop, but the length of each of those breaks is going up, according to a report on Deadline. While there will be five breaks per quarter—up from four in recent broadcasts—the net number of ads will not change. The shift, an attempt to speed up the pace of the game, is at least partly due a response to changing viewer habits. This year's Super Bowl pulled in 98.2 million viewers, the lowest number in 11 years. The newly downsized Fox is expected to depend more on live events like the Super Bowl to maintain profitability. When the company is holds its annual upfront presentation to media buyers on May 13, Deadline reported, the NFL is expected to be a cornerstone of that pitch.



Lisa Granatstein and **Stephanie Paterik** are jointly taking over from *Adweek* editorial director Jim Cooper, who has been in the position since 2011. Cooper will become editor-at-large, assisting CEO Jeff Litvack with special projects as well as having the opportunity to pursue other opportunities outside of the company. Granatstein will head up event programming and the magazine, while Paterik will oversee editorial strategy and the operations of the newsroom. Granatstein started at *Adweek* in 2011 as the managing editor, before moving into the role of editor and VP of content and events. Paterik has been with *Adweek* since 2015, most recently serving as managing editor, a position in which she oversaw the integrating of the publication's print and digital staffs.

Bill and Chelsea Clinton are getting into the podcasting game. "Why Am I Telling You This?," co-produced by the Clinton Foundation and At Will Media, will feature conversations with President Clinton, Chelsea Clinton, Clinton Foundation staff, partners and special guests. The series will cover issues related to the Foundation's work such as the ongoing hurricane recovery needs in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the greater Caribbean region; how to combat climate change and the opioid crisis; and new ways to improve early childhood literacy. The series will also include conversations on global leadership and reflections on the Clinton Administration.



The last print edition of *ESPN the Magazine* will come out in September, according to a report on TheWrap. ESPN said that the decision reflects changing "consumer habits" and that the same content would continue to be available online. The company also says that no immediate layoffs are planned. "The only change here is that we are moving away from printing it on paper and sending it in the mail, following September's release of The Body Issue," ESPN's statement said. "Our data shows the vast majority of readers already consume our print journalism on digital platforms, and this approach will maximize our reach and impact. In the future, we will explore releasing tentpole collections such as Body in special, differentiated print formats."

COMMENTARY

We all know the drill. Consumers today are more attuned to their purchasing habits and how they impact the world, and expect brands to take a stand on social and political issues with clearly-defined values that align with their own.

In recent years, we've witnessed the rise of the socially-conscious brand, of companies reshaping their reputations through random acts of kindness and tossing their hats in the ring on any number of hot-button social issues in a bid to position themselves as authorities on everything from climate change to racial injustice to sexual harassment. Unfortunately, too many of these efforts are disingenuous, and it's only a matter of time until consumers grow cynical about this overplayed strategy and begin getting the sneaking suspicion that many of these initiatives are empty advocacy platitudes, consumer marketing efforts disguised as corporate benevolence. The fifteen minutes are just about up.

An unpopular opinion, I'll admit. But one issue isn't up for debate: Americans want corporations to be socially aware, and the public's perception of brands is now greatly determined by companies' commitment to causes we believe in. A March Hotwire survey found that nine out of 10 consumers consider themselves conscious of how their personal values align with their purchasing habits, and 76 percent said they now make a concerted effort to buy products and services only from companies whose beliefs are in line with their own.

Another similar recent survey discovered that 71 percent of U.S. shoppers think it's important for businesses to take a stance on social causes, with three-quarters claiming they're more inclined to buy from companies that support issues they agree with. The same study also found that some social stances now influence consumers' buying decisions more than price: a company's environmentally-friendly business record, for example, took greater precedence among more Americans (71 percent) than how much a product costs (44 percent).

Granted, consumers place higher expectations on some industries' commitment to CSR initiatives than others; according to a recent Clutch survey, 70 percent of respondents said they associate the food sector—namely, restaurants and food retailers—as uniquely poised to tackle issues such as food insecurity in their local communities. Additionally, 70 percent said they expect the tech industry to take the lead in addressing data and privacy issues, and 65 percent want the fashion industry to invest more in the use of ethically-sourced materials.

Marketers are keenly aware of this, of course, and as a result, Corporate Social Responsibility programs have exploded in popularity in recent years. The Hotwire survey found that more than half of the marketers polled (61

percent) believe their organization should take a more proactive stance on social issues. It's a nice idea, I suppose, and each of these topics invokes conversations worth having, but there's just something vaguely opportunistic about the notion of a company whose lone priority is profit stealing the mic every time a controversial issue arises in the national conversation. Does anyone actually believe Gillette exists to cure toxic masculinity, or that it's Nike's mission to end police brutality?

If those aforementioned companies' recent earnings are any indication, some clearly do. And therein lies the problem. Companies that shape public opinion through self-congratulatory acts of advocacy are simply responding to consumer demand. The greater challenge will be convincing Americans in this "woke" age that buying things will never alone suffice as a moral value expression. The socially-conscious shopper conducts a performative display to take a stand on something he knows he'll never be called on to actually fix; it allows us to engage in these narcissistic moral purity contests where we compete to achieve the prestige of being labeled the most conscientious among our peer group. But hey, it feels good to believe we're making a difference, right? I wonder how much these "enlightened" consumers actually do in the way of directly helping their communities, be it through volunteering at a shelter, or canvassing for a political candidate, but why do any of that when you can buy a pint of Ben & Jerry's and leave with the feeling that you're Rosa Parks? The undue moral scrutiny we give our purchasing habits feeds a lazy misconception that the private sector can do all the ethical heavy-lifting for us and we don't have to do anything aside from buy certain products. This isn't how reality works.

Perhaps it's not surprising, then, that more consumers are beginning to question the motives of companies who engage in CSR. According to a Harris Poll Reputation Quotient study, 40 percent of Americans said they believe companies that embark on CSR initiatives only do so to bolster their public image. My guess is we can expect that number to surge in the coming years.

For this reason, it isn't difficult to see how CSR initiatives can result in disaster. Most people know a fake when they see one, and for this reason, CSR carries a lot of attendant risk. Indeed, one recent study found that silence might be most companies' best policy on social issues, as consumers are less likely to boycott brands that remain mum on political issues they care about than they are to stop supporting brands that take a stance on issues with which they disagree. Perhaps this is one more reason, as the adage goes, that if you aren't willing to walk the walk, maybe you shouldn't talk the talk

—Jon Gingerich