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Jason Liszewski, Managing Director, E FUN

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How the media failed in its 2016 election coverage

Delivering the March 28 keynote address during Syracuse University’s Toner Prize, an annual awards ceremony that recognizes excellence in political reporting, President Obama took the opportunity to reprimand conduct prevalent in the media, where “there’s enormous pressure on journalists to fill the void and feed the beast with instant commentary, Twitter rumors and celebrity gossip and softer stories.”

The media’s job, Obama said, is “more than just handing someone a microphone.” It’d be a gross understatement to say the media has been irresponsible in its coverage of the 2016 presidential election. The “news” anymore resembles a cultural extension of reality TV, another puerile entertainment outlet that on good days serves as Twitter’s greatest hits, aggregating stories popular on social media, and on (increasingly) bad days, resembles stenographers for the most divisive and caustic rhetoric imaginable from grandstanding simpletons posing as political leaders, a forum where opinion has more currency than fact, where outright lies are allowed to fly on-air unchallenged, where narrative-obedient anchors are entrusted to lob only the softest of softball questions, lest candidates threaten never to grace the network again with their ratings-boosting interviews.

There was an assumption, sometime last year, that policy talk would eventually crystallize in this election cycle, and its carnival overtones would eventually fade in a din of remember-when laughter. Needless to say, that never happened. Not only did the media fail to predict the converging social and economic forces that authored Donald Trump’s meteoric rise — a groundswell of working class whites who feel increasingly disenfranchised by a Republican establishment and find themselves galvanized by rhetoric against immigrants, terrorists and a scourge of political correctness — the networks encouraged and outright rewarded a political climate where salacious content got the most attention, where the most divisive candidates wrote the headlines and those who preferred to talk issues found themselves victims of a maddening circularity: they had no chance because the media wouldn’t cover them, and the media wouldn’t cover them because they had no chance.

Trump has bragged that he doesn’t need to advertise. And why would he? His minuscule campaign budget — he’s spent only about $10 million in ads so far, less than any other candidate — has been engendered by a historic salvo in media coverage. Trump in February accounted for an estimated $400 million in earned media, more than commentary on Ted Cruz and Hillary Clinton combined, and about the same amount John McCain spent during his entire 2008 presidential run, according to a March New York Times report on findings by mediaQuant. The networks have now essentially kept a phone line open for him, where he can call in and pontificate on-air regarding news of the day, which means, of course, an open forum to talk about himself. Former TV news correspondent Jeff Greenfield in March compared networks’ unedited on-air regarding news of the day, which means, of course, an open forum to talk about himself. Former TV news correspondent Jeff Greenfield in March compared networks’ unedited report on findings by mediaQuant. The

Compare this to the attention the networks have given Bernie Sanders, which can be characterized as dismissive, perfunctory at best. The media decided Sanders either didn’t have a chance of winning the Democratic nomination, or that his platform — that an uneven distribution of income has hollowed out the middle class, that Wall Street has fleeced the masses and that our campaign finance laws and education system desperately need to be salvaged — simply didn’t make for compelling combat TV. Sanders has continued to receive a fraction of the coverage allotted to Trump, even as he’s managed to raise $140 million — essentially the largest grassroots campaign-funding achievement in history — his rallies have topped Obama’s historic 2008 assemblies in many cities and he currently beats Trump and Cruz by wider margins than Clinton in every general election poll. CNN, Fox News and MSNBC on March 15 ignored Sanders’ speech in Arizona because they were too busy filming an empty Trump podium. The same networks a week prior bumped Clinton’s speech after the Michigan and Mississippi primaries, choosing instead to keep the feed rolling as Trump promoted his line of wine and steaks. The “liberal media,” the greatest vanguard in rendering Trump’s ramshackle candidacy a self-fulfilling prophecy, has found a new formula for success in an era footnoted by shuttered newsrooms: that ignoble tradition of keeping the masses entertained at all costs, with a resolute unwillingness to discuss anything resembling real issues.

As insane as it sounds, the formula worked. Coverage of the 2016 presidential election has sent TV ratings soaring at the top networks. CNN in March reported its most-watched quarter in seven years. Fox News, regularly the most-viewed network, for the first time also became the most-watched basic cable network in total day and prime time for the entire quarter. And after an abysmal 2015, MSNBC bounded back with its most-watched quarter since 2013. The media’s new lows in quality have converged with new highs in profits, and this bodes poorly for the future of the news. After this election is over, not only can we dispel the fiction that the news today exists to inform us, we can also be sure that things are only going to get worse.

— Jon Gingerich
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CERTIFICATIONS:

Study finds link between gender diversity, reputation

Companies with strong reputations boast more than twice as many women in their senior management ranks, according to data that measured the percentage of women in executive positions.

Companies admired by the public are more likely to boast greater gender diversity at the executive level, according to key insights revealed from March data released by Weber Shandwick.

Weber Shandwick’s analysis, titled the Gender Forward Pioneer index, measured the percentage of women in senior management positions at Fortune global 500 companies. Though women still comprise a small percentage of senior level leaders, the index found that companies recognized for having strong reputations are more likely to hold a higher proportion of female executives.

Using Fortune’s “World’s Most Admired Companies” rankings as a guide, the index found that companies with strong reputations boast more than twice as many women in their senior management ranks (17 percent) than companies with weaker reputations (8 percent), suggesting a correlation between a company’s reputation and the number of women it staffs on the senior level.

Currently, however, the GFP index found that gender parity is virtually nonexistent among global corporations’ senior executive ranks. None of the world’s 500 largest companies ranked by revenue have senior management teams boasting an equal representation of men and women, and nearly 40 percent (37.6 percent) hold exclusively male senior leadership teams. On average, only 10.9 percent of the senior executives behind the world’s 500 most successful companies are women.

According to the GFP index, the number-one industry for women in senior management roles is general merchandisers, which holds an index of 33 percent. Some industries — diversified wholesalers, food and grocery wholesalers and shipping, temporary help and textiles companies — hold virtually no women on their senior management teams. Overall, North America has the highest proportion of women in senior management roles, where nearly two out of 10 (19 percent) of executives are women. In total, only 13 of the Fortune global 500 companies have a female CEO.

In creating the index, Weber Shandwick analyzed the senior management rosters at companies on both Fortune global 500 and the “World’s Most Admired Companies” lists, identifying more than 8,600 current executives at companies in 36 countries. Research was conducted between November and December.

Weber Shandwick is now launching an initiative titled Women Leaders Engagement, which will utilize experts across the agency’s network of specialty practices for the purpose of raising the profiles of female executives. It will be led by Weber Shandwick global corporate practice chair Micho Spring and executive VP and Executive Equity and Engagement practice head Carol Ballock.

PR news brief

360 brews PR for Crabbie’s

Boston-based agency 360 Public Relations has been named U.S. agency of record for UK brand Crabbie’s Alcoholic Ginger Beer.

The alcoholic ginger beer was first introduced in 1801 in Edinburgh, Scotland, and is now manufactured by UK-based Halewood International Holdings PLC. Crabbie’s, which is distributed in the U.S. through St. Killian Importing, was introduced to six states in 2012. Due to rapid growth, its U.S. presence later picked up to 48 states, and it will be distributed in all 50 states by 2017.

360PR’s integrated campaign for the adult beverage, titled “The Crabbie’s Rules,” will target earned, paid and shared media channels nationally and in key markets throughout 2016. The campaign, which will particularly focus on Millennials, will emphasize the brand’s originality in the adult beverage industry, and will also support “Crabbie’s Weeks,” an event series that St. Killian Importing has launched in major markets.

360PR, which holds additional offices in New York, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, in 2015 accounted for more than $1.7 million in food/beverage related net fees, according to O’Dwyer’s rankings of PR firms. Current 360PR beverage clients include Juicy Juice, The Pogues and Illy Italian coffee.
What B2B companies should look for in a PR partner

By Vanessa Horwell

PR can drive untold value to B2B companies, but it’s up to industry stakeholders to earn that value through tactical campaigns, smart networking and hard work.

Business-to-business executives are rarely enthusiastic about budgeting big dollars into public relations. While not exclusive to the B2B sector, it seems many C-level stakeholders — especially in complex, technology-driven B2B sectors — hold an outdated perception of PR as an expensive cost center, focused on flashy campaigns and meaningless media placements disconnected from the business development engine.

Inside the industry, however, PR professionals understand that worthwhile public relations efforts can drive untold value to B2B companies, but it’s up to industry stakeholders to earn that value through tactical campaigns, smart networking and create new business opportunities. Yet the PR industry’s longstanding love of vanity metrics isn’t helping its cause.

When outlining the value of PR to existing clients and prospective ones, agency professionals often default to the results they can quantify. In spite of their middling relevance, agency executives will shift discussions directly to metrics: ad value, earned media placements and impressions. But unless those numbers are mapped to more specific performance indicators — like conversions, or increases in website traffic — or are tied to larger lead generation efforts, they have little connection to business outcomes, and therefore mean nothing of value to B2B executives.

Stop selling PR short

Comprehensive public relations efforts can drive untold value to B2B companies, but it’s up to the PR industry’s stakeholders to earn that value through tactical campaigns, smart networking and major hustle. Here are the key drivers of PR success that B2B executives should be looking at, which all smart B2B agencies should possess.

Subject matter expertise. Across virtually every B2B industry, “inside baseball” intel is the engine driving the digital media landscape. The online media shift of the last decade-plus has created an endless appetite for sector-specific content in every niche sector imaginable, creating a wealth of high value content-placement opportunities for today’s smartest B2B PR firms to secure for their clients.

But the key to securing placements for bylined client content items is quality. In order for a PR agency to communicate clients’ value propositions in an accurate, effective and compelling way, the agency needs to genuinely understand the nuances of the market to which it’s communicating. B2B companies should actively investigate a firm’s subject matter expertise by asking to read sector-specific articles, blog posts and resources produced by a potential agency partner. When it comes to industry knowledge, never assume a PR outfit automatically has it. Verify, then trust.

Deep industry connections. Especially for B2B companies, public relations should always be heavy on the relations. Facilitating meaningful introductions is one of the primary ways an agency partner can drive value for its clients, whether that means creating new media connections, helping fill C-level staffing vacancies or getting two potential business partners into the same room.

As they shop for potential PR firms, B2B stakeholders shouldn’t be afraid to ask agency heads about the breadth and depth of their trade-reporter and industry-insider networks. If a PR agency can’t highlight anything other than its “media relations expertise” and “extensive press connections,” executives should keep looking for one with a deep client list and roledex of contacts in your industry, ideally with an eye for mutually beneficial cross-market opportunities. After all, an agency’s potential effectiveness is just as much about who it knows as it is about what it knows.

A tailored services list. Some B2B companies mistakenly believe that retaining a big-name agency or business-to-consumer PR firm is a smart tactic for launching broad campaigns and earning massive media attention. It’s easy to see why B2B executives fall in the big-agency trap, given that generalist PR firms excel at offering new clients the world: integrated marketing, media relations, collateral development, social media management, branding, lead generation, search engine marketing, digital advertising, SEO, design and everything else under the sun.

Yet B2B executives should be wary of any “we do it all” agency. Few PR firms are as deeply staffed and talent-loaded as they present themselves online, and overpromising — and under-delivering — is an unfortunate industry specialty. Picking a PR agency partner with a tailored services list in several targeted focus areas can lead to higher quality and higher value business outcomes in line with your expectations.

Business thinking. This attribute falls squarely in the “intangibles” category, but it’s hugely important nonetheless. While many agencies chase accolades to showcase their creative work, those that loudly broadcast their inclusion in meaningless “Top 50” or “Best of” lists — or that tout their pay-to-play award wins as evidence of their success — rarely have real muscle behind their showy exteriors.

B2B clients can earn far greater business value from a PR partner with actual biz-dev experience and credentials. A PR strategy that is aligned and integrated with a company’s entire business — not just the marketing department — can drive sustainable long-term growth. B2B stakeholders should seek out PR partners with track records of helping clients achieve real goals when it comes to growing their margins, expanding to new markets, earning exits, or scaling their revenue.

Results and references. Our dictum to “verify then trust” applies to more than just assessing a PR firm’s industry experience and knowledge. A B2B company should only contract with a PR partner that can provide real evidence of their success beyond hollow honors or anonymous 4-star reviews. Ask an agency for case studies and examples of results earned for clients, and seek out reputable references who can speak the PR partner’s praises.

PR is a revenue driver, not a cost center

Ultimately, the stakes in B2B PR are too high to leave to chance: Traditional PR fluff has no place in the world of enterprise-technology vendors and B2B buyers. To earn its slot of a company’s annual budget, PR needs to support revenue growth, period. It takes a smart, motivated PR partner to earn results that go beyond vanity metrics to driving real business outcomes.

Ask around for referrals on a PR partner with targeted experience in your industry — it may be the best business development investment your company makes.

Vanessa Horwell is Chief Strategy Officer of ThinkInk, a specialist agency serving technology companies across the advertising, airline, loyalty, mobile, payments and travel sectors.
Google’s new rules for blogger product review

Google now requires bloggers who review products in exchange for compensation to disclose the nature of these relationships. Here’s how this new rule could affect digital PR.

By Mark Simon

On Friday, March 11, Google published an advisory warning bloggers who review products in exchange for compensation that they must disclose the paid nature of these relationships. Google wrote:

Users want to know when they’re viewing sponsored content. Also, there are laws in some countries that make disclosure of sponsorship mandatory. A disclosure can appear anywhere in the post; however, the most useful placement is at the top in case users don’t read the entire post.

Google also warned that any links in review articles must be “no-followed” (i.e., they will not pass PageRank to the site of the reviewed product):

Links that pass PageRank in exchange for goods or services are against Google guidelines on link schemes. Companies sometimes urge bloggers to link back to the company’s site, the company’s social media accounts, an online merchant’s page that sells the product, a review service’s page featuring reviews of the product or the company’s mobile app on an app store.

Unless both requirements — disclosing and no-following — are met, Google may consider all parties involved — including the agency, the blogger, and perhaps even the sponsor — to be engaged in what Google calls a “link scheme.” The penalty for engaging in such a link scheme can be very severe, involving a loss of ranking and perhaps even a Manual Penalty, which basically wipes out all SEO visibility for a lengthy time.

How does this change digital PR?

Many U.S. PR and marketing agencies enlist “influencers” — popular reviewers, online celebrities, or other people with large audiences — to review products or tout brands. Compensation to the blogger may be in the form of cash, a free product, or other valuable good or services. This practice has become so popular — and lucrative — because it’s a win for all parties concerned: the agency (who can report great engagement metrics for the client), the blogger (who is often richly compensated), and for the client (whose message — because it’s ostensibly “organic” — can make it through ad blockers and bypass the reflexive “banner blindness” of users).

The missing beneficiary here is, of course, the user (or “consumer,” as the Federal Trade Commission puts it), who is most likely unaware that the “impartial” information he/she is consuming is anything but, thus being deceived. As the FTC notes in Native Advertising: A Guide for Business.

“Under the FTC Act, an act or practice is deceptive if there is a material misrepresentation or omission of information that is likely to mislead the consumer acting reasonably in the circumstances. A misrepresentation is material if it is likely to affect consumers’ choices or conduct regarding an advertised product or the advertising for the product.”

Clear, visible, disclosure — in the eyes of both the FTC and Google — is the antidote to this toxic problem. In a March 15th settlement with Lord & Taylor over an allegedly deceptive social media campaign, the FTC supplied detail about what adequate disclosure looks like:

Disclosures on social media, or via any communication using an interactive electronic medium, such as the Internet, must be unavoidable, clear, conspicuous, using language likely to be understood by the average consumer.

A visual disclosure (e.g., one made on social media) “by its size, contrast, location, the length of time it appears, and other characteristics, must stand out from any accompanying text or other visual elements so that it is easily read and understood.”

Such disclosure must be in “close proximity” to the sponsored message. This means that a disclosure message “is very near the triggering endorsement or representation.”

The FTC noted that “a visual disclosure that cannot be viewed at the same time and in the same viewable area as the triggering endorsement or representation, on the technology used by ordinary consumers, is not in close proximity”

What must be done

PR agencies whose clients are using product review bloggers or running influencer campaigns need to get out in front of this issue. They must inform their clients about the need for disclosure, and warn them that no direct SEO benefits will accrue from product review bloggers or from influencer campaigns. (Indirect SEO benefits, however, may accrue, if enough people seeing the paid-for-post decide to link to the sponsor on their own.)

Today's digital PR agencies must also include in their contracts with review bloggers the requirement that disclosure and the no-follow rule be obeyed. Finally, agencies must monitor the reviews which result to ensure that the blogger has complied — both with the terms of the agency contract and the dictates of Google and the FTC.

The good news is that many product review bloggers are fully aware of the FTC’s guidelines, and conspicuously disclose their paid relationships. But Google’s additional requirement — that links to the sponsor’s site be no-followed — isn’t so universally respected. For example, when Didit surveyed 50 prominent review bloggers in the “Mommy Blogger” review space, it found that while 82 percent of them provided disclosure, only 46 percent of them have no-followed their links. Spot checks of other popular review blog segments yielded similar results. It is likely that compliance would improve if PR agencies made the no-follow rule an explicit contract provision.

Most agencies will have no problem adjusting to this new, more intensively-policed environment. Again, most product review bloggers understand and incorporate disclosure, believing (correctly) that more transparency equates to more trust from their user base. And most clients will understand that the real value of a prominent review comes from the content of the review and its exposure to a large, relevant audience — not from hyperlinks passing PageRank.

Furthermore, links embedded in reviews will continue to function as navigational shortcuts that will allow people to click through to the destination site — a valuable benefit in its own right. Only search engine spiders will be blocked from doing so (and search engine spiders don’t buy products).

As long as these new, but fundamentally simple and intuitive rules are understood, transmitted, and adhered to, no agency need fear any blowback in the form of a lawsuit, a rankings downgrade, or from users accusing them of deception.

Mark Simon is Executive VP at Didit, a full-service online advertising and marketing services firm.
Social media tips for senior management

Social media has become more important to senior management over the last few years, but there are still a lot of things we wish they knew about the ‘social interwebs.’

By Emily Eldridge, Liz Hilton and Adrian Patenaude

Y ou’re wrapping up a kick-off meeting with a client and your PR team, when suddenly you hear one of the C-suite team utter these cringe-worthy words: “Let’s do some social media, too.”

Effective social media management is not as easy as it seems. It can be time consuming and requires a smart strategy to effectively engage audiences. We’ve seen social media grow in importance among senior management over the last few years, there are still a lot of things we wish they knew about managing social accounts.

This is not a drill

At a recent Las Vegas industry conference, we had a conversation with the CMOs of two large banks. They spoke about the challenges marketing to younger consumers, which they referred to as the “Battle of the Bank Millennials.” They noted that the “creation” of social media was similar to the advent of the Internet in the ways in which it has revolutionized business, and that social media has single-handedly changed how these executives do their jobs.

We’ve all come to realize in the last five or so years that social media isn’t just a trend — it’s here to stay. Social has been an integral part of political elections, disaster relief efforts and social rights movements. Pew Research now finds that 63 percent of Facebook and Twitter users identified at least one of those platforms as their primary news sources. The way we communicate — and ultimately the way marketeers reach audiences — has been permanently altered. As users turn toward these nontraditional outlets, companies must get creative.

It’s not an afterthought

The only thing worse than no social media is bad social media. Our senior management team always discourages throwing social into relief efforts and social rights movements. The success rate of most social media platforms is low. Remember Xanga, Friendster and iTunes Ping? Yeah, neither do we. The social platforms that thrive today are the ones that have evolved with users’ demands. Facebook is notorious for constantly updating its features, most recently allowing users to “react” to their friends’ posts with different emotions. Even though these updates seem minor, it’s a way for Facebook to stay relevant and maintain users’ attention in this age of distraction.

We need senior management to understand that social media is constantly changing, so the best way to succeed with the medium is to change along with it. Brands have to be flexible, and social media managers need to be willing to adapt and experiment.

Here come the cool kids

As older generations begin embracing Facebook and Twitter, younger users are fleeing to newer platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. In the past year alone, Instagram has overtaken Twitter in monthly active users (~400 million vs. ~300 million) and Instagram users are 120 times more engaged with posts than on Twitter. These numbers should raise eyebrows in the boardroom. The fact of the matter is that Twitter is dying, and we don’t know how to tell management that.

Snapchat, the newfangled app young people seem obsessed with today, is significantly underrated by many decision makers. This platform is all about capturing real-time experiences, and for anyone wanting to grab the attention of Millennials, this is the place to do it. It’s no surprise that Snapchat has been heavily experimenting with its advertising potential, from sponsored videos embedded in hosted content on its “Discover” page to custom geofilters tailored for branded events.

Ain’t nobody got time for that

Social media is time-consuming. While we agree an organizational playbook or approval process is essential, it should be designed to provide quick feedback to team members so content doesn’t go stale. Whether it’s sending a morning email detailing the day’s posts or simply texting your supervisor some content before you send it, do whatever works best so you don’t let a good opportunity pass you by.

Of course, engaging with others is just as important as creating content. Retweeting, regramming, sharing or liking a post from another like-minded organization is a great way to speak for your brand.

Fear not

We’ve noticed that older generations often approach social media with trepidation. And while their hesitation is grounded in reality — a sloppy tweet could, and definitely has, caused a legitimate PR crisis — we shouldn’t let fear hold us back from engaging on social media. We need to learn how to relax; social media is supposed to be fun and friendly! And people respond more positively to brands that demonstrate a distinct personality and aren’t afraid to push the envelope.

Even if something goes wrong, it’s possible to make amends in a creative way, sometimes using humor to diffuse the situation. Believe it or not, the Internet can be a forgiving place if you fess up sincerely. In our fast-paced digital world, audiences will likely move on to the next controversy before you know it. “Forgive and forget” has never been more true.

It doesn’t have to be confusing

Just like anything new, social media takes some getting used to. We all remember setting up MySpace accounts in 2004 and not really knowing how to crop the profile photo or change our Top 8. Before our 16th birthdays, we were pros.

The same goes for senior management today: you may not know what a Snapchat story is and you probably don’t know if you look better in a Valencia or an X-Pro II filter, but you should know by now that social media matters and offers real investment returns when planned and executed correctly. So please, don’t underestimate the power of investing in a talented social media team.

Social media can be intimidating. But jump in, ask questions, hire great talent and give it a try. It’s all one big learning curve and to be honest, we’re still figuring it out too!

Emily Eldridge is an Account Executive at Crosswind Media & PR. Liz Hilton and Adrian Patenaude are Assistant Account Executives at Crosswind Media & PR.
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PR seeks social media: a match for the digital age

As PR professionals, we can’t so much as “swipe right” nowadays without considering the impact social media makes on every story we tell, every connection we make and every result we report.

Public relations is to storytelling what social media is to story making. And that story must be told properly in order to effectively grow a brand, solidify or rebuild reputations, reach a target audience and ultimately drive business results for our clients.

PR professionals must also be cognizant of, anticipate and plan for the potential pitfalls of social media: notably, the ease and speed at which one negative consumer comment online can reverberate through social and traditional media channels to key stakeholders and audiences in the offline world, impacting corporate brand reputation, customer loyalty and investor sentiment.

Relationship status

When it comes to trial and conversion, the most powerful tool is word of mouth, the holy grail of PR. One could easily argue that the most powerful tool is word of mouth, the holy grail of PR. One could easily argue that word of mouth for a new generation is entirely born and bred online. However, as PR professionals, we can find inspiration in the fact that 60 percent of people seek out additional information about a product or service after reading, watching or being exposed to digital content about it online.

Exercises in brand building can be told entirely through a social lens. A brand’s social following is its most authentic audience and should be treated as such. Break news first online, engage regularly with your most loyal ambassadors and know when it’s timely and appropriate to disengage. If PR and social teams are working together seamlessly, the story should flow from Facebook page to newspaper page without so much as a single disruption.

Swipe right

PR and social media work best together, of course, when united to tell a single story—one that sparks action online and offline. Take the United Nations’ 2016 #ShareHumanity campaign, for instance. In an effort to drive awareness surrounding World Humanitarian Day, the U.N. and its partners developed a powerful platform whereby celebrities, influencers and everyday users could “donate” their social media feeds for one day to tell a true story of humanitarian aid in action. Coupled with well-timed media relations efforts that led to a myriad of placements across a variety of verticals—from tech to entertainment and sports outlets—the #ShareHumanity campaign ignited a movement that not only outpaced all key performance indicators, but saw the hashtag trending across multiple platforms, all thanks to the combined coordination of PR and social efforts.

Swipe left

On the flip side, social media can negatively impact a brand’s bottom line just as much as a poor showing on Yelp or a bad review in the Times. Take Pizza Hut’s recent row with reality television personality Abby Lee Miller. The “Dance Moms” star took to her Instagram account to point fingers at a Santa Monica store that supposedly hung up on her multiple times. More than two million followers were instructed to call and harass the store, which they apparently did, and Pizza Hut received a barrage of calls and a few terse words in traditional media as well. The chain subsequently asked Miller to remove the post, but in the merged worlds of social media and PR, you can’t simply fight fire with fire.

It’s complicated

The value of social media to a PR professional goes well beyond added impressions or a secondary avenue of storytelling. Consider the following when planning your next product launch, brand building exercise or consumer campaign:

Mining for content: As mentioned previously, PR and social media are fundamentally all about the “story.” PR professionals can use social as the most consumer-connected tool we have at our disposal to mine for content that can be used to create said stories and build brand ambassadors. Did a couple get engaged in one of your stores? Did a sports superstar dine in one of your restaurants following a championship win? Find those news nuggets, forge those connections and craft better stories online and offline.

So sentimental: Facebook recently upgraded its “like” functionality to include other “reactions” such as love, haha, wow, sad and angry. While this update might seem small at the onset, PR pros now have a new social measurement tool at their disposal centered around sentiment. We can monitor reactions in real time and adjust accordingly to a news article a posted about our clients or brands. If our most loyal fans have an adverse reaction to one of our stories, switch course!

Teach, don’t preach: We’ve all seen the “how-to” videos that have taken over our newsfeeds recently, and those types of minute-long creations are quickly becoming the new norm for storytelling. Not surprisingly, consumers are more apt to engage with and place more value on a brand that provides teachable moments. Share a recipe or a “how to” guide on a topic or product closely associated with your client’s brand or service.

With publishers now operating countless social media pages and accounts that target a variety of audiences—BuzzFeed has 90 different Facebook pages, while The Huffington Post counts 79—the PR and social amplifications of teachable, shareable video marketing are endless.

Pick your platform: A study from CEO.com found that 61 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs have no social media presence at all, while another study from Rivalfox showed that only 38 percent have a Pinterest presence. Consumers expect an unprecedented level of one-on-one engagement and interaction with their favorite brands and companies, and their leaders. Be the author of the story. Share, discuss and interact, especially in those places your customers already frequent online. If you don’t, your public will, and there’s no guaranteeing a happy ending to that story.

Watch out for pitfalls: As is the case with traditional media, companies need to think about and approach social media as part of an integrated strategic communications program, including corporate communications and investor relations. A negative, misleading or factually inaccurate comment on a company’s Facebook page can quickly escalate into traditional media coverage that is then read by investors and analysts, followed by questions about the validity of the comment on the next quarterly earnings call and mentions in subsequent analyst reports. This potential escalation needs to be taken seriously and managed quickly and properly in order to mitigate damage to the corporate brand. Proper management of these situations must be evaluated and determined on a case-by-case basis. One size does not fit all.

The synergies between PR and social media are endless but don’t have to be complicated. From crisis situations to new product launches, mining for content to engaging directly with your most influential brand loyalists, the more the right hand speaks to the left, the more your client or brand wins in the end.

Seth Grugle is Vice President at ICR.
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Social media planning for crisis

When crisis strikes, every part of a company should be prepared to respond, including the parties responsible for managing social media.

By Ryan Cohn

While every company needs a social media crisis plan, that plan must be a living, breathing document that provides the opportunity for flexibility amid constant change in a crisis. If the plan is not appropriately flexible, it will fail to keep up with the constant twists and turns that come with any crisis.

As Rachael Rensink, Manager of Social Marketing Strategy and Engagement at Delta Air Lines, explained, “Do not create a plan and put it on the shelf until you really need it. Plan, test, practice, evaluate, re-test, re-evaluate, evolve, etc. Social media changes and evolves so quickly, and you need to evolve with it. This is not a situation where one size fits all, and one plan fits all. Is your company growing its social footprint? Is it growing its social staffing? Your plan needs to grow with it.”

Practice, practice, practice

It’s one thing to write a crisis plan, but another entirely to live it. Implementing a social media plan in the midst of a major emergency requires a clear definition of roles, alternative plans, and trained support options.

Rensink explained how social media fits into the mix during a potential crisis at Delta.

“Social follows what is determined by the crisis coordinator during the event. Our social teams are there to not only execute the plan, but to help develop copy that is socially appropriate, by channel/community, and also to advise on what the current social conversations are, where they are, and what we might need to address. I cannot express enough how critical coordination is with all teams involved and that social is just one of the pieces of an effective crisis communications plan.”

In other words, during a crisis, social media must be tightly integrated with every other aspect of the response. Rather than being siloed from other elements of the crisis response, social media works in close conjunction with those elements.

The reality is that crises are rarely short-term events. While the actual on-the-ground emergency may be over after a few hours, the crisis online may continue far longer. That’s the nature of social media. Discussion and analysis of an event continue long after the event has concluded. Social media teams must be prepared and ready to jump into action.

“You want to have backups and secondaries, and frankly you want to have people who can give other people relief,” said Morgan Johnston, Manager of Corporate Communication and Social Media Strategist at JetBlue Airways. “A crisis isn’t going to only occur during normal business hours. You need to plan for an emergency response that can last for days, weeks or even months. So the question becomes, how do you relieve people so they can get some rest and be able to function properly?”

Listen first, talk second

The power of social media as a listening and monitoring platform provides a variety of new ways to verify reports and take action promptly. Conversations are happening in real-time, with events being reported in a matter of moments instead of hours.

A prime example is the earthquake that happened in Mineral, Virginia in 2011. The quake was being reported on Twitter 30 seconds before it was even felt in Washington, D.C., several miles away. Conversations and reporting happen at lightning speed on social media, and crisis response teams must be tuned in to those conversations.

“Before social media, it sometimes took up to an hour to even confirm that one of your planes was involved,” said Johnston. “Now with social media and the kind of real-time reporting that’s happening, you see 14 different photos and 14 different angles of roughly the same scene, and you suddenly start feeling pretty confident that the flight is yours.”

As a crisis begins to unfold, social media teams must attentively monitor the online conversation to determine what is actually happening on the ground.

Go all-in on engagement

Social media, while vital for listening, can be even more powerful for framing and distributing your own news.

According to Johnston, “Hashtags help facilitate some alignment on the conversation so everyone’s paying attention to the same sort of thing. We’re more likely to be able to insert the proper resources so that, as we verify information, it’s visible.”

Crisis communication has changed by leaps and bounds in the last several years. Today, the initial news “announcement” frequently comes from a participant or onlooker at the scene, followed by mainstream news outlets.

Brands in crisis must be as truthful and transparent as possible. Thanks to today’s technology, everyone is an amateur investigative reporter with the resources to find the truth, often before the brand owner even knows it.

Ryan Cohn is Vice President of Social/Digital at Sachs Media Group.
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How social listening reveals actionable insights

News regarding contagious cancers, advances in 3D printing technologies and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s stance on LGBT issues might seem like incompatible stories. A closer look, however, reveals these issues are in fact related, part of a larger conversation on the topic of organ donation.

A n article about producing life-sized body parts and tissues using living cells as the “ink” in a 3D printer received more than 20,000 mentions over the last three months. Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau recently promised to end his country’s ban on homosexuals donating blood and organs. And a writer for the New York Times reported scientists are curious about the potential transfer of person-to-person cancer cells. These trending headlines were uncovered while conducting a social listening exercise to assess online chatter related to organ donation and what’s driving coverage of this topic. Using the social analytic tool Talkwalker, we learned these three articles alone had a combined reach of more than 40 million people.

Understanding the headlines and social conversations related to your brand, issue or cause is the first step in collecting valuable information about your audience. By keeping a beat on your audiences’ needs and motivations through monitoring the social landscape, you can better reach people where they’re already interacting, and ultimately, influence behavior.

Social listening can also inform when a brand should join a conversation. On February 14, National Donor Day, a dramatic spike in organ donor-related conversation was measured in both volume and positive sentiment, as noted by the green line in the graph below. This event offered an opportunity to reach and interact with a broader audience who was already engaged around the donation topic.

The Health Resources and Services Administration — part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services — recognizes the value of identifying key opportunities for driving greater awareness to encourage more people to register as organ, eye, and tissue donors. The government agency leverages Facebook’s targeted reach as one of many communications outlets to educate the general public. In monitoring the organdonor.gov Facebook community, HRSA noticed a common theme: many commenters were inclined to share emotional, life-changing stories about receiving a transplant, or how their loved ones saved lives by donating organs. This community was becoming a support group for those with a connection to the cause.

This insight drove HRSA to develop #MadePossibleMonday, a user-generated content series designed to spread awareness about organ donation. This UGC campaign, fueled by social intelligence, allowed HRSA to share inspirational stories, not only demonstrating to community members that they were heard, but also activating those people to share the message with their networks, and ultimately driving new users to register. #MadePossibleMonday content resulted in more than two million organic impressions and made up nearly 10 percent of all shared content from the organdonor.gov Facebook page in 2015.

Most organizations recognize the need to evaluate conversations within their own communities, but those that understand the entire social conversation landscape and act on what they learned gain immense value. This requires clear objectives, planning and technology. Below are tips for developing an informed social listening program.

Choose the right tool. To listen effectively, it is important to have the right tool. You will want to assess what level of control is available, as well as the flexibility of the search parameters. If you have a large team, workflow may be important criteria. If your audience is global or multi-lingual, that’s another consideration. How easy is it to evaluate the data and create reports? Do you need a real-time dashboard? Social monitoring technologies range from free tools providing basic social data to enterprise-level platforms integrated into social media management systems and business solutions. Some of the advanced tools also query broadcast TV data, providing a holistic view of audience sentiment over time.

Establish clear objectives. Before setting up social listening queries, first define what the organization wants to accomplish. Objectives may be as simple as knowing the top five keywords and overall conversation sentiment, or they may be very specific, such as identifying the right micro-moments around which a brand can engage.

Plan the search. Have a list of keywords, phrases, websites, etc., to jumpstart your search. Define the audience by specifying geography, language, platforms, sources, and a time period to evaluate. Over time, refine the search query to add and/or exclude erroneous keywords and phrases, people, websites, and brands.

Measure. Evaluate activity reports to establish benchmarks. Keep an eye on conversation volume, how a post or conversation(s) spread across social networks, where and when messages gain traction, and which sources were most important in helping them go viral. If activity spikes occur, evaluate the source and whether the increase in traffic is successful content or a crisis in the making.
44% of millennials say that viewing health information online causes them to worry about their health.

Utilizing social media to impact news outlets

More and more, what happens on social media is becoming the news. Having a social media presence is vital, therefore, if brands want to elevate visibility and remain relevant.

By Aljolynn Sperber

In a recent broadcast of “NBC Nightly News” with Lester Holt, a video of two brothers taking a selfie with an eagle appeared at the end of the show. This video had gone viral on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter the week prior, so it took a national nightly news show five to seven days to finally share the viral nature selfie video with their audience. In 2013, the Chicago Sun-Times laid off staff photographers because they found more value from using photos and videos found and shared on social media, rather than having a paid professional staff to photograph events.

People are using social media to learn about the news before it is actually shared on the news. More than half — 51 percent — of journalists source their information shared on the news from social media, meanwhile 30 percent of U.S. adults turn to Facebook to learn about current events and 50 percent of them will share that news on their social networks. This means it’s important for brands to have a social media presence to get noticed and to be seen as relevant.

Tweet carefully

Are tweets the new car chases? Los Angeles television news outlets are notorious for broadcasting car chases; they do this because a car chase in Los Angeles leads to a bump in viewership and ratings. Donald Trump’s tweets, Kanye West’s Twitter fight with Wiz Khalifa and request for a loan from Mark Zuckerberg, or Kim Kardashian’s latest nude pic tweet are the new car chase: people are talking about them and the news cannot stop covering them. The news cycle of Kim Kardashian’s nude photo that was posted on Instagram and Twitter on March 7 lasted three days to finally share the viral nature selfie video with their audience. The Telegraph, Tonight, “The Talk,” “The Gabbie Show” and several others.

Donald Trump, on the other hand, is consistently dominating the news, not only with his favorable polls from the public but also with what he’s posting on Twitter. A recent issue of Rolling Stone listed the meanest insults that Trump tweeted, one of them being “The failing @WSJ WallStreetJournal should fire both its pollster and its Editorial Board. Seldom has a paper been so wrong. Totally biased!”

It’s not only magazines or national television news programs that are including tweets in their news content. Mitt Romney recently read aloud tweets about himself for “Mean Tweets,” a regular segment on the “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” show. Time and time again, the media is turning to Twitter and other social networks to find and share news, and appeal to its audience.

Speaking of the 2016 presidential election, a local Minnesota newspaper, St. Cloud Times, polled its Twitter followers on whether or not they caucused and which party they caucused for during Super Tuesday 2016. Nearly a quarter of respondents — 21 percent — said they caucused for GOP, 20 percent caucused DFL, and 57 percent did not caucus. They engaged their social media audience and could have used the data for a story on how Minnesota residents caucused on Super Tuesday.

In 2014, word about the violent riots in the streets of Caracas, Venezuela broke globally via Twitter rather than the usual news outlets such as CNN or Fox. People across the globe were tracking what happened in real-time via Twitter before it was shown on TV, and press even utilized videos or photographs shared via the 140 character social network before having crew on the ground. Venezuelan citizens kept track of what was happening via social media rather than national news.

Live from the red carpet

Awards season was recently in full bloom with the Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild Awards, The Grammys, and The Academy Awards. Not only are traditional news outlets present and covering the awards shows, social media influencers are suited up and engaging with stars to give their fans insider access to the red carpet. Gabbie Hanna from “The Gabbie Show” attended the 2016 Grammys and used Snapchat to interview and broadcast her experience at the awards show, while giving her fans and viewers a taste of insider access. Brands that want to elevate their visibility and awareness can utilize social media influencers to creatively broadcast a product launch, or use Facebook’s new livestream feature to unveil a new product. Snapchat also now offers custom geo-filters for $5.99, so companies hosting a tradeshow or conference can create one for attendees and social media users to help amplify awareness about the event.

YouTube is your friend

“The Ellen DeGeneres Show” averages around 3.9 million viewers per episode, so if you are a brand that wants to get noticed by Ellen, YouTube will be your best friend. The show favors family-friendly comedy and regularly turns to YouTube to find everyday people whose videos have gone viral and invite them to the show as guests. In 2011, Ellen noticed a viral video on YouTube of two sisters, Sophia Grace and Rosie, singing and dancing to a popular Nicki Minaj song. After viewing the video and noticing its viral nature, Ellen invited them on her show. Since then the show has invited several other video viral sensations to the show such as “Damn Daniel” and “Alex from Target,” among others.

Get social now

Want to be seen by the media? Want to put the news in your hands? You should use Periscope, Meerkat, or Facebook’s livestream feature to interview your team at events. During the Interactive portion of South by Southwest in 2015, tech savants learned about the livestream app, Meerkat, which basically launched at the popular Austin, TX event. Meerkat team members interviewed startups at SXSW, which allowed new users to see the livestream mobile app in action and fully understand how it can be utilized. Using Meerkat was a great way to give real-time insider access, before it was shared on the news, to individuals who could not attend SXSW.

Want to give social media fans additional insider access? Use Instagram to share behind-the-scenes images. Just make sure you have a solid and easy hashtag to follow and use, so social media users can follow along. Just as how news outlets sometimes share “kiss cam” moments, they now share public photos on social media to have more material for their coverage.

Get direct with the media

Using LinkedIn’s blogging feature, influencers can position experts on top in terms of getting noticed. Individuals using the feature builds their credibility, which makes them more interesting to the media. Three percent of journalists who use LinkedIn use it to identify and directly connect with experts. Several media and public relations groups exist on LinkedIn that help connect PR practitioners with the media. Twitter is also a popular tool to directly connect reporters; they occasionally post queries in search of experts on a certain topic. The media are getting savvy on social.

Continued on page 31
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5W PR helps clients develop, execute and manage multi-faceted social media campaigns that enhance visibility for brands and help build connections with audiences. From the creation and management of engaging Facebook fan pages to the expansion of Twitter followings to creating an inviting Pinterest space, 5W has unparalleled understanding of social media.

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With a strong client base in the consumer electronics, aerospace and defense, high technology, manufacturing, healthcare and green initiatives arenas, Copernio’s clients are recognized as category leaders in their respective markets. Copernio’s team is comprised of specialists with expertise in crafting customized programs to achieve our clients’ goals.

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Luis Hernandez, Senior Vice President
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We believe in storystarting, not just storytelling, because consumers want to contribute to your brand narrative. We believe in listening as the gateway to success in social media. We believe in presence with purpose. We believe in a world without walls, because today’s digital consumer no longer cares about the divisions between paid, earned and owned content. We believe that social media is not just a channel that contributes to customer service, but is one that underpins the entire customer experience. And we believe that you can pay for attention, but you still have to earn advocacy.

As expert communications strategists and master storytellers, we partner every day with high profile enterprises, including Novartis, Bimbo Bakeries, Newman’s Own, Just Born, Timberland, Humana, Perdue, Goodyear, Shell, VTech and GE to enable brand-oriented social and digital narratives with consumers, among consumers and between consumers — that translate to greater awareness, reputational impact and consumer activation.

We partner with brands to advance and advocate for social and digital strategy within their corporate organization, developing enterprise-level Centers of Excellence in social and digital to establish foundational structure and social media strategy on which to build brand success. We work closely with brands to create custom influencer networks that enable long-term relationships of value with key social conversation leaders. We manage daily engagement, content strategy and social communities for numerous high profile brands, applying our expertise on the latest digital technologies, social platforms and digital behaviors for authentic consumers experience engagement with brands that is authentic and valuable. And we work with brands to gather, interpret and apply analytics to not only evolve the social storytelling, but also to translate the value of social strategy to senior leadership.

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Crosby is #39 on O’Dwyer’s national ranking of PR firms and has offices in Annapolis, Md., and Washington, D.C. To see case studies, visit www.crosbymarketing.com.

Bimbo Bakeries USA, parent company of Arnold®, Brownberry® and Oroweat® brands “kneaded” a campaign to drive positive conversations around bread that focused attention on the introduction of a new line of whole grain bread called Healthfull®. Coyne celebrated consumers’ emotions of love of bread in a fun and entertaining way through an integrated campaign, Love, Your Bread. The campaign drove more than one billion media impressions while increasing the brand’s presence on shelf at retail.

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Who we are: The global public relations group of Inventiv Health helps brands launch and build the reputations of companies working to improve human health. Our teams create communications that enhance brand perception, drive engagement, activate behavior shifts, and deliver on the bottom line.

With an integrated approach to communications, Inventiv Health Public Relations Group includes four agencies: Allidura Consumer, Biosector 2, Chamberlain Healthcare PR and Chandler Chicco Agency — that offer best-in-class capabilities spanning public relations, digital and social media, medical and scientific education, and research and analytics.

The broad scope of Inventiv Health Public Relations Group is powered by Inventiv Health, a global provider of best-in-class clinical development and comprehensive commercialization services.

Kaplow

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Liz Kaplow, Founder and CEO

For more than two decades, Kaplow has been changing conversations and helping consumers fall in love with our clients’ brands. Our holistic programs for world-leading companies fuel consumer conversations wherever they occur.

Kaplow was built on authentic storytelling, and that has never been more relevant today when brands are speaking directly to consumers. Our creative ideas disrupt, amuse and educate consumers at every touch point.

We take an integrated approach to digital planning, working hand-in-hand with PR, communications planning and paid efforts to ensure we reach consumers and influencers at every touch point. Our best-in-class digital and social media campaigns win awards and deliver measurable results.

Our social media work is driven by insight, imagination and initiative. We start by carefully listening to what people are saying about our client’s brand and competitors across social platforms. Then, we identify the key brand differentiation and develop digital strategies that meet business objectives with measurable ROI.

We develop eye-catching content and paid media strategy and put in place a unique concierge approach to community management that puts the consumer at the center.

This high-touch approach extends to our newest service — DEQ Evaluation. Kaplow offers clients a unique look at their Digital Emotional Quotient, providing a comprehensive evaluation of their real-time relationship with consumers in comparison to competitors, as well as strategies for improvement. This enables brands to positively impact the metrics most meaningful to them.

While Kaplow continues to evolve in the digital space, the agency will always be known for having the consumer in mind, first and foremost. Our roots are in storytelling; our vision is for the future.

Digital/social clients: CEW, The Children’s Place, CVS/Pharmacy, Franciacorta, No Nonsense, Shiseido, Skype, Vitamin Shoppe, and Warner’s.

Kellen

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Joan Car, Senior VP
Rick Cristol, President
Jill Hornek, Director
Debra Berliner, Senior VP

One of the greatest threats in social media is the perception that you don’t listen to your audience. At Kellen, we help you address this and other critical issues that will determine success or failure in social media: what are the relevant business objectives; how can you add value to the online conversation; what platforms will be the most productive; how do you establish appropriate KPI’s and track, measure and report your results.

From digital gap research to strategic execution, our digital offerings are based on advocating for and communicating on behalf of not only individual brands and companies, but entire industries including those in food and beverage, construction, health and science, media, professional services and nonprofit organizations. Our capabilities as a single source for digital and brand asset development, public relations, issues management and event promotion, enable us to provide creativity and consistency while delivering results. Our client programs flow from ideation, strategy and positioning through to online media, social communities and traditional media.

L.C. Williams & Associates

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Kim Blazek Dahlborn, President and CEO
Shannon Quinn, Executive VP

Social media is no longer a tactic; rather it’s an integrated part of almost every public relations and communications plan. It’s essential to consider the wide array of social channels as vehicles to reach a desired audience.

L.C. Williams & Associates (LCWA) offers expertise in social architecture designed to make an impact on business goals and objectives. We build customized, well-rounded campaigns that make the most of social channels and spur audiences into action. From building buzz via online activations to leveraging available channels to inspire, reinforce messages and establish brand leadership, we approach the social landscape with a critical eye toward business impact.

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Profiles of Social Media PR Firms

L.C. WILLIAMS & ASSOCS.
Continued from page 24

Marketing Maven is an expert in developing a solid social media strategy that outlines measurable goals and benchmarks. Content and context are key to successful social media campaigns and we provide the Call-to-Action to reach your target demographic.

Successful social media campaigns go beyond strategy. Properly managing the follow-through of your social media campaign is crucial to building brand ambassadors. We offer A/B testing, social media advertising, social listening (identifying competitive share of voice, sentiment analysis, and key influencers), content development, social media customer service, influencer engagement, live-event coverage, manage viral campaigns, promotions, page development as well as analytics on demographics, reach and engagement.

Marketing Maven is 8(a) certified by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Women’s Business Enterprise (WBE), has WOSB status with the government and DBE, CUCF and CPUC certification.

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MAYO Communications, a full service PR firm based in LA since 1995 with offices in New York, San Diego and Buenos Aires, AR. MAYO PR offers social media, blogging, Facebook, Google+ account setup services, analytics, maintenance and reputation management services. Our clients are B2B, B2C and social cause platforms and have included Today I Can Do Anything, Hollywood, CA with a line of apparel with an inspiration message. MAYO also provides on camera media training. Our clients and services include government, smart grid technology, utility companies, nonprofits, celebrity charity and Fortune 500 corporations.

MAYO also brands startups, performs product launches, represents musicians, actors, directors, reality TV shows and TV dramas. MAYO produced a Social Media Campaign for PERI Software company based in Newark, NJ with offices in China. MAYO also developed and implemented the first Global social media campaign for PERI Software Solutions, Inc. US DOL fined PERI nearly $5 million for H1 Visa violations (later reduced to $680K). Intense Online marketing, communications, SEO tactics and social media buried negative forum comments and media coverage, saving the smart grid technology industry leader from a devastating loss of business. The National Assn. of Regulator and Utilities Commission (NARUC) social media campaigns neutralized any interference with new business allowing company to grow from $50 million to $80 million and from 700 to 1,000 employees. The world’s largest smart-grid technology company also started a School of Engineering, which prevents H1 visa overloads. MAYO produced 10+ corp. video interviews weekly on PERI.

At MAYO Communications, “We don’t guarantee media, we just Get It!”™

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Mitzi Emrich, Chief Social Media Strategist

Customers are more informed, connected and active than ever — and they have the tools and motivation to take control of their interactions with brands. As a result, they no longer want to passively receive news — they want to be part of the story and share their own views in unique and personal ways.

Enter MWWPR, one of the world’s top global independent agencies — we know how to navigate the biggest social networks or the smallest niche communities for our clients. Successful social marketing and engagement strategies are rooted in brand immer-

Lindsey Carnett, CEO & Pres.
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Aljolynn Sperber is Marketing Maven’s Director of Social Media.

(M-R) Christopher Freitas, Program Mgr., U.S. Dept. of Energy, Washington DC, Commissioner Harold D. Williams, Maryland and Sarav Periasamy, President & CEO, PERI Software, a MAYO client, at the NARUC Conference in Sacramento, CA.
We have a brand-first approach to social media. Customer service aside, social media should amplify and underscore the brand. Brand standards should not be sacrificed for engagement. People want a brand to maintain its magic, its mojo. If you lose that, you lose your customer.

Here are Six Ways to Elevate a Brand via Digital- and Social Media:

1. Blogazines: Blogazine is a term we crafted to describe a blog with swag. Copy, design and images must be “on brand” at all times. For Zemi Beach House’s blogazine, an Anguillian photographer shoots photos that we bank. A blogazine gives us content we can distribute via social media, as well as through traditional media and paid platforms. It also turns a brand into a media platform, a key strategy for generating opportunities with other brands.

2. Celebrities: Celebrities are special partners in the social media space. When Ashton Kutcher responded to our request to help us spread the word about Polished Man, his post about the global anti-sexual abuse campaign became visible to his 1.5-million fans.

3. Influencers: Digital-and-social media influencers are an ever-growing tribe. The photos from our Instagrammers’ dinner put Del Frisco’s in front of 2.5 million foodies. The evening was also covered in *The Wall Street Journal.* When we invited Boo, the World’s Cutest Dog, for a sleep over at an Affinia hotel in exchange for Facebook posts, we reached Boo’s 6-million Facebook fans (now 17.5 mil) with Affinia’s dog-friendly message. One fan wrote “I want to take my poodle to that nice hotel.”

4. Other Brands: Partnerships with other brands are also important. Our VBT Bicycling and Walking Vacations campaign with Talbots reached the retailer’s 2-3 million email subscribers six times, was promoted to Talbot’s 372,000 FB followers and on its website that receives 100,000 unique daily visitors. It was also promoted in 495 Talbot stores and 4.9 million catalogs. It resulted on over $100,000 in VBT bookings in just one month.

5. Facebook Advertising: We use online advertising to drive revenue. To increase gift-card sales for Guerlain Spa New York, our Facebook ad campaign doubled the spa’s fan base and spiked gift-card sales by a dramatic 68% increase in a month.

6. TripAdvisor: Since most travel brands do not have a place for online customer reviews, TripAdvisor is the go-to for comments. Keep responses real and “on brand.” If rankings are low, fix what is broken on site rather than “playing the game.” Our client Adele Gutman and the Library Hotel Collection are the TripAdvisor masters; people are crazy about the hotels.

Our social media campaigns have won major awards, including the coveted PLATINUM AWARD (Best of the Golds) at the annual, black-tie HSMAI Awards (the Oscars of Travel).
campaigns, digital and social media, reputation management and results/analytics. In addition to professional services, other specialty practices include consumer products/services, health, sports & entertainment, travel & leisure, B2B and higher education. Find out how rbb can help your brand breakout by visiting www.rbbcommunications.com or call rbb president Lisa Ross at 305/448-7457.

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Kathy Bloomgarden, CEO
Michael Schubert, Chief Innovation Officer
Scott Schneider, Chief Digital Officer
Maryann Watson, President, RFI Studios

In today’s hyper-connected world, all communications are social. As one of the first agencies to establish an in-house digital practice — RFI Studios — in 1999, Ruder Finn has a longstanding heritage and extensive experience in leveraging digital and social platforms to engage key stakeholders. With RFI’s global team of strategists, storytellers, designers and technologists in New York, China and San Francisco, we use a multichannel approach to tailor and optimize stories across earned, social, owned and paid channels to meaningfully engage with the end-user.

At RFI Studios, digital strategy isn’t just social. We create integrated platforms for mobile, social and .com as a means to enhance strategic digital storytelling, build engaged communities, activate audiences and provide meaningful metrics to measure success and return on engagement. We marry data-driven insights, to make sure our stories connect, with influencer mapping, to ensure we’re reaching the right people through the right channel. We are anchored in rigorous user experience research and execute (and re-calibrate) based on real-time metrics.

With a consistent focus on digital content and strategy, Ruder Finn and RFI Studios provide clients with a range of differentiated offerings from our ability to create digital builds in-house to social and real-world activations across all existing channels, including paid media. Our breadth of expertise includes managing social communities, developing mobile apps, creating progressive digital tools, implementing geolocation and gamification, developing meaningful and engaging content, identifying and building relationships with key digital influencers, and utilizing both big and little data. Additionally, we have extensive experience working with clients on internal engagement programs which includes development of enterprise-wide collaboration platforms. Our capabilities also include a dedicated health and wellness digital offering to help clients navigate the regulatory complexities of engaging with patients via digital channels. Blending traditional PR and digital expertise, Ruder Finn takes a holistic approach to helping clients create meaningful content, bringing their story to life digitally and optimize the potential to go viral.

Ron Sachs, President/CEO and Michelle Ubben, Partner and COO.

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Since 2004, SA has been a leader in social media, digital influence and engagement. We are constantly evolving our social advocacy and digital influence practice to help clients navigate the shifting landscape and harness the organic impact of powerful social networks that complement paid and owned media.

At SA, our fully integrated approach starts with building listening programs, refining messaging, curating content, identifying and engaging influencers, developing creative and compelling program concepts, and cultivating conversations that build relationships and foster advocacy. We help brands stand out in social media and use digital technologies to grow businesses from start-ups to Fortune 500 companies.

Schneider Associates is a full-service public relations and integrated marketing communications agency specializing in Launch Public Relations®, a proprietary method of launching new and revitalizing iconic products, services, companies, institutions and communities to build awareness, excitement, and sales. Visit www.schneiderpr.com.

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Robert Oquendo, EVP, Digital and Creative Strategy
Justin Kohut, Director, Digital Insights and Brand Strategy

Spectrum is at the intersection of science and storytelling. Our integrated digital team ensures access to the right resources focused on an insights-driven approach that fosters media interest and end-user engagement to create game-changing conversations.

We understand audiences and how to move them. Our experienced teams carefully dissect conversations using advanced social intelligence techniques to find meaning and context. We leverage our understanding of these interactions to develop communication strategies that advance the client’s mission — from the web to the wire. By asking the right questions that lead to meaningful results, we build compelling content-focused initiatives for clients, powered by the community at large. From blockbuster drugs to breakthrough vaccines to everyday consumer products and everything in between, Spectrum is privileged to share science stories with the world.
Kane named PRSA Comms. Chief

Laura Kane, Senior VP and Global Head of Media Relations for Marsh, has joined PR Society of America as Communications Chief.

She replaces Stephanie Cegielski, who stepped down last summer after two years. Cegielski had replaced Arthur Yann, who died while serving as VP of PR of the Society in 2013.

Kane reports to PRSA CEO Joseph Truncale and take the title of Chief Communication Officer, a new title at the trade group.

Kane led Corporate Communications at insurer Aflac and was Senior VP of Communications at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce.

She earlier worked in media overseeing e-commerce at ABC-TV and consulting for Japan’s NHK.

PR Council picks Ghazaii as VP

Industry trade association the PR Council has named Sara Ghazaii Vice President and Communications Director.

Ghazaii arrives at the Council from academic and medical industry consortium the New York Genome Center, which she joined in 2014 and most recently served as Communications and Events Director, leading the center’s marketing, branding, communications and digital media efforts. Ghazaii previously worked at MSLGroup North America, where she was Senior Account Executive and was charged with developing PR and marketing plans, as well as managing events and sponsorships.

Prior to that she was an Account Executive at Lou Hammond & Associates, and also fielded corporate communications for global healthcare company Novartis.

At the PR Council, Ghazaii will oversee editorial and media output, including the Council’s blog and website. Additionally, she’ll lead the direction of the Council’s advocacy outreach and will handle event management and research.

Podesta ramps up PR

Hastie Afkhami, Senior VP for Social@Ogilvy, has joined Podesta Group PR as Senior VP and Director of Digital as the Washington-based public affairs firm ramps up its digital and PR operations.

Podesta also tapped Principal David Marin as Managing Principal of its PR unit, which the firm said has tripled in revenue over the past five years.

Marin, who has pushed Podesta into analytics, has led campaigns for the golf industry We Are Golf and CrossFit, among others.

Afkhami started out at Booz Allen Hamilton and Emerson Human Capital Consulting before moving to Ogilvy in 2011.

Ingram succeeds Martinez as JWT CEO

Ustavo Martinez has resigned from his post as J. Walter Thompson Company Chairman and CEO, following a lawsuit filed by agency COO Erin Johnson that alleged Martinez engaged in lewd and inappropriate behavior. Tamara Ingram, WPP’s Chief Client Team Officer, has now been appointed Martinez’s successor.

Ingram, who has held the Chief Client Team Officer role since 2015, was previously President and CEO of WPP’s Team P&G group. Prior to that she was Group Executive VP and Managing Director at WPP unit Grey Group, and was group CEO at IPG subsidiary McCann Worldgroup. Ingram assumes her new position as JWT CEO immediately.

WPP Global Business Development Director George Rogers, meanwhile, will succeed Ingram in the role of WPP Chief Client Team Officer.

Ingram’s new role follows the bombshell March news that a lawsuit had been filed in New York federal court by JWT Chief Communications Officer Erin Johnson against the agency due to inappropriate remarks allegedly made by Martinez.

JWT parent company WPP on March 17 announced that Martinez has resigned by “mutual agreement” from his post at the in-house ad agency also retained law firm Proskauer Rose to conduct a review of Johnson’s claims. Johnson, who is seeking unspecified punitive and compensatory damages, is currently on leave from the firm.

Martinez, who was appointed JWT CEO in 2015, released a statement soon after the lawsuit’s filing in which he denied Johnson’s allegations. Martinez stated that “there is absolutely no truth to these outlandish allegations and I am confident that this will be proven in court.”

Besanceny to take top Walmart PR post

Brian Besanceny, a top communications and public affairs exec for The Walt Disney Company, is moving to Walmart as Chief Communications Officer for the retail giant.

Besanceny, who is slated to join the Bentonville, AK-based company on April 1 as a Senior VP, will report to Corporate Affairs Chief Dan Bartlett.

He is a Bush administration alum, having served as Deputy Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, working public affairs in the Dept. of Homeland Security during the Bush administration, and Comms. Deputy for the White House. He was also a Hill Aide to Rep. Rob Portman (R-OH).

Besanceny joined the Walt Disney Co. in 2009 as VP of PA.

Ozernoy named News Corp. Comms. head

News Corporation has appointed Ilana Ozernoy the media giant’s newest Deputy Head of Communications.

Ozernoy was Chief of Staff to New York mayor Bill de Blasio’s legal counsel, where she was responsible for managing political and strategic work, as well as supervising that unit’s staff of attorneys and analysts.

Ozernoy succeeds Daisy Dunlop, who served a three-year stint at the multinational media corporation’s New York headquarters, arriving in 2013 before being appointed Deputy Communications head in Feb. 2015. Dunlop has since returned to her native UK, where she now takes the role of PR Chief for News Corp’s U.K. operations.
**16 tips for successful satellite media tours**

A satellite media tour remains an effective public relations tactic that can generate high-quality results that matter to your clients.

By Alex Hinojosa

SMTs in 2016 are vastly different than they were 10 years ago. Today, across the PR services spectrum, it’s all about the PESO — the Paid-Earned-Shared-Owned model — and the same is true for an SMT.

Because things have changed so much, we’ve gathered our experienced team of TV, radio, Internet and PR experts together to get their takes on what makes a mega client win. Here are 16 tips for successful satellite media tours to keep in mind before you plan your media tour, which can dramatically increase the opportunities for big client wins.

**Make sure your spokesperson didn’t do an SMT last month.** This can directly impact the number and quality of bookings for your tour, and it’s a more common problem than you might suspect. Make sure you ask your spokesperson or their agent if they’ve been featured in a media tour in recent months.

**Optimize the time you have with your celebrity.** A common error we see is paying a spokesperson for eight hours and only getting five or six hours of actual service, which can result in hundreds of thousands of lost media impressions for your client’s messages. In any contract with your talent, be sure to specify that the hours you pay for are exclusively for publicity appearances. Things like make-up and hair, or travel to and from the location, are not part of those hours.

**Never underestimate the importance of b-roll for your SMT.** TV and digital are both visual mediums. Pictures are critical when producing a compelling SMT segment. Good, compelling video helps tell your story and will get your story aired. Without it, a news producer is left with a talking head. This is especially important for any taped interviews. You want your segment to be memorable. Without it, it could be forgotten on a shelf.

**If possible, avoid television sweeps months.** Television real estate is always at a premium, and that’s especially true during sweeps months — February, May, July and November — when Nielsen measures audiences to help TV networks and local stations set advertising rates. This matters to you because television media are especially busy during sweeps. Earned media interviews during sweeps without a truly compelling topic or talent can be particularly challenging. Luckily, there are integrated media tactics we can still use to get quality coverage.

**Rethink settling on “Co-op” satellite media tours.** Co-op satellite media tours typically feature three to five brands that a spokesperson presents over the course of a themed segment and are usually conducted as a result of budget restraints. There is a better solution if you’re considering a co-op tour! Thanks to technological advances and the PR industry’s embracing of PESO, a co-op media tour solution that better accommodates your client’s budget while delivering a better ROI should limit the tour to two parties to maintain message integrity.

**Understand the decision making process in newsrooms.** Whether they work in a TV, radio, print or Internet newsroom, the editorial decision-makers you want to reach need to know why their particular audience will be interested in your client’s story. Thus, a good media alert, tweet or phone pitch should boil down to a few concise, compelling sentences. Something that looks like a branded keyword-packed press release will only hurt media interest. Remember, the objective is to book the interview. Your spokesperson will deliver the messages during the interviews when the real audience you want is paying attention.

**Branding on set should be limited.** Load up the set with branding and watch producers cancel the interviews they booked. This happens because those producers can see your satellite feed before they get to the interview. It’s the best way to kill what otherwise would be a successful tour. One brand mention and one brand visual are acceptable. If you have a client who insists on more than that, we can offer alternatives that will deliver what your client wants to see.

**Leave enough lead-time to execute a tour.** Ideally, four to six weeks is sufficient. This often includes the agency account team consulting with us to determine the best tour tactics, topics, talent, timing and location. Of course, things aren’t always ideal. We’ve produced and executed satellite media tours in as little as a few days and delivered excellent results.

**Encourage your client and spokesperson to agree to the best interview time window.** An analysis of two years of SMT bookings and conversations with media professionals tell us this: for a standard tour with the main target of television bookings, we recommend 8 a.m. to noon Eastern. Radio Media Tours book best between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. Eastern. Internet Media Tours book best when done between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Eastern. There are always exceptions to these rules, especially when it comes to athletes and celebrities.

**Pick a location set over a studio, if possible.** Television is a visual medium. Producers are always interested in an SMT staged at a visually appealing location that lends itself to your spokesperson’s topic. Over the last year and a half, we’ve staged satellite tours from the Winter Olympics in Russia, Yellowstone National Park, Walt Disney World and the Super Bowl. But if you’re discussing something like lawn care, have your spokesperson do it from an attractive lawn. If it’s about car care, do it from a repair garage. When we stage media tours from locations, we always take things like weather, permits, and travel into account.

**Don’t rule out satellite media interviews from foreign countries.** If you are considering a satellite tour staged in a foreign country, know that it is eminently doable. Thanks to satellite and digital technology, the world is small now, at least from a communications standpoint. But you also have to know the ropes because things are often much different in other parts of the world.

**Be prepared for the broadcast news industry standard: Live to Tape interviews.** When KEF staged its first tour 25 years ago, all of the interviews were live. While a good pitch will always get attention, live interviews are now almost exclusively reserved for celebrities and all-star athletes. For everything else — lifestyle, medical, financial topics — today’s commercial sensitive news producers overwhelmingly like to tape their interviews to see and hear what the message will look like. Then, those taped interviews air within a few days. What are the odds of your taped interview airing? Excellent! If a producer commits their anchors’ and crew members’ time to taping your seg-
ment, it's because they like the topic and expect to air it.

Look for a hook. Timely, topical news hooks ensure media coverage so you should always be on the lookout for a hook. For example, if your client makes portable electric generators and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration just predicted an unusually high number of hurricanes this season, there's your SMT news hook. Media also love surveys and studies relevant to the interests of the average viewer, listener or reader. For example, if your client sells golf balls, commission a survey to determine the 10 worst gifts to give dad for Father's Day and then stage the tour at a golf course the Wednesday before Father's Day.

Don't get ripped off. We often wonder how some of our competitors can charge so much for a satellite tour and deliver so little by way of results. They can get away with it because they know the agency representatives often don’t know what questions to ask. We’re always looking to partner with our clients and partners don’t take advantage of one other.

Expand your target markets. “We want New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and it’s not a success unless we see those.” We’ve heard that many times and we’ll tell you straight up, for most clients, earned satellite media tour interviews in major markets is a fantasy. Clients should remember that even celebrities have trouble getting booked on local market TV programs in New York and L.A. That unknown podiatrist from Sheboygan you hired to talk about foot odor prevention products has no chance. The smart scenario is to target as many markets as possible. We want eyeballs and ears, after all. But clients often insist on major markets, so that’s one of the reasons we offer news packages guaranteed to air in those markets that typically don’t book SMTs.

Evaluate your bilingual spokesperson options. Whenever possible, have an English and Spanish speaking spokesperson. Spanish-language media is the fastest growing in America, and people who speak Spanish also want to hear your client’s message. Bilingual spokespeople can be a great way to penetrate the tougher top 10 DMAs, especially in L.A., Dallas and Houston. We’ve seen earned interviews increase 50 percent in some situations. This is also a good time to have two spokespeople — one English, one Spanish — who can rotate in and out of one chair on set during your Spanish SMT.

Alex Hinojosa is EVP of Digital and Marketing Media at KEF Media.

Don’t forget to be present

The popular phrase, “if you build it, they will come” does not work in the case of being social. Brands need to get conversational and be consistent with the content they push. They need to use data and analytics to understand what their audience wants to see. Companies need not only have a social media presence but also need to be present to get noticed.

Does the news actually cover the news or what people want? What’s shared on social media and what influences the press is news, because people are talking about it. Television producers are influenced by headlines tweeted by the news, which helps them determine whether or not a certain story is savory enough to be broadcasted to a national audience. The chatter from social media, or social media journalism, is news because it is what the public is discussing and wants to share. So be there.

Aljolynn Sperber is Director of Social Media at Marketing Maven.

Some important metrics to analyze are share of voice, a percentage of branded conversations within the entire conversation sphere; sentiment, a measure of positive, negative or neutral conversation; volume, the total number of mentions distributed by channel and frequency; top keywords, a list of words, phrases and hashtags mentioned most frequently; network analysis, the reach of individuals contributing to the conversation; key conversations, the summary of the conversations with the largest impact on reach, shares and volume; and top influencers, the key individuals that emerge as dominating the social landscape. Tracking and engaging these influencers can help brands dramatically extend their message.

A social listening strategy doesn't necessarily have an ending point. Communications pros can gain insights into conversations, influencers, brand impact and much more by applying a “test and learn” filter to innovate based on the real-time findings that are uncovered.

Lindsey Goebel is Director of Social Media & Content Marketing at Crosby Marketing.

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— Jane Velez-Mitchell, National Journalist, Best-Selling Author and Founder of JaneUnchained.com

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Alex Hinojosa is EVP of Digital and Marketing Media at KEF Media.
Science news, courtesy of Hollywood’s A-list

Broadcast news excels at telling patients’ stories. By borrowing some tricks from the movies, however, these programs could also bring science stories to life.

If anyone doubts that TV news shows know how to cover health, CNN’s recent report on breast cancer patient Chrissy Turner should settle the matter. The story, less than three minutes long, aired on Nov 27, a few days before Turner underwent a mastectomy at the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City.

In the interview at her home, the patient seems anxious but composed — like so many women in similar circumstances. But there’s a difference here: Chrissy is eight years old. Wise beyond her years, she looks into the camera and talks about her illness. “I hope I can fight it off,” she says. I challenge anyone to watch this story with dry eyes.

As a person who once pursued a career in TV journalism, I can tell you TV news has no peer when it comes making us feel empathy. The results are generally less spectacular when the subject is difficult-to-fathom medical science. But I believe there’s a solution. What if TV news shows could borrow some of the tricks and tools Hollywood uses to make these challenging elements more appealing? By doing this, the shows would elevate our national conversation about science and boost viewer engagement.

Amazing confections

One example that recently caught my eye was a scene in the Oscar-nominated film “The Big Short.” Actress Margot Robbie sits in a bubble bath, glass of champagne in hand, and explains the complexities of mortgage-backed securities. Okay, she isn’t talking about engineering chimeric antigen receptor T cells to attack cancer. But the topic is equally wonky, and the scene succeeds in bringing viewers pleasurably up to speed.

Robbie’s cameo and the way it’s presented — she breaches the “fourth wall” and talks directly to the audience — turns out to be a perfect device, both for drama and pedagogy. Could TV news shows pull this off? If they packaged the segment with humor and panache, I don’t see why not.

In fact, to communicate hard science, TV news could incorporate almost all the ingredients Hollywood uses to cook up its amazing confections. I don’t think TV audiences would balk at the use of movie stars. We already have a soft spot for celebrities who are authentic and passionate disease advocates, such as Michael J. Fox (Parkinson’s disease) and Angelina Jolie (BRCA gene mutations and cancer). More and more of them are also showing up in television commercials. Disease advocacy and product pitches are just two of the many roles these talented individuals can play.

Jurassic science

Every film buff and self-identifying nerd can conjure up a movie scene where science shines through. Maybe it’s the rebellion of HAL (the Heuristically programmed Algorithmic computer) in “2001: A Space Odyssey,” or one of the pitch-perfect re-enactments in “Apollo 13” or “A Beautiful Mind.” Then, there is the classic genetics tutorial in Stephen Spielberg’s first “Jurassic Park” movie when scientists played by Sam Neill, Laura Dern and Jeff Goldblum watch an animated film within the film.

Narrated by Mr. DNA, this animation explains how creatures that have been extinct for millions of years can be cloned from DNA in traces of blood from mosquitoes trapped in ancient amber. This clip could be used today in a class on cloning — and it probably is.

My point is, cloning is an important medical technology, laid out in an amusing, edifying way by masters of the craft in Jurassic Park. Maybe, royalties permitting, Mr. DNA could help a newscaster explain this science the next time cloning or de-extinction is in the headlines.

Master explainer

The actor who blazed trails in this type of exposition is Alan Alda. For more than a decade, he played Chief Surgeon Hawkeye Pierce on CBS’s TV show “M*A*S*H,” then spent 12 years as host of the science-themed TV show “Scientific American Frontiers.”

After that, Alda helped create the Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University. The program taught scientists — what else? — how to think like actors.

If Alda is willing to work so hard on behalf of science communications, sometimes on a volunteer or “not for much profit” basis, maybe other gifted actors might do the same. Maybe broadcast news could enlist movie stars in the not-yet-invented role of Master Explainer for complex medical developments.

The candidates that spring to mind are known for very different roles. And I confess, I haven’t asked any of them what they think (though if I get the chance to walk the next red carpet, I’ll be sure to bring it up!)

Here are a few whose science or math proclivities have been well documented in the celebrity press:

Natalie Portman: BA from Harvard, two papers published in science journals.

James Franco: math nerd, one-time intern at Lockheed Martin, now pursuing a PhD in English at Yale.

Mayim Bialik: neuroscience doctoral work at UCLA before playing a neurobiologist on “Blossom” and science nerd on “The Big Bang Theory.”

Mission possible

But what, exactly, would we be asking these celebrities to do? Without any exact predecessors in TV health news, it’s hard to know what the newfangled broadcast segments would be, but we have some idea what they would look like. Think of your favorite science scenes in movies “The Martian,” “Interstellar” or “The Imitation Game.” All it really takes is good writing, good material, and star power.

It’s true that individuals on our A-list don’t work for peanuts, and struggling TV news programs don’t have Hollywood-style budgets. But money isn’t the only thing actors think about. Many have earned plenty, and some are admirable philanthropists who understand the idea of mission. If they’re looking to give something back to society, moonlighting as science ambassadors for modest fees may fit the bill.

There is one other caveat: actors, unlike professional journalists, have no training in how to avoid biased reporting, conflicts of interest, breaches of privacy or plagiarism. Learning about these pitfalls isn’t brain surgery. And, come to think of it, brain surgery is something our versatile movie stars probably could have pursued while studying at Harvard, Yale or UCLA.

Plenty of professionals find their voices as journalists when the opportunity arises. Harvard professor and surgeon Atul Gawande writes for The New Yorker, and economist Paul Krugman has a column in the New York Times. If these individuals can do it, why not the most brilliant actors of our day? With help from Hollywood, broadcasters could continue to tell moving stories about patients and the science would be equally thrilling.

By Sara Jane Baker

Sara Jane Baker is Senior Manager of Media Relations at Chamberlain Healthcare PR, part of inVentiv Health.
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KEF Media enlisted international movie star Pierce Brosnan for its client, Mouth and Foot Painting Artists, an association of 800 disabled painters around the world, to help raise awareness for the organization. The actor is pictured here with MFP’s “New York Fare,” who presented Brosnan a painting she did of him in his iconic James Bond role. The B-roll shot of their meeting was distributed by KEF Media, reaching a broadcast and digital audience of more than 400 million.

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The anti-PR presidential candidate

By Fraser Seitel

It’s now inevitable. Despite the great trepidation of Republican leaders and reasonable-thinking people everywhere, Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee for President.

And one of the greatest losers in this most improbable presidential campaign in American history is the practice of public relations.

For the past nine months, Trump has rejected public relations orthodoxy, disdained PR counsel and run roughshod over its traditional principles. In spite of this — or maybe because of it — the Donald is one vanquishing-Hillary Clinton-step away from the White House.

Here are just a few of the tried-and-true public relations requisites that the loudmouth promoter has exuberantly violated.

Always take the high road

Savvy public relations advisors will counsel their clients to resist getting down in the mud with their adversaries. “If you can’t say something nice about someone, don’t say it” is a common PR counselor’s refrain, for the simple reason that one’s own reputation will be aided if he or she stays above the battle but soiled if one starts slinging mud.

The Trump principle, by contrast, is sling baby sling! On Carly Fiorina: “Look at that face. Would anyone vote for that?” On Barack Obama: “The worst President in American history.” On Robert DeNiro: “I like his acting but ... we’re not dealing with Albert Einstein.”

And the result of Trump’s journey along the low road? He has given hope to all those Spiro Agnew “silent majority” voters who have had it with political correctness.

Never badmouth the competition

Public relations advisors typically advise clients to steer clear of commenting on competitors and confine their remarks to what they’re doing and not what the competition isn’t. The political equivalent of this rule was Ronald Reagan’s 11th commandment that “Thou shalt never denigrate a fellow Republican.”

Trump, of course, lives to bad mouth the competition. And it has worked marvelously to his advantage.

When he branded Jeb Bush as “low energy,” the moniker stuck, and the Bush campaign was doomed. When he described Rand Paul as a “spoiled brat,” the once hopeful candidate quickly faded from the line of fire.

Indeed, Trump’s withering assaults on his opponents has tied most of them in knots, forcing them, ultimately, to join the Trumpster in the personal attack cavalcade.

Has it worked? Ask Ben Carson, a candidate Trump savaged as a potential psychopath, who now is so concerned about “staying relevant” he is supporting Trump.

Do your homework

Perfecting a public relations strategy takes time and attention. Political PR advisers regularly drill their candidates on key points and messages on the most essential issues they will face in debates and interviews.

Trump — either because he isn’t bright, or is lazy or just doesn’t care — spurns preparation. His stump “speeches” are free-form narratives that generally cover the topics of why the media are untrustworthy, why nobody should vote for the other guys, why the cops and security detail are doing a great job, what the event’s protestors are doing and what should happen to them and occasionally, a few throwaways about walls, immigrants, unfair trade partners and the other guys’ lobbyists.

Trump’s debate performances are similarly bereft of substance and preparation. The “common folk” apparently didn’t care less if their candidate is embarrassingly unprepared.

Don’t ask for trouble

Public relations advisors will counsel to steer clear of topics that might come back to bite you. Never introduce a view on a controversial subject, the advice goes, particularly if your remarks might be used against you in light of future action.

Here again, Trump just doesn’t care.

He said a protestor should “be punched in the mouth,” and a few days later, his supporters did exactly that. Trump’s provocations have now resulted in more aggressive protestors and heightened security presence at rallies.

On this past Sunday’s talk shows, Trump was quick to volunteer that he needed to defend himself against the possibility of “being hit by a tomato.” Had he a public relations advisor, of course, the candidate would have been told to not even mention that projectile possibility.

So, if you’re headed for the next Donald Trump rally, duck!
Understanding the bolt-on acquisition

By Richard Goldstein

Last month’s column discussed value billing versus hourly billing. I have a lot more to say on this subject, however, this month I want to move into a discussion of the bolt-on acquisition.

The merger and acquisition market is heating up. Larger transactions involve a transaction that is based on a multiple of EBITDA with an earn-out provision. This type of acquisition structure does not work well for a smaller transaction. For example, assume your agency is a $2.0 million agency with good but not great organic growth year on year. Also assume you have a desire to increase your revenue in the digital space but have limited resources to do this. You may want to acquire a digital firm with $300,000 in revenue and a talented business owner that can help you grow this sector. A bolt on acquisition may just be a good business move for your agency.

What is a bolt-on acquisition?

Bolt-on acquisitions are usually smaller companies with very little financial and administrative infrastructure. They are typically operated by the company owner and have a tipping point where they cannot grow anymore due to lack of capital scale or management expertise. They may have unsophisticated financial systems, IT and internal controls, but are usually excellent operating companies with good customer/client relationships.

The owners of bolt-on acquisitions are usually looking to move the administrative and corporate management so they can focus on operations and customers. This is why private-backed platform companies or corporate buyers with the infrastructure in place can be a perfect fit. Given the lack of infrastructure at these companies, buyers will usually pay a lower valuation multiple — and in most cases no valuation multiple — for a bolt-on than they would for a platform company.

Three ways the PR field is changing

According to Rick Gould, managing partner of Gould + Partners, the PR market is frothy. In the last year, numerous agencies have acquired PR firms. According to Rick, the surge is likely to continue well into this year. Whether you are a buyer or seller, there are three trends about the market to keep on top of.

New buyers in the mix. In the past few years, as the economy got off its back, many new PR agency buyers have emerged. These buyers include other PR firms — and even advertising agencies — but also digital shops and private equity players. Many firms that previously could not acquire for growth have built up their war chest. Gould stressed the key for new buyers are they now have the “down payment” for the seller firm (and the operating profits from the acquired firm will pay for the rest of the sale).

More bolt-on deals. To maximize net revenue growth and profitability, more and more buyers are looking for the bolt-on deal, or acquisitions that fill a void within the portfolio yet dovetail nicely with existing services. In the PR precints, bigger is better. When buyers do bolt-on deals they are usually building higher multiples, getting new talent and providing a depth of services, such as digital. Acquiring digital assets puts the agency in a different league among potential suitors.

Multiples are down. According to Rick, an overflow of sellers translates into lower multiples paid by buyers for sellers looking to exit. Part of the trend is generation-al. Older baby boomers may be ready for a new phase in life and are eager to sell. But if they cannot get a decent price they may need to put a sale on hold. Prospective sellers, who still have the energy to operate and are in good health, may decide to wait. These sellers will have to build their infrastructure, cultivate their number two executive, possibly improve their bottom line and reevaluate a potential deal in a year or so.

The bolt on deal structure

Before I provide what the deal structure could look like, I have to preface my comments by saying I am not an M&A specialist and do not offer M&A services to PR firms. I do, however, assist buyers and sellers in tax structuring and acquisition. Both buyers and sellers need to seek out professional advice.

Assume a PR firm’s revenue for 2015 was $300,000, had owner compensation of $125,000 and overhead of $100,000, leaving a pretax profit of $75,000. It would be difficult for the firm to grow organically due to lack of capital and infrastructure. Using traditional PR pricing methods, the firm may be worth $300,000 — one times revenue — or $300,000 using a four multiple on $75,000 if, in fact, any of these methods would even be applicable. This may not be very enticing to a larger agency and not be enough money for the firm’s owner to sell.

Another agency approaches the firm to do a bolt-on transaction. Instead of using the traditional way of acquiring a firm, this agency offers a bolt-on transaction. The deal could look like this: offer the firm’s owner a base salary of $250,000-$275,000, a $50,000 signing bonus, and a 15 percent commission on legacy business for three to five years and a 10 percent commission for new business generated for one to three years. The firm now has a complete compensation structure with upside potential, no longer has to worry about capital and infrastructure, and can focus totally on expanding the parent company’s business. This is a possible win-win for all parties.

While the payment to the firm is taxable, the deal is 100 percent deductible to the parent company. A side benefit to acquiring the firm is acquiring a talented agency owner and possibly a talent pool that it could not easily locate or hire. Another benefit to the buyer is the fee paid to the M&A advisor. Usually the M&A fee to acquire an agency is an upfront retainer against hours and a success fee. The bolt-on is different. The fee structure will still require an upfront retainer, albeit lower than in a larger deal, against hours. Rather than a success fee, a percentage of owner compensation paid by the buyer to the owner of the acquired agency is charged by the M&A advisor. Bottom line is the cost to acquire a “micro” firm can be significantly lower.

Sherwin-Williams, Valspar engage PR help in $11.3B deal

Sherwin-Williams and Valspar have engaged outside PR counsel in S-W’s $11.3 billion move on its rival.

Sard Verbinnen & Co. is supporting Cleveland-based Sherwin-Williams. Bob Wells, Senior VP of Corporate Commc. and Public Affairs, heads S-W’s in-house unit.

Valspar is working with Joele Frank. Kimberly Welch is VP of Commc. for the Minneapolis-based coatings company.

S-W’s $113-per-share, all-cash offer is a 41% premium on Valspar’s shares over the month of March. S-W president and CEO John Morikis called the target “an excellent strategic fit.” He sees $280 million in “annual synergies” within two years.
Sure to happen on TV

By Arthur Solomon

There are many things about television and radio newscasts I don’t like, the foremost being what passes for coverage lacks the details compared to newspapers like the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post and USA TODAY.

For the most part, television news is similar to watching extended sound bites. And when politics are being covered, the host often lets their guests spout half-truths or outright lies without challenging them. (Perhaps because politicians would refuse to appear on the shows if their statements were challenged by the hosts? And without politicians providing the free talent there would be no programs?)

While reading quality newspapers are necessary to get the entire story, watching news on television assures viewers of one thing: boilerplate comments from anchors.

A host is sure to tell a reporter, “good job,” even if the news has first been reported in the morning radio programs and newspapers.

During a breaking news story that has reporters working around the clock, the host will be sure to say: “Our team has been working without stop throughout the night,” as if they are the only ones that have to pull all-night stints during emergencies.

“We have learned” is an oft-heard misleading comment that gives the impression of exclusive information, even though every other news outlet is reporting the same story.

Most of the time, incorrect reporting is never mentioned. When the wrong information is broadcast during a breaking news story, the excuse given is often, “we have our sources and sometimes, early information we receive is wrong.” Maybe new sources would correct that problem.

TV producers are always on the lookout for “feel good” stories. One of the most ridiculous that I remember was in 2013 when the Boston Red Sox won the World Series. The boilerplate TV report became how the Red Sox players inspired the city to recover from the Boston Marathon bombing. And if the Red Sox had lost, Boston would have not recovered? Ridiculous.

Similarly, after the horrific 9/11 attack, New York sportscasters — and sports writers — lauded the Mets’ Mike Piazza’s game-winning home run at Shea Stadium as an important part in rallying the city, as if every New Yorker lives and dies with the Mets. As a life-long New Yorker who commuted to the city every day after 9/11, I can attest to the reality of the hype behind the storied home run. The “era of good feeling” among people because of the home run was a fantasy. People of different colors would eye each other suspiciously. Everyone who set down their packages for a moment was looked at as a possible terrorist.

Political TV reporting holds a special place in the journalism Hall of Shame. Coverage resembles the movie “Groundhog Day,” as pundits repeat the same hum drum “analysis” dozens of times a day, all day, 365 days a year. The coverage is usually limited to opposing views from partisan spokespersons echoing candidates’ talking points or stump speech talking points. Or, interviews are conducted with think tank “experts” without the hosts telling the viewers the tankers’ philosophy, giving viewers the impression that they are listening to unbiased “experts.”

The nadir of political coverage occurs on election or primary days, as the pundits, whose track record for being correct equals those of racetrack touts, try to explain what every victory or defeat of a candidate means for the next election.

One aspect of TV news reporting that is most laughable is what I refer to as the “Promote The Star Treatment.” That consists of uprooting the read-the-news anchors from New York or Washington and sending them to breaking news hot spots, giving the false impression that they can uncover information that would be unavailable to the regular correspondents in the area who have the contacts. Perhaps that’s not so surprising, considering the news is now delivered like a reality show.

Groundbreaking, in-depth reporting by Walter Cronkite regarding the Vietnam War on his CBS Evening News special report, or Edward Murrow’s World War II radio reporting from London — and his subsequent TV special about the exaggerations of communism in the U.S. government by Sen. Joe McCarthy — have not been matched by our current lineup of TV reporters, despite the many years that have passed. The one facet of current reporting to which TV can claim expertise is the practice of pretending to have new information during a fast-breaking story, even as all the anchors and field reporters report the same facts.

After growing up with the likes of Cronkite and Morrow it’s easy to spotlight CNN’s Wolf Blitzer as an example of why it’s best not to take serious comments made by today’s newscasters. Several years ago he said of basketball TV analyst Charles Barkley, “He’s a real genius,” because Sir Charles was correct about a basketball prediction. And on Feb. 20, when reporting on the Democratic caucus in Nevada he said, “...now let’s get some serious analysis.” So, all the hundreds of hours of previous analysis by CNN’s supposed experts were a waste of viewers’ time?”

Too often TV reporting resembles social media. And that’s a major problem with TV news and commentary today: The race to be first often means the race to first be wrong. Intelligent TV — except for C-Span’s book interviews and weekend American history lectures — is an oxymoron. Whatever was left of intelligent commentary on TV, like David Suskind’s “Open End,” and “The David Susskind Show” and William F. Buckley’s “Firing Line”, was killed by the popularity of silly grade school-like TV sitcoms and the advent of the 24/7 cable programming.

What passes for intelligent TV today are the British imports on National Public Television — whose management probably would have sided with England during the Revolutionary War — which, in reality, are run of the mill soap operas and mysteries with English accents. Also leading to the dumbing down of America’s TV and radio offerings are the analysis of sports commentators, some of whom have rap sheets.

I’ve been a news junkie ever since I can remember and served as a reporter and editor for several years prior to joining the international public relations firm Burson-Marsteller, where I played key roles in significant national and international sports and non-sports programs and traveled worldwide with high-ranking foreign government officials as a media advisor. Watching the early morning TV shows was a must for roadrunners like me. Now, on most days, they’re a waste of eyesight.

The shortcomings of TV news reporting can be summed up with what anchors often say to a guest: “Here’s an important question. What’s your opinion of what’s happening in the South China Sea?” Before the guest can respond, the anchor adds, “You only have 10 seconds.”

Arthur Solomon, a former journalist and senior vice president/senior counselor at Burson-Marsteller, is a frequent contributor to public relations and sports business publications.
Justice Dept. sues to block LA Times, OC Register deal

The US Justice Department has sued to block the Los Angeles Times' acquisition of the Orange County Register.

The Justice Dept. filed an anti-trust suit seeking a temporary restraining order a day after L.A. Times parent Tribune won an auction for the assets of bankrupt Freedom Communications, parent of the Register.

The Justice Dept. contends Tribune would acquire a virtual monopoly over news in the region as it would account for 98 percent of newspaper sales in Orange County and 81 percent of English-language newspaper sales in Riverside County.

"If this acquisition is allowed to proceed, newspaper competition will be eliminated and readers and advertisers in Orange and Riverside Counties will suffer," said Assistant Attorney General Bill Baer.

"Newspapers continue to play an important role in the dissemination of news and information to readers and remain an important vehicle for advertisers."

Tribune said it will fight the suit and suggested the government's justification is outdated.

"[The Justice Dept.] is living in a time capsule, with a framework that predates the arrival of iPhones, Google, Facebook, and modern media outlets that are killing the traditional newspaper industry," Corporate Comms. Director Dana Meyer said in a statement.

Tribune on March 17 won the auction for Freedom, agreeing to pay $56 million in cash for its assets (including the Register and Press-Enterprise) and real estate in Santa Ana and Riverside, Calif.

Cram becomes HDMK partner

Julie Cram, a PR agency alum and Republican communications strategist, has joined HDMK in Washington as a Partner.

HDMK is a full-service Republican PR and media strategy firm led by Bush-Cheney PR alums Terry Holt and Trent Duffy. Founding Partners Chad Kolton and Jim Morrell are now with Blueprint Communications.

Cram had been running her own shop since a stint as Senior VP at DDC Advocacy.

She was a former Director of PA at Bush-Cheney for the parliamentary election campaign of Ukrainian prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, who later became that country's president. Yanukovich was removed from his post in early 2014.

The New York Times posited that Trump has brought in the seasoned strategist to help him sweep up the remaining delegates needed to secure his position as the Republican party's presidential candidate, as well as to prepare for a potential showdown in July at the Cleveland Republican National Convention, where many of Trump's detractors within the GOP are still hoping for a contested convention.

PhRMA enlists Fed Health Counsel

Potomac, MD-based healthcare lobbying and policy firm Federal Health Counsel is representing industry trade giant the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America in Capitol Hill for health and insurance related policy issues.

Federal Health Counsel will specifically aid PhRMA on issues involving drug benefit coverage as they relate to exchange plans under the Affordable Care Act. The firm will also represent the pharmaceutical trade group on coverage and reimbursement issues under Medicaid and Medicare's drug benefits, and issues involving the FDA regarding that federal agency's regulation of drugs and biologics, as well as industry user fees.

Handling the PhRMA account is Howard Cohen, who was formerly chief health counsel for the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Health Net Inc., Amgen Inc. and the American Psychiatric Association are former Federal Health Counsel clients.

Walker Comms. Director to WE

Jocelyn Webster, Communications Director for Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, is leaving the statehouse for a VP slot at WE Communications in Bellevue, Wash., the former Waggener Edstrom.

Walker has Jack Jablonski, a Deputy in the state's Dept. of Revenue, as Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications.

Webster departs on April 15 after four years with the high-profile conservative governor of the Badger State. She was previously Comms. Director for the state's Dept. of Administration and managed public affairs for 7-Eleven. She was also a Comms. Deputy for New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's campaign.

Trump hires Manafort

Presidential hopeful Donald Trump has enlisted veteran lobbyist and political PR consultant Paul Manafort in an effort to lock up his delegate lead in the Republican primaries, according to a March 28 report by the New York Times.

Longtime Republican strategist Manafort served as coordinator for Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign, and later advised the presidential runs for Sens. Robert Dole and John McCain, as well as the successful campaigns of George W. Bush and George H.W. Bush.

Manafort was founding Partner of Republican lobbying powerhouse Black, Manafort & Stone, which he left in 1996. That firm — later renamed Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly — is now part of Prime Policy Group, a subsidiary of WPP's Burson-Marsteller.

Manafort is currently senior partner at Davis, Manafort and Freedman. That firm is led by Rick Davis, who was national campaign manager for John McCain's 2008 presidential run.

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Weber works to Open Cuba Shop

Global PR agency Weber Shandwick in March announced it has obtained a license from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, thereby granting the Interpublic unit permission to pursue opening an office in Cuba.

When complete, that shop’s induction would represent one of the first U.S.-based marketing services firms to establish a ground presence in the Caribbean nation.

The recently obtained Treasury Department license, authorized by the department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, gives Weber Shandwick permission to participate in the transactions needed to establish an office in that country, which has seen a marked improvement in U.S. diplomatic relations in recent years due to efforts led by President Obama. Those renewed diplomatic ties have stirred demand from U.S. companies expressing interest in establishing a Cuban foothold. Both countries in 2015 inked a deal to reopen embassies in their respective capitals.

Weber Shandwick now has permission from the U.S. government to employ staff, market its services and open and maintain accounts at Cuban financial institutions.

The agency in a statement said it now plans to embark on discussions with the Cuban government for the purpose of securing the further permissions needed to open and operate a shop that serves clients in that country. Weber Shandwick has since submitted an application with the Cuban government, and is currently awaiting invitation for an official visit with Cuban authorities.

The agency said it would seek to establish a presence in Cuba’s capital, Havana.

“For us, having an early presence on the ground in Havana is an important step as we provide support to our clients who are interested in entering the market,” Micho Spring, Weber Shandwick Global Corporate Practice Chair, told O’Dwyer’s. “We’ve been advising companies regarding Cuba for many years in anticipation of change. Interest has dramatically risen with the Obama administration’s new policy towards Cuba and we look forward to continuing to help our clients navigate this complex political and economic landscape, which we know well.”

Weber officials in March confirmed with O’Dwyer’s that the agency doesn’t know at present when it would be able to break ground on its planned Havana shop. Spring in a statement said its goal is to open an office “as soon as it is legally permissible.”

Sanitas supports Tavárez Mirabal

Washington D.C.-based public affairs, communication and political advisory shop Sanitas International, LLC has been hired to represent Dominican Republic independent politician Minou Tavárez Mirabal, who is running for President in that country’s 2016 general election.

Tavárez Mirabal, who previously served as DR Deputy Foreign Minister, was later elected to that Hispaniola-based country’s parliament, for which she has served since, and is also the committee President of non-profit international network Parliamentarians for Global Action. She is the daughter of revolutionaries Manolo Tavarez Justo and Minerva Mirabal, the latter of whom was killed in 1960 along with her two sisters by Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo’s Military Intelligence Service secret police unit.

Tavárez Mirabal is currently the leading candidate to succeed the Dominican Republic’s current President, Danilo Medina.

According to Foreign Agents Registration Act documents, Sanitas will provide political strategy for Tavárez Mirabal and her campaign and will also work to secure principal media interviews in international media outlets.

FARA News

NEW FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT FILINGS

Below is a list of select companies that have registered with the U.S. Department of Justice, FARA Registration Unit, Washington, D.C., in order to comply with the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, regarding their consulting and communications work on behalf of foreign principals, including governments, political parties, organizations, and individuals. For a complete list of filings, visit www.fara.gov.

Brand South Africa, Princeton, NJ, registered Mar. 21, 2016 for Brand South Africa, Basiqa, Johannesburg, South Africa, to undertake marketing and communication activities to manage and positively influence perceptions about South Africa amongst targeted audiences and drive awareness of South Africa as a competitive destination.

Mercury Public Affairs, LLC, Washington, D.C., registered Mar. 16, 2016 for Embassy of Republic of Turkey, Washington, D.C., for representation relating to potential claims under treaty, U.S. law, and/or international law held by the Republic of Turkey against individuals and/or entities in the U.S.

Global Vision Communications, Washington, D.C., registered Mar. 15, 2016 for Taiwanese Civil Government, Taiwan, for PR services to include production of a video, op-ed and press releases.

BGR Government Affairs, LLC, Washington, D.C., registered Mar. 15, 2016 for Center for Studies and Media Affairs at the Saudi Royal Court, Al Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to provide PR and media management services, including traditional and social media forums.

Lobbying News

NEW LOBBYING DISCLOSURE ACT FILINGS

Below is a list of select companies that have registered with the Secretary of the Senate, Office of Public Records, and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Legislative Resource Center, Washington, D.C., in order to comply with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. For a complete list of filings, visit www.senate.gov.

Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP, Washington, D.C., registered Mar. 23, 2016 for VirtuStream, Inc., Bethesda, MD, to raise awareness of unique software solutions to assist the Department of Veteran Affairs and veterans in achieving more efficiency in scheduling medical appointments.


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