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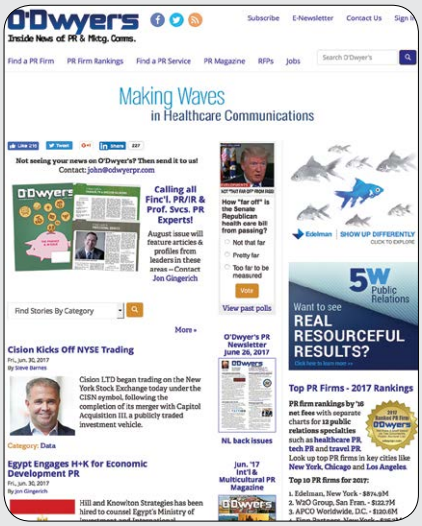

EDITORIAL CALENDAR 2020

January: Crisis Comms. / Buyer's Guide

March: Food & Beverage

June: PR Firm Rankings

July: Travel, Tourism & International

August: Financial, I.R. & Prof Services

October: Healthcare & Medical

November: Technology & Social Media

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Companies should stand up to cancel culture

If you haven't been living under a rock these past several years, no doubt you're privy to the debate surrounding cancel culture, the ritual of shaming people who've been caught saying or doing objectionable things online, a phenomenon that's turned social media—particularly Twitter—into what writer Matt Taibbi described as "a giant finger-wagging machine."

The conversation took a sharp turn in July with the publication of *Harper's* "Letter on Justice and Open Debate," a completely well-reasoned call-to-arms signed by 150 prominent authors, journalists and academics that decried an "intolerance of opposing views" that threatens to "weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favor of ideological conformity."

The pushback this letter received—in countless essays, in a gallimaufry of blogs and social media posts—was puzzling. Much of the criticism focused on oddly Trumpesque attempts to attack the letter for what it didn't say, or for its timing (this has always been a favorite fallacy of mine: *"Now isn't the time to talk about x!" "We should be discussing y!"*). Others resorted to whataboutism, using the forum as an opportunity to address their longstanding grievances with the magazine, or chose to disregard the letter because of previous actions/words of a particular signatory. Many pointed to the easy irony of elite signatories addressing the perils of censorship in a prestigious publication without fear of reprisal, as though these luminaries possess only enough imagination to write about their own self-interests, that it would never dawn on them to come to the defense of others who've been the targets of online mobs. More than a few said cancel culture is an overblown myth, merely the latest example of democracy in action.

Most of these arguments aren't very sound, but to borrow from one of them—if only to highlight its flimsiness—it's true that cancel culture isn't fundamentally about freedom of speech. People have a constitutional right to say whatever they want, yet there remain—and there should be—consequences for our words. Horses for courses.

The problem with cancel culture is less an issue of strangers being mean to someone on the Internet than it is an acknowledgment of what are obvious flaws in a social system where the private sector has been charged with adjudicating a final judgment once these cultural vigilantes begin demanding the offender be held accountable for his/her words.

For years, brands—corporations, universities, sports franchises—have ridden social movements as a marketing opportunity. And under immense public pressure, they now find themselves effectively merchandising outrage into a series of press-release-ready gestures, acquiescing to the demands of the mob and throwing employees under the bus seemingly without the good-faith considerations that all healthy internal cultures have: that maybe someone's words were taken out of context, or they misspoke, or they need counseling, or—God forbid—they made a mistake. But take solace in this: after you've been fired and your career has been ruined and you've been deemed radioactive by the community, you remain free to speak your mind.

Granted, there are open-and-shut cases where people should've lost their jobs. But there are others where the consequences clearly outweighed the crime. Was it necessary for soccer team LA Galaxy to fire player Aleksandar Katai in response to a series of tweets made by his wife criticizing the George Floyd protesters? Should food vendors boycott a Minneapolis restaurant because racist and anti-Semitic social media posts were discovered to have been written by the founder's daughter eight years prior—when she was fifteen? Why was Boeing communications chief Niel Golightly forced to resign after an employee dug up an article he wrote in 1987 questioning women's ability to serve in combat? What sort of social justice did a consulting firm have in mind when it fired a researcher for merely sharing via Twitter a peer-reviewed study on the positive political effects of nonviolent protests? Was it really in Publicis' best interest to fire one of its executives for tweeting about the coronavirus?

Companies are taking the easy way out. They've been inculcated to the notion that it's better PR to fire someone, reach a consensus with social media activists and get the virtue points than it is to take a stand and demonstrate an ability to lead in cases where public opinion is wrong. It's compliance disguised as leadership, the same performative gestures from institutions who love to tell you how they "think outside the box" as they reflexively mete out punishment to anyone who presents a view or opinion that runs counter to the prevailing narrative.

For years, the traditional reading has been that we've given too much power to the crowds, but no one considers the far more dangerous implication—especially among younger people who claim to harbor a disdain for capitalism—that we sure are handing over a lot of undue power to corporations. Businesses are increasingly being called upon to fill the gaps left by an administration that has failed us (see pg. 9), and now we're willfully ceding control for them to serve as the arbiters in determining what words or topics are off limits. What could go wrong? O

— Jon Gingerich

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Consumers say ads losing sway

Television commercials are beginning to lose their influence over Americans' purchasing behaviors, according to a recent survey.

By Jon Gingerich

TV commercials could be losing their influence over Americans. Instead, consumers say online reviews or stories they discover in the news are what cause them to pay the most attention to new products and services, according to a recent survey by New York-based digital marketing agency Macias PR.

The survey, which sought to gauge consumers' attitudes toward advertising and how advertising and the news influence their purchasing decisions, found that 70 percent of respondents said they don't believe TV commercials motivate them to buy new products.

On the other hand, more than a third (35 percent) said positive online consumer reviews influence their belief that a product is good. Additionally, eight percent said reading a positive review from a journalist convinces them to pay for a new product or service. Only three percent said celebrity endorsements influence their purchasing decisions.

The findings add another dimension of paradox during a time when news consumption has skyrocketed as millions of Americans have been forced to stay at home during the COVID-19 crisis, and yet, global ad revenues continue contracting. Indeed, 38 percent of the survey's respondents admitted they're consuming more news than ever in light of COVID-19-related quarantines.

The survey also discovered that online news is now most respondents' primary source for daily news (42 percent), followed by local news (19 percent) and cable news (nine percent). Only 4.5 percent said a local newspaper is their first choice for news. Radio or podcasts rounded out the bottom, with only three percent of respondents claiming they get their information from these mediums.

On the other hand, an April Coronavirus Media Usage Study by the Television Bureau of Advertising found that broadcast TV still maintains the highest reach (81 percent) among U.S. adults compared to other platforms (cable TV, social media, radio, newspapers and news sites/apps, among other mediums). Broadcast TV news also still ranks number-one for trust, according to the TVB study.

Finally, the Macias survey polled Americans regarding what they do when a TV program goes to commercial break. More than a third (36 percent) said they reach for their cell phones or laptops when a commercial comes on TV, while 17 percent said they fast-forward through the commercial and 10 percent said they leave the room to complete a task. Only 10 percent said they actually watch the commercial. ○

COVID-19 has altered buying habits

Americans say COVID-19 has influenced their consumer purchasing habits and has also left them wanting the private sector to do more to earn their business.

By Jon Gingerich

Like virtually every other facet of American life, the global economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak has had a remarkable impact on consumer purchasing behaviors and will also undoubtedly affect how brands connect with audiences henceforth.

According to a Bospar survey, 86 percent of Americans report that COVID-19 has changed their consumer buying habits. Specifically, more than a third (35 percent) said the pandemic has influenced them to buy only essential goods. Nearly a third (30 percent) said it had made them more concerned about price (30 percent) and has left them being more selective about purchases (30 percent).

The survey also discovered that, in light of the pandemic, a majority of Americans (81 percent) said they now want companies to do more to earn their personal business. The initiatives respondents are most eager to see companies implement include helping the health workers fighting COVID-19 (49 percent), helping essential workers such as grocery employees (45 percent) and hiring a diverse workforce (34 percent). Nearly a third of respondents (30 percent) additionally said they want companies to make a statement—with accompanying actions—supporting Black Lives Matter and 26 percent want companies to invest in corporate social responsibility programs.

More than three-quarter of those polled (78 percent) reported that COVID-19 has impacted them, leaving them more fearful (33 percent), working fewer hours (24 percent) or unemployed (16 percent). Five percent of respondents said they lost a family member to COVID-19 and three percent said they contracted the virus personally. ○

Speaking out pays off for CEOs

CEOs who "consistently communicate" are seeing bottom-line benefits, according to findings from a new FTI Consulting study.

By Steve Barnes

Speaking out is paying off for CEOs, according to a new study conducted by FTI Consulting.

Out of the 100 top-performing companies analyzed in "The CEO Brand and Its Impact on Business," 81 percent are led by CEOs who have a distinct brand and "consistently communicate." Twelve of the top 15 firms are headed by CEOs who place a premium on communications.

Those CEOs topped their less communicative peers by an average of two percent, resulting in what FTI says is $260B in added shareholder value.

In addition to resulting in increased overall performance, an emphasis on CEO communications also made companies more likely to successfully withstand the challenges posed by COVID-19.

This is especially true for so-called "stakeholder CEOs," those who see their mission as serving stakeholders as well as the shareholders who own the company. The study found that stakeholder CEOs, who accounted for 39 percent of the more communicative CEOs, outperformed their peers by an average of 3.75 percent.

The importance of speaking out extends across all market sectors, the study found. In the two largest groups, almost nine of out ten (89 percent) of the healthcare companies had vocal CEOs, and tech firms were close behind at 78 percent.

While female CEOs accounted for only six of the 128 CEOs that were included in the study, all of them fell into the more-communicative category.

FTI evaluated the companies with the highest growth in their share prices between Jan. 1, 2015, and Dec. 31, 2019. ○

Social media audiences uninformed

Americans who get most of their political news from social media sites are more likely to get the facts wrong about current events and are also more likely to have encountered fake news and conspiracy theories, according to Pew Research Center analysis.

By Jon Gingerich

Americans who depend on social media platforms for their political news tend to be less likely to follow major news stories and also generally possess less political knowledge than other groups, according to analysis recently released by the Pew Research Center.

Pew's survey found that only eight percent of U.S. adults who get their political news primarily from social media platforms said they're currently following news about the 2020 election "very closely," the lowest share among the six media platforms analyzed. By comparison, levels of engagement for election news was about four times higher among those who get their political news mostly from cable TV (37 percent) or print media (33 percent).

Moreover, less than a quarter (23 percent) of U.S. adults who get their political news from social media admitted they're following news surrounding the COVID-19 crisis very closely. By contrast, the percentage of Americans who rely to cable TV, national network TV, news sites and apps or local TV all revealed higher levels of attention to coronavirus-related news (50 percent, 50 percent, 44 percent and 32 percent, respectively).

The survey tested respondents' political knowledge and asked 29 fact-based questions focusing on current events ranging from COVID-19, to the economy to President Trump's impeachment. Pew's findings discovered that only 17 percent of those rely most on social media for political news fell into the high political knowledge category, while 45 percent of those who rely on news websites/apps, 42 percent of radio listeners and 41 percent of print readers earned this designation.

About one-in-five U.S. adults (18 percent) reported that social media is currently their main source for political news. That's more than the number of Americans who said they get most of their political news from print (three percent), radio (eight percent), network TV (13 percent), local TV (16 percent) or cable TV (16 percent). According to Pew's findings, news websites and apps are now the number-one source a majority of American turn to for political news (25 percent).

Finally, Pew's analysis found that Americans who use social media for political news were less likely to express concern regarding the fake news phenomenon. While more than half (58 percent) of those who rely on cable TV expressed high levels of concern regarding fake news' potential influence on the 2020 election, only a little more than a third (37 percent) of social media users reporting being concerned about it.

Despite this, social media news users were more likely to have been exposed to false or unproven claims than other media audiences. About eight-in-ten (81 percent) have heard the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 pandemic was intentionally planned, higher than any other media audience. Altogether, more than two-thirds of social media news users (68 percent) admitted they've encountered coronavirus-related misinformation.

Pew's analysis was based on data drawn from five separate surveys conducted between October 2019 and June 2020. ○

Business takes up government's slack

Employers in the private sector are getting high marks for picking up the ball when government falls short, according to a new study.

By Steve Barnes

Businesses are increasingly being called upon to fill in the gap created by falling levels of trust in government institutions, according to a new study released by Weber Shandwick, United Minds and KRC Research.

"The Workplace as a New Town Square" finds that employers are taking a major role in ensuring the health and safety of their employees during the pandemic, as well as making progress on racial inequality. It also finds that many people think government, at both the state and federal level, is coming up short.

Only 43 percent of those surveyed said that they were confident that the U.S. has the leadership to guide the nation through the hurdles presented by COVID-19, rising unemployment and systemic racism.

When it comes to COVID-19, confidence that the federal government is taking the right steps to stop the virus's spread and bring it under control slid from 58 percent of those surveyed from April 15-17 to 46 percent for those polled from June 15-17. State governments did better, but their trust level still dropped from 69 percent in April to 53 percent in June.

Employers got higher scores. In June, 72 percent of employees surveyed said that their employer's response to the coronavirus is exactly what it should be, with 69 percent agreeing that their employer is putting worker safety above profit.

In addition, most workers said their employers were adequately addressing racial inequality in the workplace, with 78 percent indicating that their employer does not tolerate discrimination of any kind at work and 74 percent agreeing that their employer has created a fair work environment where they can be themselves and contribute to the company.

However, there was a sizeable gap between how black and white workers view discrimination in the workplace. While 80 percent of white employees said that discrimination was not tolerated in their workplace, that number drops to 64 percent for black employees.

The increased trust in businesses creates a window of opportunity, the report says. One of the main tools to capitalize on that is to put communications front and center. Companies that communicate with employees and consumers can see a noticeable uptick in their reputation for trustworthiness.

For example, 88 percent of workers who said their employers have communicated about recent crises said they were proud to work for that employer. For those who did not receive such communications, that number drops to 51 percent.

As regards what issues companies should communicate about, the top issue is expressing zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment (46 percent), followed by pledging to fight racism, discrimination and unconscious bias (44 percent), and committing to pay equity (44 percent).

"The Workplace as a New Town Square," polled 1,004 adults between June 15-17. ○

Building, maintaining reputation in a virtual world

The tools, technologies and processes companies are using to keep stakeholders engaged and informed—from a distance.

By Sean Mogle

Social distancing has transformed many industries but has been especially challenging for relationship-driven professions like public relations. Sustaining a corporate reputation depends, to a large extent, on engaging diverse tiers of stakeholders, both internal and external. The advent of social media and related digital engagement platforms have prepared us somewhat for virtual contact with stakeholders, but nothing could have effectively prepared us for the sudden and complete suspension of face-to-face contact and physical proximity.

So, what are reputation managers and communicators to do in this strange, complex new world?

Keeping it in-house

When it comes to building and maintaining corporate reputation, employees remain one of the most critical pieces of the puzzle. Their proximity to and interest in the organization make them especially receptive to the company narrative. Plus, they're active transmitters of this narrative, be it good or bad. It's no secret that employees talk, both to each other and outsiders. Keeping staffers apprised with communications that are accurate, unfiltered and on-message, therefore, is the best way to ensure the story that gets told aligns with the company's reputational goals.

This was no easy task even before the pandemic. Fast forward to today, where many companies are scrambling to keep a remote workforce engaged and informed about crucial details related to financial performance, return-to-work plans, HR matters and other key issues. It's easy to see how message distortion—and ensuing reputational damage—can take place when communications to frazzled, homebound employees are otherwise uneven or inconsistent. Now more than ever, organizations need to pay special attention to how they communicate with employees. For some companies, this may involve making a leap into new tactics, technologies and channels. This may be an uncomfortable transition for some, but it's a necessary one.

Communicate often, make it personal

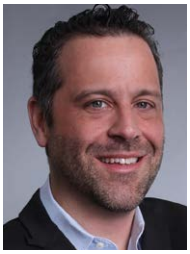
There's no shortage of information related to this unprecedented crisis. Headlines stream across our screens and our newsfeeds are brimming with news and opinions—some accurate, some not. Added to the vacuum of social isolation, it's a ripe breeding ground for rumor and hearsay. Companies need to deliver messages to their employees before the news cycle does it for them. A more frequent cadence of communications may be needed to reach employees where they are, and in real-time. The all-company e-mail is giving way to faster, more interactive modes of employee outreach such as in-app and intranet-based communications, CEO-led podcasts and videos, webinars, employee Q&As and surveys that allow staff to deliver feedback and voice concerns. Above all, these communications should feel personalized with a human voice.

Managing the media

While the media landscape has evolved significantly in recent years, embracing new technologies and subscription models, the financial and business media remain an integral forum for conveying the corporate story and elevating reputation. Like many industries, financial journalists are doing their best to remain productive while filing from remote locations. Fielding pitches and cultivating relationships with experts while competing with daily deadline pressures has led many journalists to reconsider how they gather source material. Many are relying more heavily on platforms like HARO and Profnet, for example, while others are inviting pitches via Twitter or pulling directly from published thought leadership content. This isn't to say there are no longer opportunities to build meaningful and lasting relationships with press in the current environment, but storytellers must get more creative in order to do so. LinkedIn and other social media will need to play a greater part of any ongoing press campaigns. Deskside briefings and in-person media tours may be off the table, but Zoom briefings and satellite media tours are still very much in play. No matter the chosen tactic, communications professionals need to ensure that all journalist contact is targeted, strategic, and tailored to a specialized beat or area of interest.

Notes on broadcast

For many organizations, TV, video and broadcast coverage remains a highly desired and effective way to disseminate the company story and showcase the depth of expertise. It goes without saying that things have become a bit more complicated in light of current circumstances. On the network side, producers, bookers and anchors are stretched even thinner than usual, valiantly filling the demand for 24/7 content while dealing with in-studio capacity restrictions, guest connectivity issues and ever-shifting editorial priorities. Many are doing so remotely and are less receptive to working with new guests and communications professionals. In the world of live broadcast, guests with long-standing relationships, instant name recognition and a high-quality Zoom or in-house studio tend to have the advantage. Companies seeking to tell their story via this channel can boost their chances by having a compelling story relating directly to the news of the day and by ensuring that technical standards are up-to-par. What's more, the broadcast world is exceptionally wide, and there's an abundance of opportunities beyond the major networks. Formerly "online" outlets like Yahoo! Finance and others have built out their live streaming platforms and have a greater ongoing need for company news and expert insights.


Sean Mogle

The stay-at-home reality has also contributed to a resurgence of podcast and radio. According to recent data from Nielsen, audio engagement and light listenership rates are growing at a tremendous pace and expected to double by 2023. This presents a valuable tactical opportunity for organizations looking to use this medium to tell their story, whether via a branded, company-sponsored podcast or one hosted by an existing media or news outlet.

The road ahead

While no one could've predicted the extent of this disruption on our relationship-driven profession, all is not lost. The demand for meaningful, authoritative communication has never been greater as isolated audiences look to trusted brands for guidance and support. For those of us on the communications side, the pandemic has forced us to get creative and finally incorporate new tactics, tools and technologies into our arsenal. The irony is that in a world where face-to-face contact has been largely deferred, virtual techniques promise to bring us closer to our constituents—and tell our stories more thoroughly—than ever before. Though we can't be sure what the new normal will look like, we'll certainly emerge from the crisis as better storytellers, and more experienced communicators with a wider array of skills at our fingertips.

Sean Mogle is Vice President in Finn Partners' global financial services practice.

Finding the right financial services agency

Key considerations for companies looking for a PR agency that specializes in financial services.

By Bill Haynes

There are many choices for companies looking for a financial services public relations agency, from global behemoths that cover a full spectrum of industries and geographies, to specialist boutiques immersed in the arcane language of financial services that understand the various ecosystems of various sub-industries, such as private equity or financial technology. Some PR firms focus mostly on more traditional media relations, while others offer a continuum of connected services from media relations to social media to content creation to design.

What makes the search even more challenging for those relatively new to external communications—a characteristic that's not uncommon in financial services—is that the marketing and PR field has its own industry jargon that can make it difficult to compare one agency against another. So, how do you wade through the websites and directories to find the right firm for your company?

Several key considerations can help organizations refine their search and help ensure they're focusing on the agencies that best fit their current needs and can quickly adapt as demands evolve.

Gauge your goals and timeline

First, a company should be clear about its goals. Are you looking for greater brand recognition or to drive new business leads? Or are both equally important? Are you launching a new product or raising a new fund, and what are the relevant time constraints? For instance, should the PR program include a rollout plan? Is there time to raise awareness prior to the launch or will the new product be the catalyst for an ongoing program? Organizations should have in mind the top three things they hope to accomplish in the next three, six and 12 months.

Identify your themes and perspectives

What insights and news do you have to offer to the marketplace? How will people benefit and why should they care? These questions are critical in articulating a value proposition to the broader market. Your company and product messaging should be clear and compelling. A PR firm should be able to help shape your messages through discussions with key executives, research and, if needed, interviews with your clients and partners. In the financial services segment, in particular, it's surprising how many firms focus solely on distributing press releases, while ignoring other levers that can be just as impactful in conveying a narrative. For thought leadership articles and proactive commentary pitches, for instance, it's important to have strong and well-reasoned points of view on industry trends. Your PR partner can help tease this out, through interviews, relevant research and content development. This will be important for ongoing positioning in the media and across distribution platforms, as well as in media interviews on new developments if the news can be tied to a marketplace trend and, ideally, supported by data and anecdotes.

Assess your news

What are your company's plans over the next several months that are newsworthy? New hires, office openings, new products or services, new funds, studies or research reports, award wins and strategic alliances are some of the things that would warrant a press release. Milestone announcements, such as an anniversary, present an opportunity to discuss the firm's strategy and approach and outline how you were able to achieve these milestones. All of these things, plus conference speaking, can also be shared via LinkedIn and Twitter as well as through email blasts and quarterly electronic newsletters.

Identify your spokespeople

All firms need knowledgeable, articulate and responsive spokespeople to convey their news and perspectives. Spokespeople could include the CEO or President, but can also feature regional leaders, product or services experts or anyone passionate about the market and the role the company serves. Don't worry if they haven't spoken with the media before. Your PR firm can train them, discussing the rules of engagement for media interviews, and help them gain comfort through practice interviews. It's helpful to build a spokesperson matrix with the individuals and the topics they can address.

Evaluate your capabilities

So, now that you've identified your goals, news and perspectives and spokespeople, you should determine the internal resources available to help you achieve your goals. Do you have an experienced marketing team in place that can implement an integrated plan, in which case the agency can be tasked with execution? Alternatively, will these efforts be overseen by a marketing associate, with minimal experience, who may be best deployed as a liaison between the agency and its senior managers, in which case the PR agency develops and deploys a more comprehensive integrated marketing plan? In either case, this question is critical in determining how to best leverage your agency and ensure key initiatives are supported and amplified by robust marketing strategies.

Bill Haynes

Assess the cultural fit

For long-term success, it's essential to hire a PR agency whose culture, values and approach are similar to your own. Do you share your values on your website and try to live by them? How do you treat each other and your clients/partners? How often and by which means do you like to communicate? Would you characterize yourself and your colleagues generally as "decisive, no BS, straight shooters," who want to make decisions quickly, or do you prefer to deliberate and discuss issues before taking a measured approach? These cultural questions aren't just important in selecting an agency, but in also determining how an agency will staff your account.

Define success/implement measurement

How do you define success for your PR program? Have this discussion early in the process with PR agencies you're considering. What KPIs can the agency implement to show progress toward your goals, and what metrics can capture increased awareness and new business the agency helped generate? A baseline measurement of website traffic via Google Analytics, social media involvement, media coverage for the last 6-12 months, and competitor share of voice are useful ways to establish an initial baseline. The company can also help by establishing a baseline that measures new business inquiries, RFPs received, usage of articles to spur prospect communications or new business won. And companies and their agency partners should track these metrics over time to assess performance and also course correct as new efforts yield new results.

Determine your budget

Budgets will range widely based on the comprehensiveness of your program, frequency of tactics deployed, and geographic reach. For mid-sized companies to imple-

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Why COVID-19 is accelerating ESG momentum

Why ESG programs are becoming increasingly more important in helping investors evaluate non-financial risks.

By Bryan Armstrong, Zaineb Bokhari, Geoff Serednesky and Ben Herskowitz

The economic dislocation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has rippled through the global economy. In spite of this period of economic instability, momentum behind Environmental, Social and Governance is strengthening, particularly with respect to the social dimension of ESG.

What's the fuss about 'S'?

According to a recent investor study conducted by FTI Consulting, 57 percent of respondents believe corporate ESG programs are more important today and going forward compared to before the pandemic. Investors are paying close attention to the health and safety of employees as well as the resilience and governance of companies they invest in, all of which are key pillars of a traditional ESG program.

While many companies have taken decisive steps to safeguard their employees and implement business continuity measures, a shockingly high number of companies haven't. According to Just Capital's COVID-19 Corporate Response Tracker, 30 percent of America's 301 largest publicly traded companies as of June 9, 2020 still hadn't implemented remote work policies or modified work schedules, and 37 percent hadn't yet implemented health and safety measures. While concerning in its own right, this indicates a potentially longer-term issue with companies' risk mitigation strategies, which will continue to directly affect their ability to navigate COVID-19 and future crises successfully.

For investors, ESG is becoming a more important tool in helping them evaluate these non-financial risks. In fact, 62 percent of investors in our recent survey said they expect to use ESG strategies and related tools to a greater extent over the next 12-18 months to manage their own portfolios. Respondents indicated they're increasingly using ESG in their investment decision-making process, primarily in two areas: first, to pick stocks—either screening out undesirable companies (44 percent) or identifying high-quality companies (40 percent) and second, to evaluate risk (39 percent).

As adoption of ESG continues to accelerate in the investment community, we expect pressure on corporates to increase disclosure and transparency related to risk management will follow suit. This is particularly true given the inability of many companies to reliably forecast business trends in the current environment.

This adoption curve is also being aided by a growing body of evidence linking ESG to favorable stock performance. For example, a recent study administered by Fidelity International showed that during the COVID-19-driven market sell-off between February 19 and March 26, shares of companies that received better ratings (A or B) on their sustainability rating system outperformed the S&P 500 by 380 basis points, while those with lower ratings (C to E) underperformed by 740 basis points. This stock performance disparity supported Fidelity's view that management teams making strong commitments to sustainability tend to be high-quality and their businesses more resilient during market dislocations and crises.

FTI's recent investor study corroborates these findings, as 58 percent of investors believe those companies with above-average ESG practices have been more effective at managing business risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, we found that 64 percent of investors also believe that companies with above-average ESG practices are better prepared for future pandemics, crises, and other black swan events.

Spotlight: potential 'social' risks

While the pandemic is serving as a catalyst for major changes in how companies and investors evaluate and manage risk, the underlying importance of non-financial risks has been increasing for some time. The significant increase and higher proportion of intangible assets over the past three decades has created a divergence between market values and book values, which has made conventional financial measures less meaningful, particularly in evaluating the resilience of companies during times of market dislocation.

As we look ahead, there are several top-of-mind risks for investors that fall within the social dimension of ESG that companies should be prepared for as they navigate through the pandemic.

Issue #1: privacy and data security

Increases in remote work and digitization as a result of COVID-19 directly increase companies' exposure to data privacy and security risks. As is the case currently, privacy and security risks are amplified when new processes such as videoconferencing are implemented and scaled quickly within organizations without the proper controls in place, including relevant corporate policies aimed at reducing user and corporate risk. As a consequence, incremental personal and proprietary data remain at risk to hackers looking to exploit these opportunities. In fact, according to the FBI, COVID-19 related cybersecurity threats reported to its Internet Crime Complaint Center were trending as high as 20,000 daily through early June of this year, with the year to date volume already exceeding what the IC3 had seen across all threats in 2019.

Bryan Armstrong

Zaineb Bokhari

Failure to implement sufficient oversight of employee and customer privacy and data security can have an adverse material impact on a company's performance and valuation. Data security issues can be quite costly, as was the case when Verizon lowered its purchase price of Yahoo by $350 million after security breaches exposed sensitive user information of more than a billion Yahoo users.

On a more acute—and hopefully, temporary—basis, private-sector companies are now using various forms of technology to identify, track and monitor the spread of COVID-19. According to a June McKinsey survey, checking employee temperatures is currently the most common tactic used to identify and isolate employees showing COVID-19 symptoms. Of the respondents whose companies are checking temperatures or plan to, more than half say daily temperature checks would be mandatory. Gathering and securely storing information such as this, among many others, presents a new set of risks that companies may not have fully contemplated yet.

For investors, data security remains at the forefront of social risks they care most about. While companies can't completely eliminate the risk inherent in data collection and storage, they do have the power to strategically identify and manage the associated risks and communicate proactively to stakeholders their actions and mitigation plans.

Issue #2: human capital management

As companies implement cost-reduction initiatives, including staff reductions and furloughs, regulators have seen a material

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COVID accelerates ESG momentum

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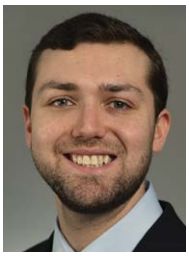
increase in whistleblowers who no longer fear employer retaliation. Per a *Washington Post* article on April 16, thousands of Occupational Safety and Health Administration complaints have been filed against companies for workplace safety concerns. The article indirectly highlights investors' inability to make informed investment decisions without accurate, reliable, and material ESG disclosures, stating, "collectively, the records depict the desperation of the employees as well as their frustrations with employers who in their view were at best simply unprepared for a pandemic and at worst callously unconcerned with worker safety."

Geoff Serednesky



Ben Herskowitz

Beyond OSHA complaints, per a May 26 Reuters article, Steven Peikin, the agency's co-head of enforcement, noted that the Securities and Exchange Commission fielded about 4,000 complaints from mid-March to mid-May, representing a year-over-year increase of 35 percent.

Although whistleblower policies have been around for many years, this level of activity is unprecedented and has emboldened the workforce to more readily take action as and when they deem appropriate. Accordingly, companies that have been outspoken about how well they're treating their workforce may face a backlash if that sentiment is not shared among employees.

To ensure employees feel protected—and thus protect against value-destroying lawsuits and/or public complaints—companies must establish a culture of safety in which employees see, hear and experience a sustained effort to keep them safe and well. Communications alone may help them to understand policies, but the effort must go further to define the behaviors that are expected, train leaders to be positive role models, and incentivize teams to hold one another accountable. Safety must be seen as a shared responsibility with regular reminders of what is expected.

Issue #3: widening executive pay gap

In addition to workforce reductions and furloughs, some companies also reduced executive compensation to help rein in costs. According to executive compensation experts, Semler Brossy, nearly 20 percent of Russell 3000 companies had made explicit announcements regarding executive and director pay actions in their SEC filings through the month of May.

However, as the process of reopening and resuming economic activity begins, companies must take special care as they contemplate returning executive compensation to pre-crisis levels. This is particularly true if employee pay and benefits do not recover in parity or as quickly as the executive suite. For publicly traded companies, this will be highly visible in their corporate disclosures regarding CEO pay ratio, which has been mandated since 2018.

While to date, CEO pay ratios have not evoked widespread concern from shareholders or other stakeholders, there are admittedly wide variations in the data across industries. For example, a 2018 Equilar study indicated that while the CEO pay ratio for BICS-classified Utilities and Energy companies cap out around 300-to-1, Consumer Discretionary and Consumer Staples companies exhibit a larger disparity in pay, with the top CEO pay ratios upwards of 750-to-one. Companies that anticipate a meaningful increase in this ratio should expect heightened scrutiny, especially if furloughed employees are not fully reinstated as 'normal' business activity resumes.

Risks are also high for companies that receive taxpayer-funded aid—a point of view that came across quite strongly in our Shifting Expectations survey. Respondents indicated that Americans are not willing to bail out most industries and therefore organizations that receive aid will be expected to both retain staff levels, pay, and benefits and provide considerable transparency on executive pay and corporate expenditures.

Preparing for the next black swan event

As we look beyond the current pandemic, investors will undoubtedly amp up the pressure on companies to provide greater transparency and disclosure around material risk factors in their industry and business as well as the governance and controls they have put in place to manage them. When done well, an effective ESG program provides a natural platform from which to organize, align, and implement enhancements to a company's enterprise risk management, while at the same time ensuring "full credit" is received for their efforts from key stakeholders.

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Finding the right fin. services agency

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ment an integrated communications program, expect the fees to be between $10,000 and $30,000 per month. If you can't afford an annual retainer, some agencies will engage in project work and may have a rate card that reflects the most common initiatives such as press releases, media tours and thought leadership development. Annual retainers are the preferred option if budgets permit, as they enable the company and agency to form a strong partnership and allow the agency to be proactive in fielding requests for commentary, identifying conference speaking roles, submitting for awards and capitalizing on other ways firms can demonstrate their expertise and value proposition.

Find a PR agency/references

Even if you've answered all of these questions, it can be hard to differentiate between the agencies left to choose from. Cost is important, but it shouldn't be the determining factor, especially as agencies are often willing to work with prospective clients to find a way to meet their budgets. Check out agencies' websites and see if their services, client base and approach are in line with your objectives. Do they do their own research and write whitepapers and blogs on communications issues in your field? Do they employ former financial services journalists in house to write and pitch articles? Do they have a creative director who understands the importance of a consistent and powerful brand identity? Reach out to them, have a discussion and ask for references. Do the references give them glowing reviews? Do you have relationships with any financial journalists? If so, ask them who they like to work with. Finally, do you feel like you and the agency have the right chemistry? Even if you can't meet in person these days, you can get a pretty good sense of a firm and their team on a Zoom call. Ultimately, you want to be confident before you make a decision that the agency you choose will care as much about your success as you do.

Selecting a PR agency is an important decision, and asking the right questions upfront is essential to long-term success. At the end of the day, the ability of your company and your agency to help build your brand and drive new business comes down to collective strategy, teamwork, competence, desire and trust.

Bill Haynes is Founder and CEO of Back-Bay Communications. O

Building confidence amid the pandemic

Why financial services firms should pay careful attention to the needs of furloughed employees.

By Alex Stanton

With COVID-19 causing unprecedented disruption to the U.S. and world economies, many financial services firms have had to make the difficult decision to lay off or furlough workers. In the case of furloughs, employers have often communicated that they hope and expect to hire employees back as soon as they're able. In this situation, maintaining clear and consistent communication is crucial not just to build internal confidence but to manage reputation more broadly.

In a media environment rife with reporters focused on how financial firms are responding to the crisis—and hungry to expose anyone taking unfair advantage of government stimulus programs or profiting while employees are negatively impacted—thoughtful and strategic communication is more critical than ever.

Retaining employees you've trained and cultivated is in a firm's best interest. Research suggests direct replacement costs can reach as high as 50-60 percent of an employee's annual salary, with total costs associated with turnover ranging from 90-200 percent of annual salary. However, keeping employees aboard can be a challenge today as attitudes have surely shifted, loyalty is fleeting and customers and the revenue they provide have been significantly impacted.

Accelerate pace of communication

A key step is to increase communications frequency with both retained and furloughed employees. All employees hold a direct stake in the success of the firm and are often the front line of communication with customers, business partners and other stakeholders. They can be your greatest advocates through these turbulent times—but only if they feel the company is being transparent and keeping them informed.

This means more frequent communication—even when circumstances haven't changed—and being prepared to field tough questions about uncomfortable issues. While your communications strategy needs a certain amount of flexibility, it's unwise to play it by ear. Build a reasonable schedule and stick to it so employees know when they'll hear from you. This also forces management to prioritize this activity and to really think about the important issues and get aligned on messaging.

Thoughtful messaging is vital, and a good guidepost is to be as transparent as possible regarding what's happening at any given moment. Transparency should stay within limits, of course, and absolutes should be avoided at all costs. Remember: during a crisis, the stakes are amplified and leadership is in the spotlight. The most valuable asset you have in this environment is your credibility, so you can't afford to put it at risk.

With furloughed workers, maintain open avenues of two-way communication and offer good news when possible to keep them interested in returning to the workforce and staying engaged with the company. When sharing positive news, be particularly conscious of tone and context. This is a very difficult time for many and you don't want to appear celebratory when employees are struggling and the path forward remains uncertain.

Finding an authentic voice

If the company had to undergo more than one round of furloughs, and you're bringing people back in phases, it's important to be sensitive to how different groups may feel about their value and place in the company. Clearly explain and reiterate why actions need to be taken. Be the encouraging, inspiring and empathetic leader you'd want to hear from in this environment.

The approach isn't much different for retained employees. Knowing that your furloughed team members are likely in touch with colleagues and friends who've remained on the job, it's critical that the messaging remain consistent.

Businesses usually confront legal restrictions in formal communications with furloughed employees, and their access to channels like Slack or Teams will be similarly restricted. Creating a dedicated and up-to-date virtual space these workers can easily access to stay informed is an important step in this process.

Putting a human face on your communications is vital. Consider, for example, a bi-weekly video recording or fireside podcast. It's one thing to read about managing through difficult business conditions in a pandemic, and quite another to see and hear leadership explain it with conviction.

Cultivating employee ambassadors

Leadership should also identify and connect with employee ambassadors to determine the optimal way to reach all segments of the workforce, including those on furlough. The goal is to create a reliable process and vehicles for providing continual updates and collecting feedback so you understand and can address key concerns.

Though social media may feel like a natural avenue to employ to maintain these connections, it also comes with pitfalls. By design, social media is open and shareable and thus open to greater scrutiny. It's important to create a secure space where conversation can happen and messages are less likely to be misconstrued.

Alex Stanton

For the retained workforce, virtual happy hours over video-conferencing platforms have become popular. Team-wide and company-wide video chats allow you not only to inform but maintain a collaborative, supportive culture by addressing non-work-related matters. For more sensitive topics such as team or compensation changes, one-on-one engagement is the right approach even though it requires more coordination and investment of time.

Are you ready for the 'new normal?'

While there's hope we may soon be on the decline curve of this pandemic, now's the time to plan what "normal" will look like for your workplace and how communications practices need to evolve. You shouldn't assume that once there's a green light to return to the workplace that communication can be de-prioritized or become less frequent. Leadership must clearly articulate how you're thinking about the issue, and reiterate that employee health and peace of mind is your top priority. Employees need to know you've done everything you can to make their physical space as safe as possible.

For many businesses, the right move will be to put forth a plan but also to seek employee input so you can respond to concerns and make the necessary adjustments. Employees know the situation changes day-to-day and can react negatively to a policy dictated to them without input. Furloughed employees will have many of the same issues plus an additional layer of concern about go-forward job security, so it will be important to reinforce messaging about the stability of the company, speaking confidently but avoiding guarantees.

The pandemic is unprecedented and there's no one right approach. However, smart financial firms are rethinking how they engage with employees and how communications can create and maintain strong, lasting bonds. We're truly all in this together.

Alex Stanton is CEO of Stanton.

KEKST CNC

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Corporations and institutions around the world are confronting a series of unforeseen events that are fundamentally shifting the ways in which people work and live – and that have the potential to redefine businesses and entire industries.

This is a moment in time in which clear and transparent communication is essential. The demand upon leaders to communicate in a timely and effective manner with employees, customers, investors, and other key stakeholders has never been so critical.

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2020: the year of brand activism

Brands hold the power to affect societal change, by taking a stance and backing up their values through measurable action. As recent events have forced corporate leaders to self-reflect, however, some well-intentioned brands have resorted to "performative activism"—showing that empty words can risk brand credibility. How can PR pros help companies responsibly take a stand?

By Julia Bloch Mellon

From a global pandemic to widespread outcries for racial justice, 2020 has forced companies to listen better, reflect on their values and decide what steps they're willing to take to improve the state of our world.

In a capitalist economy, corporations have extraordinary power to shape society, especially when government falls short. As the maxim teaches us, "with great power comes great responsibility."

Brand activism around issues from sustainability to women's financial empowerment has been championed for years.

The events of the past six months made clear that brand activism must extend across societal issues, casting company actions and inaction into stark relief. Many companies have been called out for "performative activism," or professions of support, driven by marketing messaging without the underlying values and actions to match.

COVID-19, racial unrest raise the stakes

During the early days of COVID, the messages that engendered goodwill were examples of brands taking swift action to fill the desperate need for cash, PPE and supplies in virus hotspots. Think of the local distilleries that pivoted from making vodka to donating hand sanitizer; the grocery stores that launched senior hours to allow high-risk populations early access to quarantine supplies; the free flights JetBlue offered to incoming medical workers; and how we laughed and cried at Google's "Thank you, teachers. Thank you times infinity" ad celebrating front-line heroes while quietly providing educators with free access to G Suite for Education software.

These messages resonated and built loyalty and brand affinity because they were magnifying real, concrete things that brands did. Always actions speak louder than words, especially in times of crisis.

One recent example of the flip side of this coin is the performative activism of well-intentioned brands and individuals on Blackout Tuesday, when black squares clouded Instagram feeds with posts of professed allyship. Corporate brands rushed to publish statements in support of Black Lives Matter as protests following the death of George Floyd swept the country and the world. With a topic as difficult to navigate as racial inequity, both messages and actions may not always perfectly hit the mark.

Many CEOs and corporate brands backed up these statements by listening, learning and taking steps to support the cause. These brands understood that corporate activism is hollow when unaccompanied by concrete, measurable action. In fact, new research found that 73 percent of consumers expect BLM-related statements they receive from brands to be not only empathetic, but also be followed by measurable action.

As marketers, we love words. Words can tell a story, shape a narrative, craft an identity. But words without actions aren't only meaningless—they're expensive. They can cost a brand its credibility.

So, how can PR professionals and marketers—the fierce protectors of company reputation—ensure they are providing meaningful guidance to brands during this time?

Understand your customer ethos. In the current climate, many issues, even those seemingly in support of the common good—consider, for example, mask wearing—have become charged with polarized politics. The reality is that as much as today's consumers expect brands to take action on important societal issues, customers are also prepared to walk away from brands that don't reflect an ethos they can stand behind. As marketers and PR professionals, part of our job must be evaluating this reputational risk. It will require knowing your brand's current and prospective customer base, measuring their attitudes on issues and ensuring that business stakeholders have a plan in place to align the future of the business around its future customers. A recent academic study on the effects of corporate activism on financial performance found that activism well-aligned with stakeholder ethos nudged stock price up an average of one percent and sales by 10 percent. In contrast, poorly aligned corporate activism cost stocks an average of a two percent loss and reduced sales by over four percent.

Of course, as triple-bottom-liners have been saying for years: profit isn't everything. In some cases, companies will choose to take stances that may lead to short-term losses in order to do what they believe is right for both people and the planet. Corporate leadership is only possible by being ahead of the curve.

Take stock of your competitive landscape. By auditing the positioning of competitors and clients—and measuring the fallout of their activist stances—marketing professionals can clearly evaluate how a brand fits within the competitive landscape. With brands across industries wading into political discourse, there will be ample missteps to learn from. On a personal and professional level, humility, self-education and openness to feedback has never been more important.

Train your CEOs to know their power. Recent events have codified the principle that CEO actions can and will impact brand reputation. Many modern customers are unwilling to divorce the values of leaders from the brands they lead. In this setting, a CEO can be an asset and a liability. PR professionals accustomed to working with chief executives know that provocative leaders who say what they think can preserve a brand's leadership position. Conversely, controversial and politically charged stances can lead to boycotts.

Julia Bloch Mellon

Advocate for action with company leadership. Ultimately, marketers can't force a brand to take action. However, marketing departments can become an impetus for corporate change by asking challenging questions to pressure-check if values, words and actions truly align: "How have we supported American families and front-line workers during the pandemic?" "What percentage of our Board, C-suite, and senior leaders are people of color?" "What has our company done to reduce our environmental footprint?" Marketers have the power to hold up the looking glass and show brands the gap between corporate values and company reality. The next step is coming to the table with recommended actions to close that gap. One action within PR professionals' power is to examine the makeup of company spokespeople and push for diverse representation within leadership.

Like it or not, brands have the power to make an immediate impact on the lives of their employees and customers. Backed by data, marketers and communications professionals can be a positive force in this dynamic, encouraging company leadership to not just tell, but show what they stand for.

Julia Bloch Mellon is Senior Vice President of Financial Services at Bliss Integrated Communication.

B2B fintech: it's the content, stupid!

How to build brands and market awareness by developing creative, branded content that reaches critical audiences.

By Henry Feintuch

It's a pretty good bet that if you're working with a recognizable fintech brand such as VISA, PayPal, Venmo or other top tier organizations, your press releases are being read and your calls are being returned by reporters at top business, financial technology and vertical trade media.

But for the thousands of fintechs operating in the layers below—including innovative start-ups, critically important but lesser known infrastructure providers and a broad swath of B2B market providers—breaking through can be quite the task.

Couple that with a radically altered media environment with fewer media outlets, a shrinking news hole and overworked journalists holding down more beats and responsible for far more than just reporting, and you wind up with a significant challenge. How can you break through, build your brand and create a conversation with critical audiences?

Here are three examples. The campaigns or projects referenced aren't necessarily award-winning or Harvard Business case studies; they're simply examples of ways to package creative content to reach your critical audiences.

Develop market awareness

When you think of online trading, foreign exchange trading or forex may not necessarily be the first thing that comes to mind. Yet, the global forex market is the largest financial market in the world—larger than stocks—with a daily volume greater than $6 billion daily in 2019. The market trades 24 hours a day, six days a week. Our client, one of the first players to go public in the U.S., wanted help in educating investors and broadening out media coverage from the handful of niche publications and newsletters covering the FX market.

We decided to create a branded vehicle for the company to showcase its in-house research and expertise. "The Forex.com Quarterly Markets Outlook" launched in October 2009. The combination teleconference/webcast was designed for a sophisticated but broad media audience and included a recap of trends in the market during the past quarter, and a 50,000-foot level forecast of where the markets could be trading in the quarter ahead. International media alerts targeted key FX markets and those where our client was licensed. More than 100 investors and a dozen reporters joined the first webcast—more over time—with hundreds of downloads on-demand. Articles appeared on Dow Jones, *Businessweek*, Forbes.com, CNBC, Business News Network and ForexTV. Numerous requests for interviews followed and our Forex.com was able to use the webcast as an educational and sales tool for its clients for the two-year duration of the campaign.

Utilize a consumer omnibus

In 2018, Klarna was preparing to introduce a "Try Before You Buy" payment option for its existing and prospective online clients. But how do you communicate that credibly to etailers and convince them to switch or add the Klarna solution to their checkout mix?

Understanding the hesitancy many shoppers had in making online apparel purchases since they didn't have the chance to see or try on those items, we decided to field a broad omnibus survey. We asked more than 2,000 consumers about their attitudes and preferences towards a try now, pay later service that would not charge them anything for 30 days so they could receive, try on and return items they didn't want.

The findings were a blow-out:

- 74 percent of consumers said that having the ability to try on or try out goods before paying would remove a major drawback to their online shopping;
- 37 percent indicated a "Try Before You Buy" option would rank as their preferred payment option for buying apparel from an online retailer;
- 71 percent of respondents stated they would be moderately, very or completely likely to choose a retailer offering a "Try Before You Buy" option over one which did not offer this option; and
- 69 percent of consumers surveyed said they would be moderately, very or completely likely to buy more items from online merchants offering this payment option.

Key retail, fashion, fintech and business media picked up the story including *Chain Store Age*, Fashion United, Retail Dive, PaymentsSource, Luxury Daily, Fibre-to-Fashion and a feature in Yahoo! Finance. The coverage provided the launch boost our client sought and turned a routine fintech app launch into pop culture buzz.

Find an audience

Every fintech product or service has its own natural audience, however niche. Take the case of BasisCode Compliance, a leading provider of regulatory compliance and risk management solutions for the investment management sector. The company's cloud-based software suite is used by nearly 400 organizations globally for its core compliance, personal trading and insider trading solutions.

Only a handful of financial services trades cover the compliance area, and then not on a frequent basis. So, how to promote the company's solutions and help generate sales leads? Our solution was a thought leadership webinar.

Henry Feintuch

We approached the key industry association serving the market, the National Society of Compliance Professionals, and proposed a webinar on "How Best to Work with Compliance Consultants." We suggested a panel of two corporate compliance officers, who had experience in using compliance consultants, and two experienced compliance consultants, together with the CEO of BasisCode serving as moderator.

The webinar would be designed to educate NSCP members on not only on the best ways to utilize compliance consultants, but also when not to and why not to. After agreeing to NSCP non-commercial guidelines, we produced the webinar on Dec. 13, 2018. It attracted 160+ financial industry professionals whose registration information was provided to BasisCode and the panelists.

But we didn't stop there. We proposed that the NSCP's key member publication, *Currents*, run a Q&A/abridged version of the webinar as a feature article. Once approved, we edited the webinar transcript down to a 3,350-word summary which appeared in the June 2019 *Currents* issue.

Finally, we supported our client in sending out a marketing blast of the reprint to its client and prospect database. Triple impact to a finite and targeted audience

Content rules

Success in fintech and financial services relies heavily on content, understanding your key business objectives, knowing who you need to reach and a healthy dose of creativity. It's the challenge and joy of our industry.

In the final analysis—and with apologies to James Carville whose 1992 TV quip, helped elect Bill Clinton as President—in fintech and financial services, "it's the content, stupid."

Henry Feintuch is President of Feintuch Communications and a past President of PRSA-NY. O

How COVID-19 changed the fin. marketing playbook

Internal communications has been overlooked for far too long at financial institutions, and it took a global pandemic for many to realize their internal team is the foundation for everything they do.

By Andrew Healy

The financial services space is no stranger to economic crises and mass uncertainty. In just the last quarter century, they've experienced—and in some cases, caused—the 2008 financial crisis, the dot-com bubble, the 9/11 attacks, financial crises in Asia and Argentina and Black Monday.

Where COVID-19 will ultimately rank on this list is yet to be determined, but as with every industry and part of society, the coronavirus' impact on the financial services space will be deep and felt for years.

Marketers and communications professionals can't always see into the future, but the initial dust from COVID-19 has settled enough for a few takeaways to emerge.

Growing focus on internal comms.

I've argued for years that financial institutions too often overlooked one of their most critical audiences: their employees. Not every firm is guilty of this, and we've had the pleasure of working on some fantastic internal communications programs with clients, but brands often focus on external audiences first—media, investors, clients—with employee engagement falling down the list. Fortunately, that is changing.

As firms scrambled to adjust to a remote setting, they were literally forced to make their employees a top priority. It's somewhat unfortunate that it took a global pandemic for companies to realize their internal team is the foundation for everything they do, but it's been heartwarming to see brands step up to the plate and truly focus on their people.

I've had countless conversations with people who couldn't stop talking about how transparent and communicative their firms were during those difficult early weeks of the shutdown, and how reassuring it was to work for a company so focused on them during an unprecedented time of need. The financial brands that truly get this and take the time and resources to invest in this area will retain and attract good employees and, ultimately, win out.

Shift away from products

Finance operates like every other industry: customers have needs and financial firms fill that gap with services and offerings, from online stock trading platforms to mutual funds and ETFs, to more nuanced strategies for institutional investors and family offices. But the common thread throughout is the same: sell a product.

But in mid to late March when domestic markets were down more than 30 percent, cities all around the world were shutting down, and global uncertainty and fear around the virus was at its peak, the last thing clients wanted to do was go shopping.

Fortunately, most financial brands recognized this and changed their communications approach overnight. Gone were advertisements and articles touting new ETFs, and in their place, firms rolled out content aiming to help clients understand and get through the economic fallout.

Webinars, tutorials and increased social engagement replaced roadshows, product launches and media tours, and though a strong market recovery in Q2 has calmed nerves and consumers are again planning for the future and need financial advice and investment products, brands that continue to focus on educational and client-centric content will see their clients return the favor.

Shorter campaign windows …

Long-term strategic planning will always have a seat at the table, but COVID-19 has compressed the typical marcom planning window dramatically. Those annual 2020 plans that took so long to craft suddenly didn't offer the roadmap they did just a few weeks ago, and marketers had to shift immediately in response to the changes in their clients' needs.

With a Presidential election less than 100 days away and continued uncertainty due to the virus, brands need to remain flexible and nimble. Agility is a word that marketers love to throw around, but it's needed now more than ever.

… And shorter content

Just as brands need to adjust to a shorter marketing calendar, they also need to shift their content strategy as well. There is a minefield of macro and micro-economic concerns on clients' minds, offering brands a great opportunity to post more frequent, shorter-form content to respond to timely concerns and engage with their audiences.

Short-form video marketing has been on the rise for years, and for good reason, and this will continue to be a key part of ßbrands' marketing approach moving forward. Infographics, Q&As, blogs, podcasts and how-to content will also play a starring role as brands increase their content output in a fast-moving environment.

Measurement is king

Over the last 10 years, PR pros have made significant progress towards tracking and measuring their impact. Vague and outdated methods such as ad value equivalency and inflated media impressions have fortunately been replaced with more thoughtful, tangible metrics.

The shift towards digital has given PR pros access to a world of data they never knew existed, which in turn has helped agencies and brands do a better job tracking their efforts in real time and adjusting as needed. Optimizing on a regular basis is a more effective approach then a "set it and forget it" one, and working alongside clearly defined KPIs has helped the industry better articulate the value they're adding.

Andrew Healy

As budgets continue to feel pressure from COVID-19, measurement and ROI will be as important as ever. Communications pros will need to invest more time and resources in this area to better showcase their efforts, and clearly articulate how it ties back to corporate goals and revenue targets.

Be nimble

The emergence of the coronavirus came at a time where the financial marcom landscape was already going through a series of sea changes. Departments and disciplines that for decades were housed separately have since been merged, new strategies have emerged while old ones have faded to the background and C-suites today have a level of understanding and appreciation of communications that their predecessors often lacked.

Companies can weather traditional downturns and crises, but the uncertainty caused by COVID-19 has presented a unique challenge that firms weren't prepared for. I expect we'll see more project-based assignments, as brands deal with decreased budgets and delayed product launches. Brands will continue to consolidate their agency rosters, which will force agencies to diversify and expand their offerings. And everything will be reviewed on a nearly daily basis, as a campaign set to roll out next month that may look fantastic today might be tone deaf by next week.

Clients are more engaged today than ever, and that's a double-edged sword that PR professionals should remind themselves of every day.

Andrew Healy, is Partner and Co-Founder of Water & Wall.

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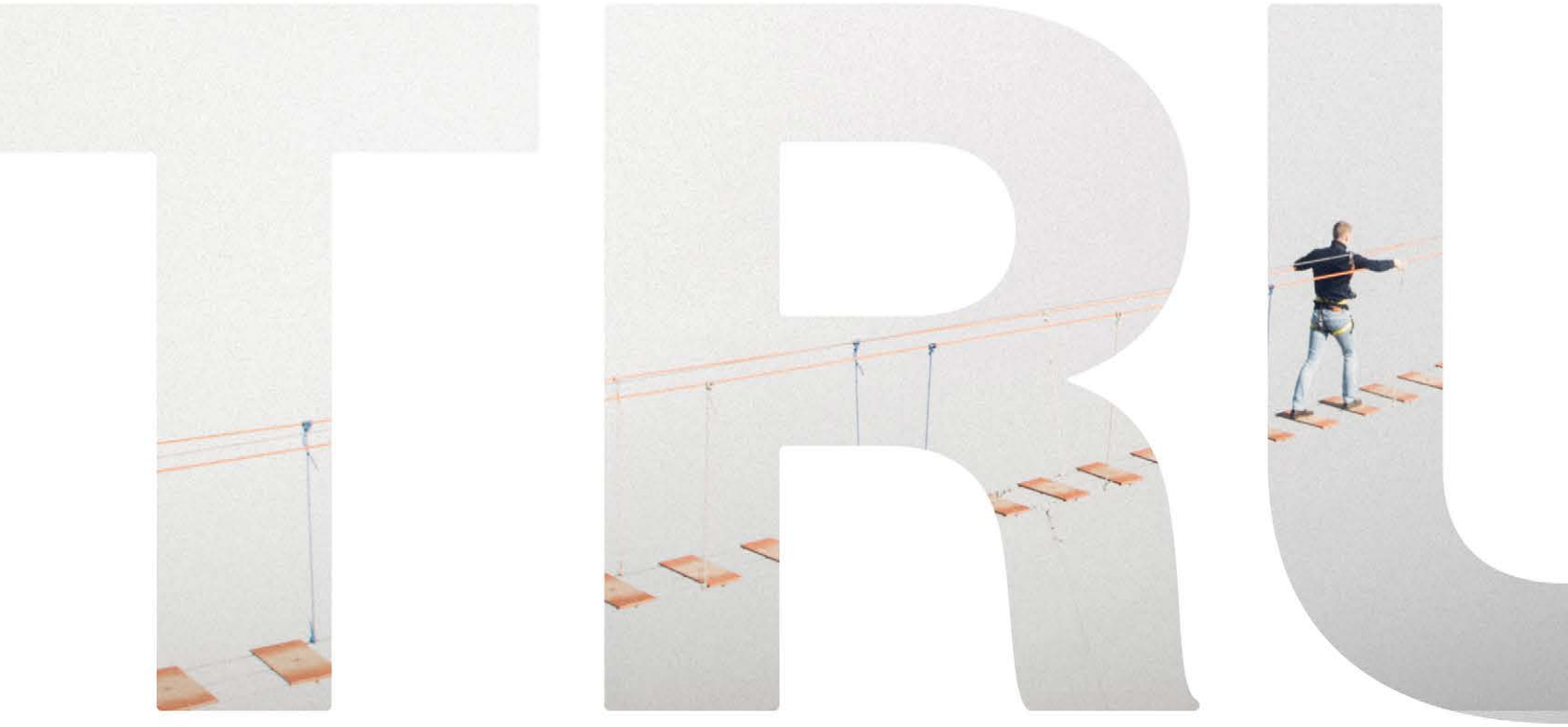

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Navigating the virtual event landscape

PR professionals must learn to transition to virtual events and find ways to get creative and generate opportunities for their clients.

By Ben Chodor

Live events are a vital component of every PR program. Brands rely on events of all sizes to showcase their latest innovations and corporate news, network with other industry professionals, meet new customers, and engage with media to garner press coverage. However, as of February, all in-person events came to a complete halt, and PR pros had to adjust their planned 2020 programming and revamp their strategies quickly.

With millions of dollars on the line, event organizers found a scalable solution—virtual events. Tech industry leaders like Oracle and Microsoft announced their in-person events for 2020 would shift to a virtual format. Given the nature of their business and roots in the tech sector, this seemed like a rather obvious solution. However, the momentum continued, and other brands and verticals began to follow suit, including healthcare, entertainment, and food and beverage.

Event organizers have started planning for 2021, and PR teams have begun drawing up plans to support different campaigns and event formats. If there is one thing we have learned it's that virtual events are here to stay. While we can agree nothing can truly replace an in-person event, there are several benefits to having both in-person and hybrid events. That said, PR professionals must learn to navigate the virtual event landscape and find ways to get creative and generate opportunities for their clients.

The right tools make a difference

While the nature of virtual events might appear to make it more challenging to interact with attendees directly, PR professionals can quickly remedy this by using the right tools at the right times. Are you hosting a press conference? Consider launching a branded live stream or webcast. With the right platform, you can also offer breakout rooms or 1:1 personalized video meetings and interactions. All of which are a win and well-received.

Personalization is key

Similar to live events, personalization is critical. PR pros should still attempt to interact as much as possible. Go the extra mile when it comes to media outreach. Consider creating personalized agendas, event plans, and activity links for reporters to navigate through the event. When creating these, remember your end goal and the story you are trying to create. Provide the reporter with the necessary sessions and content they'll need to remain engaged. By taking ownership of the schedule and direction, you create a seamless experience that they may remain engaged with.

Remember to engage

To strike the best engagement, you must bring the show to life. Whether you include gamification options, giveaways or swag bags, it helps! Reporters and influencers do not have the opportunity to touch, feel, or interact with your product or team. Instead, you can consider creating "booth kits" or "to-go" bags that they can unbox on a live feed alongside you. Don't hesitate to get creative with it either—perhaps it's a cocktail to sip while watching!

Lean into your digital channels

Amplifying your client's voice across social media and other digital channels is nothing new. Put time into crafting an ongoing digital media plan to broaden your audience and reach. Be sure you are promoting it on company channels, individual channels, and others continuously. Do not hesitate to include session titles or descriptions and always be sure to engage with hashtags, speakers, or attendees interested.

Train to the platform

To create the smoothest experience possible, be sure to become a pro at whatever platform a given event is using. This will take some training leading up to the event, but the long-term pay-off from knowing how to use platforms properly makes a difference. Hosting a pre-event training session for media members might allow you to stand out and guarantee a perfect virtual experience come event time.

Post-event takeaways

While following up with media members who attended your event is nothing new for PR pros, virtual events offer even more opportunity for post-event promotion. Be sure to check what kind of access you have to video archives, press releases, and other useful content following any given virtual event.

Ben Chodor

In summary, while the transition to virtual events might seem like a significant leap, PR professionals have an array of tools and strategies at their disposal to navigate this new landscape. As the industry continues to evolve, we must too!

Ben Chodor is President of Intrado Digital Media, which owns the PR workflow platform Notified.

Tech PR proves digital marketing's value

Despite tightened marketing budgets, internal communications programs facing big cuts and tradeshows put on hold, an overwhelming percentage of tech marketers said they've been able to illustrate the success of their digital marketing efforts to executives throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a report released by Atlanta-based tech PR shop ARPR.

The report, which sought to uncover what priorities, resources and strategies tech marketers will focus on in 2021 and how their tech PR and marketing budgets will be utilized going forward, found that after an entire quarter of online-only marketing, an overwhelming number of tech marketers polled (97 percent) said they've "definitely" or at least "somewhat" been able to prove the value of digital marketing to executives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One thing's for sure: it appears events are out as a priority for tech brands for the foreseeable future. Seven percent of respondents said their companies have already decided not to participate in the tradeshow circuit in 2021, and nearly half (49 percent) said they're currently unsure if their companies will attend tradeshows and conferences if they resume next year.

When asked where tech marketers would reallocate their budgets in the event that tradeshows and conferences don't return to normal, content marketing and paid digital ads shared the number-one spot, followed by virtual events, media relations, SEO and traditional advertising.

ARPR's "Data Report: Marketing in a Post-Covid World" report was based on data collected in June. and surveyed marketers at more than 100 tech companies, including enterprise brands and startups representing companies such as Amazon, Cox Communications and Rackspace and others.

Access to capital remains top challenge for women

The challenges of communicating available financial resources to women-owned businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By Temren R. Wroge

As the communications manager for the National Women's Business Council, I'm in the unique position of conveying the crucial mission of the Council, especially during this unprecedented and uncertain time.

The NWBC is a non-partisan federal advisory committee created to serve as an independent source of advice and policy recommendations to the President, Congress and the U.S. Small Business Administration on economic issues of importance to women business owners. NWBC has three policy priorities for 2020: Women in STEM, Rural Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Capital and Opportunity. Through in-depth conversations, roundtables and webinars with women business owners across the country, we've found that a lack of funding, financial assistance and resources still exist among women business owners and entrepreneurs. The Council seeks to close that gap and connect women in business to opportunities to start and grow their enterprises.

Because the NWBC is tasked with providing policy recommendations to the White House, Congress and the SBA, we work to identify ways that federal programs can be streamlined or adjusted to eliminate access barriers for women entrepreneurs. NWBC also seeks to raise awareness about relevant financial literacy issues and existing curriculum, programs and initiatives dedicated to teaching women entrepreneurs about capital and financial literacy, which may be amplified to help women build personal and business credit, build wealth and achieve financial security.

The financial challenges

Access to capital continues to be the biggest impediment to growth for women-owned businesses. Women access commercial loans at lower rates and receive less venture and equity capital than men. In order to accurately advocate for women business owners and founders, it's paramount to address the barriers that inhibit women.

NWBC's communication strategy seeks to create a climate for women entrepreneurs to flourish. In doing so, NWBC needs to engage a broader audience with compelling and accessible content informed by our mission. Because access to capital and opportunity is so important for women in business, the content that NWBC shares is to better inform policymakers of the work that still needs to be done to ensure that women in business have the opportunity to start and grow their enterprise.

Social media has been a successful way to share new opportunities for women in business. NWBC also works closely with women's business organizations like the Association of Women's Business Centers and the Women's Business Exchange National Council to highlight trainings being offered and also promote local resources for women in business.

NWBC is the only independent federal advisory committee devoted solely to the empowerment of women-owned businesses. However, federal agencies usually have an Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization and subdivisions or departments that focus on women and minorities and deliver relevant programming.

Providing financial resources

Amid the pandemic, NWBC's policy focus areas remain the same, but our means of engagement and outreach has shifted to solely virtual methods for the time being.

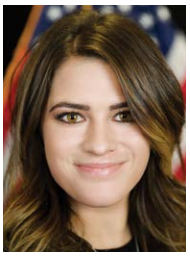
NWBC shifted its signature #LetsTalkBusiness Roundtable Series, which connects the voices of women entrepreneurs and business owners from across the country to policymakers in the Nation's capital and helps serve as a springboard for the Council's annual policy recommendations to Congress, the President and the SBA to an online platform. The latest roundtable focused on Women in STEM and was held virtually on July 28.

At the start of 2020, NWBC launched #WebinarWednesday—a monthly webinar series that serves as a platform for women entrepreneurs and business owners, to connect them to key advocates, experts, and useful resources that can help bolster their knowledge and skills, and elevate their entrepreneurial potential. NWBC has also used its #WebinarWednesday series to highlight resources amid the pandemic. In April, NWBC and the Vinetta Project teamed up for a virtual panel aimed at helping startup founders navigate the CARES Act. The April 2020 webinar helped break down the available federal relief for venture-backed startups. Experts from the SBA, JP Morgan and Graphite Financial discussed available resources, lending options and how to document your requests.

NWBC's email updates, monthly newsletters and #WebinarWednesday series all play a part in proactively sharing and disseminating resources and information surrounding the pandemic.

Impacting businesses through policy

Highlighting the unique role that women business owners fill in the economy and sharing their challenges and opportunities with policymakers allows for more effective recovery legislation and allows the voices of women business owners and entrepreneurs to be heard.



Temren R. Wroge

Because NWBC has shifted to a virtual platform and outreach strategy, the feedback that we receive during the webinars and roundtables is extremely valuable. Per our statute, NWBC submits an annual report to Congress and the Administration with policy recommendations at the end of each fiscal year, and the roundtable and webinar discussions serve as a springboard for those recommendations. NWBC also routinely meets with members of Congress and agency officials to share the council's mission and relay challenges for women's business enterprise.

In NWBC's most recent Annual Report, the Council sought to amplify the Women's Business Center program and the resources and trainings it provides to women looking to start or grow their business. NWBC recommended that the SBA consult with the Association for Women's Business Centers and conduct a market scan in order to cast a wider net when looking for a funding match and gauge the need for a business center within the community.

Federal programs, like the Women's Business Center program, give women in business the opportunity to learn about available resources to start, sustain and grow their businesses, which is extremely valuable as small businesses are being drastically impacted by the pandemic.

Proactive communication, representation

As we navigate the strange and turbulent waters of the COVID-19 pandemic, NWBC remains committed to our principal mission to assist women in their business endeavors. We remain flexible and prepared to grow and adapt to the changes that society brings. It's truly an honor to advocate for the nations' growing and committed base of women entrepreneurs.

Temren R. Wroge is Communications Manager at National Women's Business Council, in Washington, D.C. ○

O'Dwyer's guide to FINANCIAL PR & INVESTOR RELATIONS

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Bill Haynes, Founder & CEO

BackBay Communications is an integrated public relations, thought leadership content development, and digital marketing agency focused on the financial services sector, with special expertise in private equity, asset management, fintech, and impact investing.

BackBay is known for helping companies develop strong brands and drive new business through thought leadership, media relations, research and message development and integrated marketing campaigns. BackBay has very close relationships with the business and trade media. With 20 employees and offices in Boston and London, BackBay serves companies across the United States, Europe and elsewhere, leveraging global partners.

BackBay takes a brand-centric, content-driven approach to developing and executing market positioning and integrated communications programs for financial services firms including marketing strategy, content development, creative design, and multi-channel distribution of company news and perspectives to build brand awareness, credibility and drive new business for our clients.

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We work with some of the biggest names in asset management, insurance, wealth management, banking and private equity and have expertise in reaching niche audiences, including regulators, advisors, intermediaries, institutional investors, business owners, consumers, Millennials, women, mass affluent, and high-net-worth investors.

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Hey—can we talk to you for a second? Yeah—you—the person reading these descriptions.

Is it us or does this copy all seem the same? We bet nearly every agency description says "we're award winning" and "tech blah, blah, blah" and you're left wondering: who do I pick?

Here's our advice: pick an agency that is the right size to care about you passionately with the right team to get it done.

We of course think that's us! Bospar was named *PRWeek*'s Outstanding Boutique agency for the second year in a row, because we offer the best of big and small.

Like a big agency, Bospar has seasoned professionals across the country, based in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Orange County, San Diego, New York, and Washington, D.C. Its content department provides blog posts, case studies, ghost-written articles, messaging, positioning, press releases, social media content, website copy, infographics, research projects and videos.

But like a boutique, you will get attention from the most senior staff and a team of people who have worked together for years.

Bospar's staff includes journalists who know how to reverse-engineer media coverage from a client's needs and provide intensive media training with an insider's perspective. Bospar supports its media efforts with analyst and influencer relations, customer and third-party relations, case histories and speaking and awards programs. The agency's specialty is driving coverage from the likes of ABC to the *Wall Street Journal*.

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Justin Meise, President & Founder

Buttonwood Communications Group is a boutique public relations, marketing and strategic communications firm specializing in financial services. Founded in 2015, we have had the privilege to serve a diverse range of financial organizations from niche players to household names.

Buttonwood employs an integrated model emphasizing the development of strategic content to leverage across communications disciplines to maximize impact and value. Our team has built an impressive track record for designing and managing successful programs to promote products and services and transform brands for many B2C and B2B companies from asset management, exchange traded funds and brokerage to investment banking, private equity, hedge funds, specialty financing, mortgage and financial technology.

Clients include: FTSE Russell, Parametric, Westchester Capital Management, The Investment Advisor Association's Active Managers Council, LeaseAccelerator, Indus Valley Partners, and BondWave

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Dukas Linden Public Relations (DLPR) is a communications partner for leaders in finance, asset management, professional services, fintech and B2B technology. We create compelling narratives that expand our clients' share of voice, enhance their brand value and—most important—engage key audiences in a global marketplace.

Ranked #7 on *O'Dwyer's* list of top financial PR firms, we're driven by a passion to deliver targeted strategies and creative solutions that provide measurable benefits to clients—and help their businesses grow and succeed. Our full suite of integrated communications services includes: comprehensive messaging and media relations across multiple platforms, content creation, media and presentation coaching, crisis and special situations communications, online reputation management and internal communications.

DLPR's clients include well-known, large and middle-market companies in key areas of finance, including: institutional investing, mutual funds, ETFs, wealth management, alternatives and private equity, and investment and community banking. DLPR has proven professional services experience within accounting, business consulting, compliance, cybersecurity, economics, risk management, management consulting and law. DLPR also has strong experience in fintech and B2B technology.

DLPR has an exceptionally strong broadcast group that, on average, secures approximately 50 bookings per month, primarily on CNBC, Bloomberg, Fox Business and Yahoo! Finance.

Clients Include: ARK-Invest, Adams Street Partners, BlueMountain Capital, Brandes Investment Partners, Brightstar Capital Partners, Brown Advisory, Crossmark Global Investments, Eaton Partners, EisnerAmper, Global X Management, JMP Group, Muddy Waters, Navigant, Neuberger Berman, Raymond James and Robeco.

Richard Anderson, senior managing director, financial services, Feintuch Communications

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Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Our 6,000 people in more than 60 offices deliver communications strategies that give our clients the confidence to lead and act with certainty, earning the trust of their stakeholders. Our honors include the Cannes Lions Grand Prix for PR; *Advertising Age*'s 2019 A-List; the *Holmes Report*'s 2018 Global Digital Agency of the Year; and, five times, Glassdoor's Best Places to Work. Since our founding in 1952, we have remained an independent, family-run business. Edelman owns specialty companies Edelman Intelligence (research) and United Entertainment Group (entertainment, sports, lifestyle).

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Henry Feintuch, President
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From fintech to financial services, the Feintuch Communications team has the experience and know-how to help its clients achieve their business objectives.

Our fintech experience is strong and varied – with decades of hands-on support to companies in virtually every facet of the business from foreign exchange and payment technologies, to compliance software, loan platforms, trading technologies and more.

We provide integrated financial communications services to public and private companies seeking to raise capital, burnish their image or inform markets. Our senior team helps companies to fine-tune their corporate story for the investment community and their market position and differentiation to the business and trade press.

The Feintuch team provides strategic IR services in-house and partners with best-of-breed providers to deliver a full IR platform. We also help privately held companies with registered debt to tell their stories to the financial media.

Rick Anderson, financial practice head, is a former chair of PRSA's financial communications section. The firm's expertise is supported by the financial services specialists in the PR World Alliance, an international alliance of premier independent PR and IR consultancies.

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Moira Conlon, President

Founded in 2007, Financial Profiles is a strategic communications firm that specializes in creating value through effective communications. We partner with public and private companies as well as asset management firms, sell-side firms and trade associations to provide strategic counsel, value-based positioning and messaging, and access to investors, analysts and the press. We work across industry sectors and have a dedicated financial services practice.

Our senior team has deep expertise across a range of specialized services including investor relations, media relations, IPO preparation, M&A support, corporate positioning and messaging, media training, and crisis communications support. We are proud of successes in leveraging best-in-class communications to help our clients distinguish themselves, enhance credibility, and build Wall Street and media support.

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Ryan Barr, Practice Leader and Managing Partner (NY)

Finn Partners' Global Financial Services Practice advises companies on strategies to navigate today's highly competitive markets and complex regulatory environments. They also help clients achieve successful business outcomes through purposeful storytelling and integrated communications, and identify the most meaningful ways for clients to engage key audiences and inspire action. Led by industry veteran Ryan Barr, the practice has continued to build upon the momentum from last year's acquisition of London-based financial services firm, Moorgate Communications. In today's ever volatile markets, Finn's seasoned experts understand that modern companies must engage customers and clients in ways never before imaginable. Whether broadening brand awareness, building appreciation for clients transforming an industry or driving adoption of new products and services, Finn's Financial Communications practice combines smart data and analytics with creative programing and flawless tactical execution to deliver on our agency promise—be bold, meaningful and amazing for clients.

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Mark McCall, Global Segment Leader

C-suites, boards of directors, and business leaders from around the world come to FTI Strategic Communications with their most complex, business-critical issues that require diverse skill sets and integrated disciplines. As part of a global business advisory firm, we help these organizations manage change, mitigate risk and enhance their market position by combining decades of deep subject matter expertise with functional and disciplinary experience.

Our financial communications professionals serve as trusted advisors to management teams on a range of capital markets events as well as other stakeholder issues throughout the corporate life-cycle. We help clients navigate their most pressing challenges and opportunities around M&A, IPOs, restructuring, capital raising, corporate governance, ESG strategy, proxy fights, and shareholder activism. Our integrated capabilities in financial communications, corporate reputation and public affairs help clients protect and drive business value.

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The Hoyt Organization, Inc., is a full service, integrated communications firm which focuses on the financial sector as part of our real estate studio. As such, over the years, we've worked with private equity firms, venture capital firms, owner operator entities, direct lenders and other sources of capital wealth, so you can be assured that our team understands your market and will be dedicated to building out your message.

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Established in 1998, ICR partners with companies to execute strategic communications and advisory programs that achieve business goals, build awareness and credibility, and enhance long-term enterprise value. The firm's highly-differentiated service model, which pairs capital markets veterans with senior communications professionals, brings deep sector knowledge and relationships to more than 650 clients in approximately 20 industries. ICR's healthcare practice operates under the Westwicke brand (www.westwicke.com). Today, ICR is one of the largest and most experienced independent communications and advisory firms in North America, maintaining offices in New York, Norwalk, Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco, San Diego and Beijing. ICR also advises on capital markets transactions through ICR Capital, LLC. Learn more at www.icrinc.com. Follow us on Twitter at @ICRPR.

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Joele Frank, Managing Partner
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Joele Frank provides effective and disciplined communications counsel and support to help our clients take control in advancing their business and strategic objectives.

Our clients range from large, global public companies to smaller, private enterprises across virtually all industries. Our professionals have been recognized by our peers, the financial community and journalists for their quality work, strategic acumen and creative approach to challenging issues.

The firm's practice areas include investor relations, corporate communications and media relations, restructuring and bankruptcy, crisis communications and special situations, transaction and integration/change management communications, shareholder activism, ESG, litigation support, private equity, and design and digital.

Joele Frank consistently ranks among the top PR firms in announced restructurings, M&A transactions, and defense against activist investors.

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Jeremy Fielding, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Partner (New York)
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Kekst CNC is a leading global strategic communications firm with unparalleled expertise in helping global business and institutional leaders navigate challenges and opportunities as they grow, transform, and protect their organizations. Our clients rely upon the sound judgment, innovative thinking, and proven effectiveness of our highly experienced team of advisors to develop and execute the integrated communications strategies necessary to maintain the confidence of stakeholders in an era of accelerated change.

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Martin Mosbacher, President

Lansons Intermarket is a leading reputation management and strategic communications consultancy with offices in New York and London and clients throughout the global financial services industry. We provide a combination of strategic expertise and highly targeted execution designed to create integrated communications programs that will shape your firm's messages, produce impactful content and generate the media coverage and social media amplification that

builds and maintains reputation. Our key objective is to achieve sustained, measurable results.

With roots going back to 1986, Lansons Intermarket clients include leading asset managers, wealth advisors, investment marketplaces and exchanges, leading buy-side and sell-side institutions, banks, alternative investment providers, financial technology and service providers, as well as government and industry organizations.

Service is the key factor that sets us apart. At Lansons Intermarket, all clients work directly with a team of experienced financial communications professionals who understand your business, help shape your story, and know how to make that story resonate with the audiences you need to reach.

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Montieth Illingworth, CEO and Global Managing Partner

Montieth & Company is a specialist global communications agency with expertise in corporate communications, financial communications and public relations. It provides strategic communications solutions for key corporate initiatives and supports engagement with analysts and investors. The firm has offices in New York, London and Hong Kong, and works across global money and media markets.

The firm is known for its work with publicly listed and private clients across financial services (asset managers, investment banks, hedge funds and private equity firms), professional services, real estate, fintech, emerging technologies, aviation, manufacturing, natural resources and renewable energy. It has worked extensively with clients listed on public exchanges, including the NASDAQ, NYSE, TSX, FTSE and AIM, on investor relations and media relations. This includes raising a company's brand presence in the media, succession planning, M&A, capital raises,

Montieth Illingworth, CEO and Global Managing Partner of global communications agency Montieth & Company.

IPOs, quarterly and annual reporting, analyst relations and regulatory disclosures.

With the firm's wealth of experience in crisis communications, issues management, litigation communications and public affairs, Montieth & Company is also able to holistically assist clients on special situations relating to activist shareholders, insider trading, SEC and other regulatory actions, fund liquidation, bankruptcies, discrimination and sexual harassment cases, fraud and anti-trust lawsuits, among others.

Visit https://montiethco.com/expertise/corporate-financial-communications/ for more information on our specialist capabilities and work in financial PR and corporate communications.

You can view our previous client work here: https://montiethco.com/ourwork/

PEPPERCOMM

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Maggie O'Neill, Partner & Chief Client Officer
Tara Lilien, Chief Talent Officer

Peppercomm is an award-winning strategic, integrated communications and marketing agency headquartered in New York City with offices in San Francisco and London. The firm combines 25 award-winning years of expertise serving blue chip and breakout clients with forward-thinking new service offerings and the freshness of a start-up. This unique mix of experience and energy attracts and empowers teams with a creative edge, drive and a passion for promoting, protecting and connecting clients in a fast-changing marketplace.

Corporate purpose has become the buzzword of the year with many brands taking a stand on societal issues to drive marketing programs. Peppercomm's StandSmart is a purpose stress test that evaluates brands' business practices to ensure credibility and authenticity to stand behind their corporate purpose. Peppercomm's Employee Engagement helps Chief Human Resource Officers develop insight-led communications programs to attract and retain talent, ensure employees are informed and engaged, and create workplaces with genuine two-way dialogue.

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RF|BINDER

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Amy Binder, CEO

The RF|Binder Corporate & Financial Services practice has worked with some of the most recognizable brands across retail banking, asset management, brokerage, mutual funds, financial technology, insurance, professional services, and private equity. Our fully integrated communications team works closely with the firm's digital and analytics practice to develop and execute measurable programs closely tied to business objectives. We help organizations with all layers of their communication programming, from narratives and messaging, media relations, executive positioning, thought leadership, and corporate social impact programming, to implementing B2B/B2C communications initiatives, including social and digital media programming, content campaigns, branding and design, influencer relations, and more. Our team brings a broad understanding of the regulatory and compliance issues that govern communications around financial service companies and products, and take a consultative approach with our clients.

SITRICK AND COMPANY

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Michael S. Sitrick, Chairman and CEO

Less important than what you say about yourself is what others say about you.

• *The New York Times:* "The City's Most Prominent Crisis-Management Firm."

• *Forbes*: "The crew from the television magazine is banging on your door. You can have the security guard throw them out and know they'll trash you. Or you can sit down with them and figure that out of the hour you give them, they'll use only 40 seconds on air. And those 40 seconds will make you look very guilty. Better solution, call Mike Sitrick."

• *BusinessWeek*: That's unbelievable. This is the heavy artillery." Quote is from the CEO of one of the largest PR firms in the world, after learning we were brought in on the other side of a contentious matter in which his firm was involved.

Since our firm's founding 31 years ago, we have been consistently ranked among the top crisis and strategic communications firm in the nation.

The majority of the firm's senior executives are former editors and reporters from news organizations that include the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, Bloomberg, *Los Angeles Times*, *Forbes*, CBS News, and NBC News. We also have former practicing attorneys and business executives.

Matters with which we have been involved include litigation support of all kinds; intellectual property matters, allegations of stock manipulation, wrongful termination, contract disputes, allegations of fraud and fraudulent inducement, wrongful death claims, allegations of illegal drug use, SEC matters, and a variety of other white-collar crimes. We have also handled criminal and civil cases against

_ Continued on page 32

SITRICK AND COMPANY

_ Continued from page 31

companies and their executives for such things as price fixing, insurance fraud, options backdating, antitrust violations, race and sex discrimination, sexual harassment, racism and #MeToo matters. We have a significant data breach, mergers and acquisitions and corporate governance practice and have done extensive work combatting short sellers. Other issues include sensitive environmental matters, racketeering cases, family disputes, and high-profile divorces, reputation management and reputational positioning. We have also been involved in helping to launch such firms as Oaktree Capital.

Offices are in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Boston and Washington, D.C., though we have handled cases all over the world.

For additional information including clients for whom our work was public and additional media comments about our firm see: www.sitrick.com.

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Stanton works with a wide variety of firms in financial services and asset management helping raise their profiles, build their reputations, and grow their businesses. Our clients range from funds and brokerage firms to private equity, venture capital and private credit; and from risk management, insurance, and reinsurance to a variety of fintech and tech-enabled financial services companies. Our work has earned us a place on the *Observer* Power List of financial PR firms two years in a row.

With offices in New York and the San Francisco Bay Area, we are a full-service agency supporting our clients across a variety of communications disciplines including media relations, brand messaging, content development and marketing, internal communications, executive visibility, thought leadership, digital and traditional marketing, reputation & crisis management, executive counsel, and social media. Our deep understanding of the financial services world and the media covering it allows us to position clients effectively in today's complex environment. Our senior professionals spend the majority of their time on client work, ask tough questions, challenge assumptions, and suggest bold solutions. Flexibility, collaboration, responsiveness, and bureaucracy-free service are the hallmarks of our client relationships. Clients find a home at our firm because we deliver a unique blend of smart strategy, strong relationships, innovative thinking, and first-class execution that produces business-changing results.

From left: Vested President & Co-Founder Binna Kim, CEO & Co-Founder Dan Simon and COO & Co-Founder Ishviene Arora.

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Nationally ranked in financial services and technology industries, along with the #2 position in Georgia and Atlanta's fastest growing, Trevelino/Keller continues to see success in both its financial services as well as fintech markets. Working in collaboration with the Technology Association of Georgia, Trevelino/Keller continues its ongoing support of Fintech South Conference. Based in one of the strongest financial services markets in the country, Trevelino/Keller has built a balanced practice, working in peer to peer lending, credit unions, payment processing, factoring, tokenization, merchant cash advances, cyber security software and data analytics to name a few. Representing emerging, middle market and national brands, the agency gravitates towards four distinct communities—disruptive forces, category pioneers, stealth leaders and wonder women. Its suite of services includes public relations, integrated marketing, demand generation and creative services.

Having successfully solidified its position as one of the preeminent technology firms in the Southeast, its financial services practice integrates into the firm's existing base of business and consumer experience. Following one of its most successful years, ranked among the top 15 fastest growing firm in the US, the firm has moved from a service-focused to an outcome-driven philosophy, building customized programs around growth, value, leadership and engagement. Owning the industry's number one retention rate, having lost one staffer to an agency in 17 years, the firm is known for its progressive, culture-rich programs like Red with Ted, Cooleaf Pro, Read to Lead, Farm to T/K and its soon to be launched, Voice4Change Project. For more information, visit trevelinokeller.com.

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Amer Roberts, CEO of Professional Services
Elspeth Rothwell, CEO of Vested UK

Vested is an award-winning, global integrated communications firm that is at the front of the rapidly evolving financial sector. The agency's approach merges deep financial expertise with creativity and an obsessive commitment to creating value for clients through paid, earned, shared and owned channels. Vested works with brands across financial services, ranging from newer fintechs to institutional firms. Its clients include American Express, Morgan Stanley, Morningstar, Bloomberg, Grayscale, SEI, Scotiabank and RBC Capital Markets, among others.

The agency, which has offices in New York, San Francisco, London and Toronto, is a founding member of the Global Fintech PR Network and operates an investment group, Vested Ventures. In 2019, it made a strategic investment in PR/content firm Caliber Corporate Advisers, and acquired the financial content marketing firm Scribe. Vested has been recognized as one of Inc.com's Top Places to Work, *Bulldog PR*'s Best Industry-Focused Agency, PRovoke's Financial PR Agency of the Year, and *PRNews*'s Best Places to Work.

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Andrew Healy, **Matt Kirdahy** & **Scott Sunshine**, Partners

Water & Wall is an award-winning communications and marketing agency specializing in earned media, content strategy/development, branding, design, and crisis communications.

Our team helps build and maintain the reputations of financial and professional services brands and we've worked with the most well-known names in the business. Our financial industry experience includes retail/institutional asset managers, hedge funds, private equity funds, VC firms, ETF providers, wealth managers, fintech companies, investment consultants and more. Our professional services experience extends to law and accounting firms, management and regulatory change consultants, executive compensation specialists and real estate companies.

We're as careful at selecting our clients as they are at selecting us, and if we work together, you'll have our undivided attention, out-of-the-box thinking and, perhaps most importantly, our unwavering commitment to your success.

O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

TOP FINANCIAL PR & INVESTOR RELATIONS FIRMS

Firm	Net Fees (2019)
1. **Edelman,** New York, NY	**$83,645,000**
2. **ICR,** New York, NY	**49,124,635**
3. **Prosek Partners,** New York, NY	**48,213,707**
4. **APCO Worldwide,** Washington, DC	**11,223,699**
5. **Vested,** New York, NY	**9,236,000**
6. **Finn Partners,** New York, NY	**8,825,000**
7. **Gregory FCA,** Ardmore, PA	**6,400,000**
8. **Dukas Linden Public Relations,** New York, NY	**6,318,683**
9. **Lambert,** Grand Rapids, MI	**5,136,000**
10. **Bliss Integrated Communication,** New York, NY	**3,976,000**
11. **Padilla,** Minneapolis, MN	**3,939,768**
12. **BackBay Communications,** Boston, MA	**3,674,919**
13. **RBMG (RB Milestone Group),** Stamford, CT	**3,433,225**
14. **Caliber Corporate Advisers,** New York, NY	**2,922,102**
15. **Hewes Communications,** New York, NY	**2,761,129**
16. **Zeno Group,** New York, NY	**2,633,958**
17. **IMRE, LLC,** Baltimore, MD	**2,573,000**
18. **5W Public Relations,** New York, NY	**2,100,000**
19. **G&S Business Communications,** New York, NY	**1,978,358**
20. **Inkhouse,** Waltham, MA	**1,692,445**
21. **Kivvit,** Chicago, IL	**1,611,164**
22. **Peppercomm,** New York, NY	**1,571,186**
23. **Havas Formula,** New York, NY	**1,476,595**

Firm	Net Fees (2019)
24. **Buttonwood Comms Group,** New York, NY	**$1,212,200**
25. **KCD Public Relations, Inc.,** San Diego, CA	**989,089**
26. **360PR+,** Boston, MA	**771,240**
27. **Greentarget Global LLC,** Chicago, IL	**769,590**
28. **Akrete,** Evanston, IL	**710,121**
29. **Pierpont Communications,** Houston, TX	**689,114**
30. **Standing Partnership,** St. Louis, MO	**671,717**
31. **rbb Communications,** Miami, FL	**538,819**
32. **Beehive Strategic Communication,** St. Paul, MN	**515,166**
33. **Bradford Group, The,** Nashville, TN	**426,370**
34. **Butler Associates, LLC,** New York, NY	**366,762**
35. **Jackson Spalding,** Atlanta, GA	**360,732**
36. **Trevelino/Keller,** Atlanta, GA	**330,000**
37. **IW Group, Inc.,** West Hollywood, CA	**287,000**
38. **French I West I Vaughan,** Raleigh, NC	**260,237**
39. **MP&F Strategic Communications,** Nashville, TN	**230,760**
40. **Fish Consulting,** Fort Lauderdale, FL	**173,000**
41. **Brownstein Group,** Philadelphia, PA	**112,953**
42. **SPI Group LLC, The,** Fairfield, NJ	**100,000**
43. **O'Malley Hansen Communications,** Chicago, IL	**92,000**
44. **Buchanan Public Relations,** Bryn Mawr, PA	**79,286**
45. **Hoyt Organization Inc., The,** Torrance, CA	**65,000**
46. **Tunheim,** Minneapolis, MN	**14,469**

Thought leadership, now and after the pandemic

The importance of developing thought leadership programs that build brand and reputational capital.

By Doug Donsky

From global law and management consulting to accounting and executive search, 2020 has been a tough—if not terrible—year for professional services. Not only have salaries, employees and budgets been cut for many, but most professional workers have been forced out of their offices and into their homes and are now gamely trying to balance the demands of clients and new business efforts with those of family. Everyone's just trying to hang on, but hanging on won't likely cut it in 2021 and beyond. And it has raised a question within professional services that many would just as soon avoid: How will we ever win new clients if nobody ever wants to physically meet again?

COVID business development challenge

This isn't an inconsequential question and, unfortunately, there's not a readily apparent answer. All businesses thrive on relationships, but professional services is uniquely driven by the needs of the client, which can require grueling travel, pulling an all-nighter at the office or working onsite for weeks, months or even years at a time.

Against the backdrop of the global pandemic, Zoom and other video services have been a lifesaver in keeping professional firms' communicating with their clients and business moving forward, as well as providing strong evidence that work-from-home actually works, improves productivity and offers a better work-life balance for employees.

What this new virtual "office light" work environment hasn't proven, however, is whether it's sustainable and, specifically, whether it can become a profitable business model for professional services long term. Moreover, it says nothing about fashioning a winning organizational culture, which prioritizes and respects collegiality, team work and mentorship. FaceTime can't replace "face time," especially for younger employees who need to learn from managers by observing.

Despite these headwinds, a small number of firms are in fact having a record year, while the vast majority are coping with some level of pain. And within this small but elite group, there's one common denominator: reputation. Almost always, the firm is known for something. Or, more specifically, someone at the firm is known for something. They can be rainmakers or "umbrellas," those so knowledgeable they can keep a client dry when it pours. But regardless, they're vital within professional services and often the key difference between the elite and the pack.

The importance of thought leadership

If business development separates the successful from the rest, then thought leadership is the platform to generate new business. Thought leadership has long been a cornerstone of professional services business development, but without the ability to develop relationships and establish credentials in person, implementing a thought leadership program takes on increasing importance. Today's pandemic crisis, therefore, is forcing many to look deeply toward deciding what they're known for and whether they're truly a leader or just another competitor in a hyper competitive industry. Even the largest and most successful global consultancies are reevaluating whether they can truly be all things to all people. And many are trying to get ahead of the coming industry shakeout and consolidation, deciding today where they want to place their time, resources and focus, as well as how they wish to communicate to become the go-to providers for their expertise.

The three Cs of thought leadership

Developing thought leadership involves many ingredients but, critically, it requires a champion at the top and strong consistency of fresh and timely content, which continues to drive the point of competitive differentiation and market expertise home. Without delving too deeply, it's best for those in public relations and strategic communications to keep thought leadership focused around three simple themes when explaining to either internal or external stakeholders:

Captivate. In today's always-on and always-communicating world, you'll never be heard above the dissonance if you're timid. You need a strong point of view and a gifted messenger, one who can captivate both mind and spirit, as well as simplify the solution. Being edgy—not crazy—while also being thoughtful—not frantic—are solid guideposts to consider for creating impactful thought leadership. Of course, you can remain an impassive observer; nobody's forcing you or your organization into the traffic. But you won't build much of a reputation staying on the sidewalk and, eventually, you need to figure out a safe way to cross the street if you ever hope to get somewhere.

Content. In thought leadership, content is king. Companies serious about building reputation work hard every day to be both opportunistic and thoughtful, looking at ways to insert themselves into trending conversations while building "set pieces" into a calendar that consider surveys, white papers, conferences, webinars, podcasts and more. In addition to bringing ideas, media relationships and strong writing to the table, strong communicators also play the crucial roles of "convener" and "challenger-in-chief," assembling people from different areas to discuss the latest news and asking how new ideas, products or services tie back to a firm's mission, objectives or messages.

Doug Donsky

Capture. One of the biggest failings in thought leadership is the inability to "capture," which means growing a loyal audience actively engaged in your ideas. LinkedIn is a fantastic platform, but especially when it comes to crushing egos and putting people in their rightful place. Everyone on LinkedIn has "connections," a few have "followers," fewer still have graduated to loyal "subscribers," and a rarefied group are recognized as "influencers." With a global audience of more than 700 million, LinkedIn today has roughly 800 influencers. (I'm not great at math, but I would say that's infinitesimally small.) Most have earned that exalted status by their position, not because they actually said anything of interest. More interesting, though, is that a lot of LinkedIn's most prominent influencers are sort of nobodies who have busted into the club because they have strong opinions, great ideas and, of course, publish regularly. That should show there's hope for all. But you sort of need to bring it if you're going to capture attention.

Even before the pandemic, professional services was hurting. Artificial intelligence was automating many services, clients were yanking more work in house, and there was little time during the day for relationship building, which gave rise to extending day into night with dinners and evening client events. In a virtual world, however, a lot of this has gone away and won't be coming back soon. Thought leadership is the one and maybe only certain way forward, providing an opportunity—not a guarantee—of how to build and bank reputational capital. Time, however, isn't on the industry's side.

Doug Donsky is a Managing Director in ICR, Inc.'s real estate, financial services and professional services group.

Value vs. vanity: metrics that matter for earned media

Clients often want press—even if it's not the right press. PR professionals must have the ethics and wisdom to help clients get value-based placements, not placements that simply look good.

By D.J. Jordan and Dustin Siggins

"With great power comes great responsibility." From Uncle Ben's mouth to Peter Parker's ears to PR practitioners' computers, two recent national surveys show the power of earned media and the serious responsibility we bear to serve our clients and the general public.

The first study was Edelman's June "Brand Trust In 2020" special report. Forty-four percent of respondents said earned media would help them choose a brand, while 51 percent would leave a brand over media coverage. The second survey came from Bospar in July; earned media drove 19 percent of respondents to visit a company's website after just one mention. After 10 mentions, 85 percent of respondents visited a company's site.

In a time when a single bad story involving politics, injustice or the pandemic can have real consequences on real people's lives—or can change an entire industry and launch a social movement—executives need to take the power we bear and use it in ways that improve our companies, our clients and the world.

Company culture

The area that executives can most influence is within their company. Hiring the right people with the right values sets your company on the path to ethical and long-term growth. A trustworthy team treats clients like friends and each other like family. Together, they'll help each other become better and maximize the value your firm can bring to a client.

Building the right culture and the right team is solely on the CEO. As described in great detail by former Navy Seals and Iraq War veterans Jocko Willink and Leif Babin in their book "Extreme Ownership," the buck can't stop with anyone else. The CEO's values—open door policy or strict hierarchy? Formality in the workplace or a looser structure? Snide comments about staff or solutions-focused? Discrimination and hypocrisy, or admirable ethics?—will guide every decision the company makes from day one.

You set the policies, the tone and the success of your company long before the first prospect is pitched and the first contract is signed. Once you have the right values and the right team to fit those values, your company is ready to guide clients to getting positive earned media.

Clients

A CEO must guide clients. This is doubly difficult because most people and prospects don't fully understand what PR is. Worse, our respective firms find that many client prospects have been burned by alleged PR experts at least once, sometimes to the tune of thousands of dollars. These short-term "experts" create long-term problems for the rest of us.

The amorphous nature of PR requires success to start with earning client trust. Pinkston Group does this by promising the "wow" factor to clients. Proven Media Solutions published a "good-faith effort" pledge so clients know what they're getting for their money. Our firms seek first to show a prospect that they aren't just getting placement: they're going to make a real difference for their customers, staff, vendors, investors and other stakeholders. And, in a time of social unrest and extreme discourse, for society at large.

Once the client signs on the dotted line, you must continue to prioritize ethics by putting client goals first. For example, you may want to get the client placed quickly to prove you can produce. However, the client may not be ready for that much exposure, especially if their message isn't fully developed. Overwhelming a client and causing them to flounder benefits your company in the short run, but costs you thousands of dollars—and them tens of thousands of dollars—in the long run.

On the other side of the coin is moving the client too slowly. We've both seen PR "professionals" take advantage of client ignorance by placing them well below their level of influence. It's a lot easier than aiming high, but it doesn't serve your client—just you.

The Goldilocks approach is one that brings the client along with your approach. Taking the time to educate a client on your process to accomplish their goals is hard, but it's the right thing to do. Follow "Never Split the Difference" author and former FBI hostage negotiator Chris Voss' win-win negotiation style by guiding your clients to "that's right" moments where they understand what you're doing and why. Seek to truly see the world from their point of view, then mirror their language and goals so you both take ownership of the strategy.

The final step in the trust-building process is to have agreed-upon metrics for success. Any so-called PR "expert" can get a client placed. The ethical and success-oriented practitioner will seek placements that meet specific goals to build the client's brand towards accomplishing long-term goals and aspirations.

Social ethics

In the Bible, Judas sold Jesus Christ out for 30 pieces of silver. Where's your line in the sand to maintain your values while still growing your business? You must know where yours is to uphold your company's values, truly serve your clients and make a positive mark in the world.

D.J. Jordan

In a diverse society, it's hard to only serve clients who fully line up with your values. Senior executives must decide how to incorporate one's personal and social ethics into getting clients great press and influencing public opinion.

Dustin Siggins

In short, you must ask if telling a great story puts your company on the track to success or makes you a modern-day Judas.

Cancel culture to changing a culture

Every PR agency has the potential to change the world. One of our firms works with a government contractor lender that, yes, wants to grow and make money, but also wants to become the ethical lender of choice for small businesses that are regularly taken advantage of by predatory lenders. The Consumer Technology Association likewise represents a $400 billion industry, but it has also launched a foundation which connects seniors to technology to keep them connected to loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"With great power comes great responsibility." PR executives have to decide how to use their power to lead their company, their clients and the greater society. The line between "cancel culture" and changing a culture is a small one, but it means the world to the world.

D.J. Jordan is a Vice President with The Pinkston Group. Dustin Siggins is CEO of Proven Media Solutions.

O'Dwyer's guide to PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

5W PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Dara Busch, **Matthew Caiola**, Presidents

Since 2003, New York City-based 5W Public Relations (5WPR) has worked with widely known and emerging brands, corporations and high-profile individuals. Our practice areas include Consumer Products & Brands, Food & Beverage, Health & Wellness, Beauty, Apparel & Accessories, Home & Housewares, Travel & Hospitality, Entertainment & Sports, Corporate, Technology, Public Affairs & Government Relations, Nonprofit, Crisis Communications, Events, Digital Marketing & Social Media. We have a 360-degree approach to PR, social media, branding and digital marketing that delivers game-changing results to our clients.

Our 150+ tenacious and creative communications practitioners develop and execute creative campaigns that connect our clients with their target audiences in memorable ways. Every aspect of our programs are designed to impact our clients' bottom line, bringing leading businesses a resourceful, bold and results-driven approach to communication.

5WPR's diverse client experience includes Sparkling ICE, It's a 10 Haircare, jane iredale, Bowlmor AMF, CheapOAir, L'Oreal, SAP NS2, VIZIO, The Trade Desk, CareerBuilder, Santa Margherita, Topps, Retro Fitness, Welch's, LifeStyles, SodaStream and Zeta Global, among others. Our innovative programs have received recognition and we have won many awards including PR Agency of the Year, PR Executive of the Year, Product Launch of the Year and Business to Business Program of the Year.

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Bill Haynes, Founder & CEO

BackBay Communications is an integrated public relations, thought leadership content development, and digital marketing agency focused on the financial services sector, with special expertise in private equity, asset management, fintech, and impact investing.

BackBay is known for helping companies develop strong brands and drive new business through thought leadership, media relations, research and message development and integrated marketing campaigns. BackBay has very close relationships with the business and trade media. With 20 employees and offices in Boston and London, BackBay serves companies across the United States, Europe and elsewhere, leveraging global partners.

BackBay takes a brand-centric, content-driven approach to developing and executing market positioning and integrated communications programs for financial services firms including marketing strategy, content development, creative design, and multi-channel distribution of company news and perspectives to build brand awareness, credibility and drive new business for our clients.

Our services include strategic integrated marketing plans, media relations, content creation, branding, website development, marketing materials, videos, advertising and social media.

Our industry work and experience includes: Accounting, Advisory, Asset Management, Banks, Financial Technology, Hedge Funds, Impact Investing, Insurance, Legal, Private Equity, Venture Capital and Wealth Management.

The October issue of *O'Dwyer's* will profile Healthcare PR firms.
If you would like to be profiled, contact Editor Steve Barnes at 646/843-2089 or steve@odwyerpr.com

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Bliss Integrated Communication's roots in professional services run 45 years deep. We count among our clients some of the nation's leading consulting, law and accounting firms, non-profits and associations, as well as innovative technology-enabled B2B solutions providers. Our clients operate across industries including retail, manufacturing, healthcare, technology and more.

Because professional services companies go to market on intangibles (ideas, expertise, education, advocacy, services), we create messages that codify our clients' unique selling propositions to help them stay consistently visible in the media and relentlessly valuable to the markets they serve.

We're energized by complex ideas and translate them into differentiated marketing programs that are achievable, on-strategy and high-impact. We treat our clients' businesses as our own, diving deep to build a seamless understanding of your brand, goals and path to growth. We are channel-agnostic, focused foremost on helping you attract and retain the right audiences at the right time in the sales cycle.

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Julie Talenfeld, CEO
Don Silver, COO

When law and accounting firms seek out the very best and brightest Florida PR, social media, and digital marketing specialists, they count on Boardroom Communications (DBA BoardroomPR).

We are a full-service public relations and integrated marketing agency delivering results for many of Florida's top law and accounting firms. By utilizing a systematic approach to bridge new and traditional media, our clients have an edge in rising above Florida's highly competitive professional services market.

For more than 30 years, clients have turned to BoardroomPR for creative solutions to increase visibility, establish credibility and ultimately make their phones ring. Our highly experienced team of former journalists, multimedia and web marketing specialists, and senior marketers have more than 150 years of combined experience counseling attorneys, accountants, and their firms. Services include media relations, press conferences, media training and crisis management, social media, website marketing, video production and new business development training.

Whether you are a specialized boutique, a statewide firm or a Florida office of an out-of-state firm, we can help bring you to the next level. BoardroomPR has the experience and know-how to get the job done.

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Is it us or does this copy all seem the same? We bet nearly every agency description says "we're award winning" and "tech blah, blah, blah" and you're left wondering: who do I pick?

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Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Our 6,000 people in more than 60 offices deliver communications strategies that give our clients the confidence to lead and act with certainty, earning the trust of their stakeholders. Our honors include the Cannes Lions Grand Prix for PR; *Advertising Age*'s 2019 A-List; the *Holmes Report*'s 2018 Global Digital Agency of the Year; and, five times, Glassdoor's Best Places to Work. Since our founding in 1952, we have remained an independent, family-run business. Edelman owns specialty companies Edelman Intelligence (research) and United Entertainment Group (entertainment, sports, lifestyle).

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Need support overseas? Our firm is an active and founding member of PR World Alliance (PRWA), an international alliance of premier independent communications consultancies. Clients can leverage our network to implement projects throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Our principal is CFO of PRWA and a past president of PRSA-NY

Henry Feintuch, President, Feintuch Communications and CFO, PR World Alliance.

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Mark McCall, Global Segment Leader

C-suites, boards of directors, and business leaders from around the world come to FTI Strategic Communications with their most complex, business-critical issues that require diverse skill sets and integrated disciplines. As part of a global business advisory firm, we help these organizations manage change, mitigate risk and enhance their market position by combining decades of deep subject matter expertise with functional and disciplinary experience.

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FTI CONSULTING

_ Continued from page 37

restructuring, capital raising, corporate governance, ESG strategy, proxy fights, and shareholder activism. Our integrated capabilities in financial communications, corporate reputation and public affairs help clients protect and drive business value.

HOPE-BECKHAM INC.

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Bob Hope, President & Co-Founder, bhope@hopebeckham.com
Paul Beckham, Chairman & Co-Founder, pbeckham@hopebeckham.com

Hope-Beckham Inc. (HBI) is an independently owned public relations firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Formed in 1994 by Paul Beckham and Bob Hope, the agency has positioned itself as one of the top independent public relations firms in the country. The firm has won many awards and honors, including top independent PR agency in nine categories; Professional Services, Environmental, Beauty & Fashion, Healthcare, Food & Beverage, Financial, Sports & Entertainment, and Technology.

HBI is an agency driven by a culture of insights, ideas and relationships. We help brands tell their stories on local, regional and national levels and make meaningful connections with customers, employees and industries.

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Phil Denning, Partner, ICR (Phil.Denning@icrinc.com)

ICR's professional and business services team brings several decades of experience working with large and midsized accounting firms, top business advisors and management consultancies, global law firms, talent and executive search firms and other critical services organizations. Our innovative campaigns for service organizations have earned the most prestigious industry awards. As one of the largest independent corporate communications agencies in North America, we can create teams with the exact experience and skills needed to achieve your business objectives, raise your profile and address the most challenging assignments.

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Joele Frank provides effective and disciplined communications counsel and support to help our clients take control in advancing their business and strategic objectives.

Our clients range from large, global public companies to smaller, private enterprises across virtually all industries. Our professionals have been recognized by our peers, the financial community and journalists for their quality work, strategic acumen and creative approach to challenging issues.

The firm's practice areas include investor relations, corporate communications and media relations, restructuring and bankruptcy, crisis communications and special situations, transaction and integration/change management communications, shareholder activism, ESG, litigation support, private equity, and design and digital.

Joele Frank consistently ranks among the top PR firms in announced restructurings, M&A transactions, and defense against activist investors.

Hope-Beckham Chairman & Co-Founder Paul Beckham (left) and President & Co-Founder Bob Hope.

PEPPERCOMM

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Peppercomm is an award-winning strategic, integrated communications and marketing agency headquartered in New York City with offices in San Francisco and London. The firm combines 25 award-winning years of expertise serving blue chip and breakout clients with forward-thinking new service offerings and the freshness of a start-up. This unique mix of experience and energy attracts and empowers teams with a creative edge, drive and a passion for promoting, protecting and connecting clients in a fast-changing marketplace.

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Amy Binder, CEO

RF|Binder is a fully integrated communications agency that has worked with some of the most recognized brands across the spectrum of professional services organizations. We increase their brand awareness, support and protect their reputation and seek to firmly establish our clients as leaders

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Choosing and Working with your PR firm

RFI BINDER

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in their respective industries. Our team works closely with the firm's digital and analytics practice to develop and execute measurable programs that achieve transformative results. We help organizations with all layers of their communication programming, from narratives and messaging, media relations, executive positioning, thought leadership, and corporate social impact programming, to implementing B2B/B2C communications initiatives, including social and digital media programming, content campaigns, branding and design, influencer relations, and more. Our team has deep expertise in designing programs that align compelling content and communications strategies to support our client's business objectives.

RIPP MEDIA

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Allan Ripp, Principal
John Garger, Joshua Spivak, Ivan Alexander, James Bourne, Joshua Karlen, Senior Directors

In continuous practice since 1986, with a roster of marquee clients and high-profile assignments, Ripp Media is an editorial-driven boutique agency with a sophisticated practice. Having represented hedge funds, institutional investors, leading hospitality brands, publisher and real estate developers, we have a particular longtime focus on legal affairs, working with many of the country's leading law firms.

In June 2020, Ripp Media was named one of only three US firms to receive a Band 1 designation among litigation PR practices nationally ranked by the prestigious Chambers Directory. Principal Allan Ripp was one of only three individual advisers given Chambers' Band 1 standing. Allan also was named to Lawdragon's list of the country's Top 100 legal consultants and strategists for the past three years running.

We regularly handle big-ticket litigation and deal matters, along with crisis assignments and extensive thought leadership content, and have worked on numerous law firm mergers and significant lateral acquisitions. Our work spans major projects in M&A, privacy-cybersecurity, life sciences, government affairs, Supreme Court cases, criminal trials, intellectual property, real estate, media-entertainment, national security, labor-employment, white-collar, capital markets and other areas. We excel at maximizing press coverage for our clients' most important matters.

Our team includes former lawyers and journalists; our writing credits include bylines in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, CNN, *New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, Law.com, MarketWatch, CNBC, NBC News, Reuters, Street.com and other key outlets. Ripp is a premier destination for top-flight content creation and media placement among law firms and other professional service providers.

Left-to-right: James Bourne, Ivan Alexander, Allan Ripp, Roksana Slavinsky and John Garger of Ripp Media.

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Michael S. Sitrick, Chairman and CEO

Less important than what you say about yourself is what others say about you.

• *The New York Times*: "The City's Most Prominent Crisis-Management Firm."

• *Forbes*: "The crew from the television magazine is banging on your door. You can have the security guard throw them out and know they'll trash you. Or you can sit down with them and figure that out of the hour you give them, they'll use only 40 seconds on air. And those 40 seconds will make you look very guilty. Better solution, call Mike Sitrick."

• *BusinessWeek*: That's unbelievable. This is the heavy artillery." Quote is from the CEO of one of the largest PR firms in the world, after learning we were brought in on the other side of a contentious matter in which his firm was involved.

Since our firm's founding 31 years ago, we have been consistently ranked among the top crisis and strategic communications firm in the nation.

The majority of the firm's senior executives are former editors and reporters from news organizations that include the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, Bloomberg, *Los Angeles Times*, *Forbes*, CBS News, and NBC News. We also have former practicing attorneys and business executives.

Matters with which we have been involved include litigation support of all kinds; intellectual property matters, allegations of stock manipulation, wrongful termination, contract disputes, allegations of fraud and fraudulent inducement, wrongful death claims, allegations of illegal drug use, SEC matters, and a variety of other white-collar crimes. We have also handled criminal and civil cases against companies and their executives for such things as price fixing, insurance fraud, options backdating, antitrust violations, race and sex discrimination, sexual harassment, racism and #MeToo matters. We have a significant data breach, mergers and acquisitions and corporate governance practice and have done extensive work combatting short sellers. Other issues include sensitive environmental matters, racketeering cases, family disputes, and high-profile divorces, reputation management and reputational positioning. We have also been involved in helping to launch such firms as Oaktree Capital.

Offices are in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Boston and Washington, D.C., though we have handled cases all over the world.

For additional information including clients for whom our work was public and additional media comments about our firm see: www.sitrick.com.

WATER & WALL

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Andrew Healy, Partner
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We're as careful at selecting our clients as they are at selecting us, and if we work together, you'll have our undivided attention, out-of-the-box thinking and, perhaps most importantly, our unwavering commitment to your success.

O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

TOP PROFESSIONAL SERVICES PR FIRMS

	Firm	Net Fees (2019)
1.	**Edelman,** New York, NY	**$83,834,000**
2.	**MWWPR,** New York, NY	**9,471,571**
3.	**Jackson Spalding,** Atlanta, GA	**8,570,356**
4.	**Greentarget Global LLC,** Chicago, IL	**7,145,500**
5.	**Prosek Partners,** New York, NY	**6,000,000**
6.	**Infinite Global,** New York, NY	**5,959,532**
7.	**Bliss Integrated Communication,** New York, NY	**5,788,000**
8.	**Finn Partners,** New York, NY	**4,146,000**
9.	**G&S Business Communications,** New York, NY	**4,018,129**
10.	**5W Public Relations,** New York, NY	**3,600,000**
11.	**rbb Communications,** Miami, FL	**3,441,154**
12.	**Zeno Group,** New York, NY	**2,913,174**
13.	**Ripp Media/Public Relations, Inc.,** New York, NY	**2,499,532**
14.	**Havas Formula.** New York, NY	**2,191,579**
15.	**French I West I Vaughan,** Raleigh, NC	**1,966,466**
16.	**Racepoint Global,** Boston, MA	**1,732,988**
17.	**Matter Communications,** Newburyport, MA	**1,677,532**
18.	**LaunchSquad,** San Francisco, CA	**1,467,000**
19.	**Fish Consulting,** Fort Lauderdale, FL	**1,418,000**
20.	**Kivvit,** Chicago, IL	**1,387,769**
21.	**Pierpont Communications,** Houston, TX	**1,204,435**
22.	**Brownstein Group,** Philadelphia, PA	**1,119,000**
23.	**BoardroomPR,** Ft. Lauderdale, FL	**1,000,000**
24.	**IW Group, Inc.,** West Hollywood, CA	**920,000**
25.	**Approach Marketing,** Worthington, OH	**885,320**
26.	**Marketing Maven Public Relations,** Camarillo, CA	**569,780**
27.	**Serendipit,** Phoenix, AZ	**519,231**
28.	**Bradford Group, The,** Nashville, TN	**$489,298**
29.	**Hoyt Organization Inc., The,** Torrance, CA	**472,000**
30.	**Bospar,** San Francisco, CA	**466,817**
31.	**Standing Partnership,** St. Louis, MO	**459,989**
32.	**Konnect Agency,** Los Angeles, CA	**419,281**
33.	**Peppercomm,** New York, NY	**415,546**
34.	**Padilla,** Minneapolis, MN	**412,922**
35.	**Violet PR,** Montclair, NJ	**394,375**
36.	**Butler Associates, LLC,** New York, NY	**380,426**
37.	**Buchanan Public Relations,** Bryn Mawr, PA	**379,535**
38.	**WordWrite Communications LLC,** Pittsburgh, PA	**343,500**
39.	**MP&F Strategic Communications,** Nashville, TN	**245,305**
40.	**BizCom Associates,** Plano, TX	**234,125**
41.	**Tunheim,** Minneapolis, MN	**229,668**
42.	**Hunter,** New York, NY	**150,000**
43.	**Trevelino/Keller,** Atlanta, GA	**150,000**
44.	**FrazierHeiby,** Columbus, OH	**109,826**
45.	**Bob Gold & Associates,** Redondo Beach, CA	**89,700**
46.	**Inkhouse,** Waltham, MA	**77,000**
47.	**O'Malley Hansen Communications,** Chicago, IL	**43,000**
48.	**Judge Public Relations, LLC,** Tampa, FL	**32,625**
49.	**Public Communications Inc.,** Chicago, IL	**30,050**
50.	**Zapwater Communications,** Chicago, IL	**26,500**
51.	**Rosica Communications,** Fair Lawn, NJ	**20,000**
52.	**Bianchi Public Relations,** Troy, MI	**16,287**
53.	**SPM Communications,** Dallas, TX	**6,175**
54.	**TruePoint Communications,** Dallas, TX	**1,050**

Mob rule trumps freedom of speech in post-Floyd era

By Fraser Seitel

Among the lasting tragedies of the Trump era is the assault on freedom of speech and the triumph of mob rule.

Ever since George Floyd was murdered in May at the knee of a crazed Minneapolis cop, freedom of speech has been subordinated in a mad frenzy to expose bigots behind every rock, from Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel appearing in black face 20 years ago to deep-sixing Christopher Columbus to hatcheting the Atlanta Braves' tomahawk chop.

Fraser P. Seitel has been a communications consultant, author and teacher for more than 30 years. He is the author of the Prentice-Hall text, *The Practice of Public Relations.*

The essence of so-called "cancel culture" is that everything must go, no questions asked. This intensifying phenomenon should be of concern to all communicators, including public relations counselors, whose employment and reputation depend on speaking boldly, dispassionately and freely.

And in the post-#MeToo/post-George Floyd era, should some brave but naïve soul have the audacity to challenge the appropriateness or logic or fairness of jumping on whatever bandwagon the mob currently favors, they're immediately categorized as "sexist" or "racist" or "unwoke." The result: Few challenge the zealots and freedom of speech evaporates.

Much of this, of course, can be traced to the reign of Donald Trump, who's inflamed such blind loyalty among his supporters and extreme hatred among his detractors that any chance at compromise or understanding or even listening to someone else's point-of-view is impossible. (Ironically, lately Trump, himself, has begun repeating the mantra that he stands for "freedom of speech," although he doesn't really.)

But Trump and political partisans aren't the only culprits in the demise of open-mindedness and compromise and objectivity. Schools, professors, news organizations, journalists, athletes and artists from musicians to actors all share the blame in elevating bullies as the ultimate arbiters of acceptable thought.

In July, *Harper's* published a bold open letter from 153 prominent—many of them left-leaning—artists and intellectuals warning of this insidious trend of "an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for public shaming and ostracism and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty."

The letter, which argued against "groupthink" as well as silencing those who oppose common wisdom, was orchestrated by African-American columnist Thomas Chatterton Williams, who noted that the signatories included "plenty of Black thinkers, Muslim thinkers, Jewish thinkers, people who are trans and gay, old and young, right wing and left wing."

Mr. Williams and his co-signers didn't have to wait long to prove their point. Almost immediately, Twitter and its competing social media platforms lit up with criticism and vitriol, ostracizing and ridiculing the signatories for, as the *Times* put it, "thin-skinnedness, privilege and … fear of loss of 'relevance.'"

Sure enough, the outpouring of social media mob vitriol caused several of those who had signed the letter—including one mortified *New York Times*' opinion columnist—to turn tail immediately and ask that their names be removed from the original missive. So much for freedom of speech and the courage of one's convictions.

A few days later, another *Times*' columnist, Bari Weiss, caused a stir by resigning over what she claimed, in a letter on her website, was a civil war at the paper between "(mostly young) wokes and (mostly 40+) liberals", one of whom was herself. On her way out, Ms. Weiss warned erstwhile associates at the world's greatest newspaper, "Never believe an editor or publisher who urges you to go against the grain." Anyone who wonders about "objectivity" at today's *New York Times* no longer need wonder.

Which brings us to the role of public relations advisors in this climate of go along to get along or risk the wrath of the thought police (as opposed to the real police, who are personae non gratae). Where do you, personally, come out in this important, current dilemma?

Here are two recent real-life cases, one national and one local, that may help determine where you stand. In each case, what would your counsel be?

The first case is that of the *New York Times*, which in June ran a controversial op-ed piece by pro-Trump Republican Senator Tom Cotton, calling for the President to activate the military to quell violent street protests in cities like Portland (which a month later, Trump did).

The Cotton op-ed immediately triggered an insurrection in the *Times*' newsroom, led by African-American staff members, one of whom tweeted that the Cotton op-ed "puts Black @NYTimes staff in danger." The *Times*' tweetstorm was followed by a letter from more than 800 apparently equally-petrified staff members protesting the paper's decision to publish the op-ed. And calls rang out for the *Times* to fire editorial page editor James Bennet, who'd worked at the paper for 20 years.

Question: If *New York Times* Publisher A.G. Sulzberger and Executive Editor Dean Baquet were your clients, what would you recommend they do?

The second case occurred in July in an affluent New York City suburb, when photos were anonymously sent to social and traditional media and public officials featuring a member of the local high school board of education wearing blackface.

The 30-year-old trustee admitted he'd naively worn the blackface at a Halloween party 12 years ago as a teenager, when, frankly, he didn't know any better. He explained he'd never again done such a thing, apologized profusely to those offended and begged the community to allow him to undue his wrong through wiser, more mature and sensitive actions.

What followed was an online petition signed by 2,700 concerned citizens seeking the young man's immediate resignation and an emergency seven-hour board meeting, lasting until 3 in the morning, in which residents lined up to express their hurt and humiliation over the scurrilous 2008 photo.

Question: What do you recommend your clients, the other eight members of the school board, do?

In both cases, the accused individuals were summarily fired by their employers. (Well, technically they each "resigned," but c'mon.)

Mr. Bennet was quickly thrown overboard by his long-time colleagues Messrs. Sulzberger and Baquet, two of the weakest of weak-kneed media managers. And the young trustee was voted out by seven of his brave band of board brothers, one of whom summed things up this way: "By stepping down he shows our students that the behavior will not be tolerated. Students are craving diversity, and with that diversity brings true understanding and reform."

And also, one might add, another nail in the slowly sinking coffin of freedom of speech. ○

Equitable names Weaver CMO

Connie Weaver, a seasoned financial services veteran, is now Chief Marketing Officer of insurance giant Equitable.


Connie Weaver

She has served as Executive VP-CMO & CCO at TIAA, Senior VP-CMO & CCO at The Hartford, Executive VP-COM at BearingPoint and Executive VP-PR, brand & marketing at ATT.

Weaver also has held IR & marketing posts at Microsoft, MCI Communications and McGraw-Hill.

At Equitable, she will oversee and align marketing, digital and insights to advance the company's business objectives and positioning.

Godley becomes Greenough president

Greenough Communications has brought on Ben Godley, former Chief Operating Officer of Boston public television station and content producer WGBH, as President.


Ben Godley

Godley was most recently the CEO and Co-Founder of Contributor Development Partnership, a WGBH-owned public benefit corporation that provides marketing, technology, data analytics and fundraising services to 230 public media stations as well as managing $110 million in annual donations.

He joined WGBH in 2008 as Executive Vice President, was named COO in 2010 and was additionally named President of Business Services in 2017. Prior to joining WGBH, Godley served as Senior Advisor and Deputy National Finance Director with Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential campaign.

In his newly created role, Godley will leverage his executive management and marketing experience to help support Greenough's portfolio of national clients in the healthcare, life sciences, technology, professional services, consumer and non-profit sectors.

BerlinRosen hires Pesante Haughton

BerlinRosen has recruited Kiara Pesante Haughton, Communications Director at the Civil Rights Corps, for the Senior VP of Issue Advocacy slot.

She will drive the narrative and policy changes on justice and equity campaigns.

The New York-based firm represents advocacy groups such as MomsRising, Families Belong Together, Youth First, UNICEF USA and Vera Institute of Justice.


Kiara Pesante Haughton

At the CRC, Pesante Haughton worked to end money bail and pretrial detention systems, hold prosecutors accountable for misconduct, and stop the criminalization of poverty.

Earlier, she was Communications Director for the Democratic staff of the House committee on education and the workforce and Southern Regional Press Secretary and National Director of African-American media at the Democratic National Committee.

Abrahams shifts to Sard Verbinnen

Michael Abrahams, a 20-year veteran of WPP's Finsbury, has joined Sard Verbinnen & Co as head of its employee and transformation communications practice.


Michael Abrahams

He will work with SV&C clients on transactions, restructurings, crisis, litigation, activism and corporate reputation matters.

In addition, Abrahams will counsel clients on remote working, workplace return plans, diversity, equity and inclusion as companies address communications opportunities related to the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice issues,

As Finsbury Partner, Abrahams founded and led its employee & change communications practice.

Earlier, he served as Interim Global Communications Chief for Netherlands-based Royal Ahold, parent company of Giant Food, Stop & Shop, Peapod and Albert Heijn. Abrahams also did a seven-year stint in the communications and PA department of National Public Radio in Washington.

Osborn checks in at Northwell Health

Barbara Osborn, an 18-year PR veteran at Manhattan's Lenox Hill Hospital, has been named VP-PR for its parent company, Northwell Health. She succeeds Terry Lynam, who recently retired as Senior VP and Chief PR Officer.


Barbara Osborne

Osborn is in charge of strategic communications, media relations and thought leadership for the 23 hospitals of Northwell, plus its Feinstein Institute for Medical Research.

She has been front and center during the COVID-19 pandemic, connecting media with Northwell's clinical and non-clinical staff for an insider look at the crisis.

Prior to Lenox Hill, Osborn was Director of PR for the John T. Mather Memorial Hospital in Port Jefferson, NY. She began her career as a journalist at Fox News Channel and News 12 Long Island.

Northwell is New York State's largest healthcare provider.

SourceCode names Stippich SVP

SourceCode Communications has hired Kristen Stippich as Senior Vice President, a newly created position in which she will lead the agency's New York office.


Kristen Stippich

Stippich comes to SourceCode from Technovation, a global tech education nonprofit aimed at inspiring girls and families to be leaders and problem solvers, where she was senior director, leading brand, marketing, and communications. She previously served as Senior Vice President at Airfoil Group and VP at Weber Shandwick.

Moderna taps Avenue Solutions

Moderna, the Cambridge, MA-based biotech with a promising COVID-19 vaccine in development, has hired Avenue Solutions for DC representation.

Avenue Solutions bills itself as the "all-female, all-Democratic firm specialized in representing pro-business interests on Capitol Hill."

Tracy Spicer, founding Partner and former Deputy Chief of Staff and Political Director for Sen. Ted Kennedy, spearheads the push for Moderna.

Moderna's phase II clinical trial for its mRNA-1273 vaccine is expected to begin on July 27.

That drug has sparked a 385 percent surge in Moderna's stock price this year, though JP Morgan Chase downgraded its shares on July 20 from "overweight" to "neutral."

The bank remains bullish on Moderna's "long-term outlook, disruptive platform (in the vaccine space and otherwise) and chances of being one of the first companies to bring a COVID-19 vaccine to market," according to its research note.

It said momentum from the mRNA-1273 vaccine "could certainly drive Moderna even higher, but we're simply unable to continue to fundamentally justify it."

Avenue Solutions, which picked up the JPMorgan Chase account earlier this year, has done work for the American Medical Assn., Merck, UnitedHealth Group, ExxonMobil and Environmental Working Group.

PR heavyweight Ray Jordan, a veteran of Amgen, Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer, joined Moderna in June to head its corporate affairs unit.

Netflix streams in Mercury PA

Netflix has hired Omnicom's Mercury Public Affairs unit to keep an eye on developments on Capitol Hill.

Mercury's Al Simpson, who was Chief of Staff to former Congressman and Trump acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, and Rodney Emery, ex-Aide to Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., spearhead the push.

Netflix spent a little more than $1 million for D.C. lobbying work during the year ended June 30. It focused on Internet privacy & competition issues, intellectual property matters and broadband caps.

Netflix, which faces spirited competition from HBO Max, AppleTV and Disney+, added 10.2 million subscribers during the second quarter, exceeding projections by more than 20 percent.

The company recently upped chief content officer Ted Sarandos to co-CEO, serving alongside founding CEO Reed Hastings.

WPP sells PA offering stake

WPP Chief Mark Read is selling a 49.99 percent stake to management of the revamped Finsbury Glover Hering, which will launch early next year with nearly 700 staffers in 18 countries.

FGH is a mash-up of Finsbury, Glover Park Group and Hering Schuppener, which had a strategic partnership in place.

Roland Rudd and Carter Eskew, founders of Finsbury and GPG, respectively, will co-chair the new firm that Alexander Geiser, Managing Partner of HS, will helm.

Read said the corporate revamp fits WPP's plan to simplify and integrate operations. He'll sit on the FGH board, which he predicted would be a "global powerhouse in strategic communications."

Based in New York, FGH will have offices in Washington, Los Angeles, London, Dublin, Brussels, Berlin, Moscow, Dubai, Riyadh, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing, Singapore and Tokyo.

Raytheon's Thompson to Intel

Al Thompson, who led government relations for Raytheon Technologies' commercial aerospace and space businesses, is moving to Intel as VP-US Government Relations.

Al Thompson

During his Raytheon stint, Thompson also led state government outreach, supervised its digital advocacy efforts and was lead lobbyist for Carrier and Otis Elevator.

Earlier, he handled *Fortune* 500 clients at Mehlman, Vogel, Castagnetti; served as Deputy Executive Director of the Technology CEO Council; and was VP at the Retail Industry Leaders Assn, which represents Walmart, Target, Lowe's, Home Depot, Best Buy and Costco.

The Coast Guard veteran also served as a staff member on the Committee on Homeland Security for Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-MS).

De Blasio's press aide joins SKDKnickerbocker

Olivia Lapeyrolerie, first Deputy Press Secretary for New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, is exiting City Hall for a VP slot at Democratic PR firm SKDKnickerbocker.

She joined de Blasio's team after a stint in Ohio for the Hillary for America presidential campaign and a press job at Barack Obama's Commerce Dept. Lapeyrolerie also worked on de Blasio's ill-fated run this year for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Olivia Lapeyrolerie

Her exit follows the departure of de Blasio's Press Secretary Freddi Goldstein, who announced in July that she was jumping shop.

Goldstein had a four-year run with the mayor, joining his administration from SKDKnick, which is part of Mark Penn's Stagwell Group.

H+K works to bolster WHO's credibility

Hill+Knowlton Strategies is working with the World Health Organization to make certain its science and public health messaging is credible in order to ensure there's trust in the Switzerland-based group's advice and that its guidance is followed.

The firm acknowledges there have been criticisms and assertions leveled against the WHO and media coverage that could undermine it as a trusted and critical information source on global health issues.

For instance, President Trump on July 6 formally notified it that the U.S. intends to withdraw from the group because he believes it helped China cover up the outbreak and spread of COVID-19. Joe Biden promised to withdraw the exit notice if he's elected President.

H+K advises the WHO while the "temptation could be to react every time, a sound, considered and thoughtful approach will mitigate the risk of further inflaming the situation."

The firm began its work on May 20 focused on the areas of influencer identification, message testing and development of a campaign framework for a fee of $135,000. O

AF International reps Syrian democracy group

AAF International has a six-month agreement to provide government affairs and media relations services to the US mission of the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the Syrian Defense Forces.

The SDF has been a major US ally in the fight against ISIS, losing more than 11K of its male and female fighters in the campaign.

The SDC, which represents Arab and Kurdish political and civil society groups in north and east Syria, says its goal is to work towards a democratic country through conversations, consensus building and diplomacy.

The group condemned president Trump's Oct. 6 decision to allow Turkey to invade northeastern Syria, a move that "heralded chaos and bloodshed for our people," according to Ilham Ahmed, Executive President of the SDC.

The Oct. 9 Turkish invasion, which displaced 130K Syrians, was an act of genocide against the Kurdish people, Ahmed told Congress on Oct. 23.

The subsequent "ceasefire" ironed out by the US, Turkey and Russia ceded a large portion of SDF-controlled territory to Turkish control. "Now the same fighters who defeated ISIS are being told to retreat like criminals, and being labeled 'terrorists,'" said Ahmed. O

APCO seeks 'fair & balanced' Kazakhstan coverage

APCO Worldwide is providing strategic communications within and outside the US to assist legal counsel representing the Ministry of Justice of Kazakhstan.

Retained by Herbert Smith Freehills LLP, APCO's duties include "assessing media coverage regarding such litigation and seeking fair and balanced coverage," according to its engagement agreement.

APCO is in line for a flat $65,000 under the three-month pact signed July 7 by President/Managing Director Evan Kraus.

APCO also charges a flat fee of $3,250 for "desktop research tools, premium digital and social tools and subscriptions for analyzing audiences, media impressions, stakeholder engagement, public opinion trends, and social media channels through the use of big data and proprietary licensed software." O

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.

Barnes & Thornburg LLP, Indianapolis, IN, **registered Jul. 14, 2020 for Embassy of Ethiopia**, Washington, D.C., regarding improved relations with the US government.

Blueprint Communications, LLC, Alexandria, VA, **registered Jul. 15, 2020 for Fujian Jinhua Integrated Circuit Co Ltd.**, Jijiang City, China, regarding placement on the US Entity List and related litigation matters.

Alexandria Group International, Lawrenceville, VA, **registered Jul. 10, 2020 for Atanas, Plamen and Hristina Bobokov**, Sofia Bulgaria, regarding awareness of the state of and developments related to the business climate, civil society, corruption, transparency, the judiciary and the overall rule of law in Bulgaria for the principals whose companies produce motor-vehicle batteries and petroleum-based items.

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.

Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, Washington, D.C., **registered Jul. 24, 2020 for DoorDash**, New York, NY, regarding counsel on policy matters impacting independent workers, consumers and businesses.

Gotham Government Relations, Garden City, NY, **registered Jul. 23, 2020 for National Association of Bail Agents**, Oceanside, NY, regarding issues related to protecting the commercial bail bond industry.

Steptoe & Johnson LLP, Washington, D.C., **registered Jul. 23, 2020 for 7-Eleven, Inc.**, Irving, TX, regarding issues related to The Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act or HEROES Act.

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www.jpublicrelations.com
Employees: 70. Founded: 2005.

Agency Statement:
J Public Relations (JPR) is an international luxury PR, influencer management and social media agency specializing in hospitality, travel and luxury lifestyle brands. With 75 team members across four offices in New York City, London, Los Angeles and San Diego, plus a presence in Denver and Arizona, JPR is a trusted leader in media relations and brand strategy, trend forecasting, brand partnerships, influencer relations, digital and social strategy. JPR is an innovator in all things travel, being the first travel PR agency to launch a podcast in 2018, Priority Status.

Established in 2005, JPR has consistently risen to become the world's fastest growing agency in the travel and hospitality spaces. JPR's global roster includes more than 150+ hotels in the U.S., U.K. and throughout Europe, Mexico, Caribbean, Dubai, New Zealand, Asia and more. JPR represents destinations such as North Carolina and Utah as well as brands including Marriott, Relais & Châteaux, Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts, Vail Resorts Hospitality and multiple Ritz-Carlton Hotels & Resorts.

JPR is listed on the Observer's annual "PR Power 50" as one of the country's most powerful PR firms and *Crain's* "Best Places to Work in New York City." The agency also garnered "Top Places to Work" by PR News and "Agency of the Year" by Bulldog Reporter in addition to multiple trade and consumer awards for company culture and brand success.

Jamie Sigler O'Grady, Sarah Evans, partners

Locations:

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530 7th Ave., #502, New York, NY 10018
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"Now (they) have hired Michael Sitrick, whose Los Angeles (based) public relations firm is known for going atomic on opponents, using "truth squads," "wheel-of-pain" tactics and high profile journalists (to write profiles…That's unbelievable (said the head of the PR firm for the opposing entity). This is the heavy artillery." – ***BusinessWeek***

TechCrunch: "When it comes to handling crisis situations in particular, Sitrick is as well regarded as they come." "We've been in a tricky position a number of times and the thinking (in Silicon Valley) has historically been to ignore reporters, says one Bay Area tech founder. "Sitrick takes the opposite approach. You're made to get into the trenches and engage."

"You cannot put your firm's interests ahead of the client's interests," **Michael Sitrick as quoted in the *New York Times.***

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