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Weather Channel takes on global warming deniers

Hats off to The Weather Channel for the launch of its “United States of Climate Change” effort to report on the impacts of global warming on a state-by-state basis.

The campaign comes as Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt has vowed to replace Obama carbon regulations and open up the debate in 2018 on climate change.

TWC, though, operates in the real world, not the Big Oil fantasy land of Pruitt. It sees no reason to debate the science of climate change. That matter has been settled. Or as TWC notes on its site, “There is no climate change debate.” About 97 percent of climate scientists agree change is happening. NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued reports this month showing that 2017 ranked as either the second or third warmest year on record.

“The basic mechanism of climate change was described in 1896,” the site says, “and while the climate system is wickedly complicated, humans’ understanding of climate change and the factors which might alter or mitigate it has only grown over the past century.”

Believing that a picture is worth a thousand words, TWC is going to let images tell the story of climate change.

“We’re going to tell a story for every state in the nation,” said a statement from TWC. “We’re going to talk to people. We’re going to take pictures and shoot video and report. We’re going to investigate.”

The “United States of Climate Change” section of TWC’s website has an interactive map, where users can click on any state to get a capsule view of how climate change is affecting it. It also has a series of in-depth features that examine such subjects as California’s costly efforts to protect residents from a potential megaflood and innovative bison-grazing strategies that could lead to a reduction in greenhouse gases.

TWC will report how individuals, communities and businesses are responding to changes happening across the American landscape. Kevin Hayes, executive editor of TWC, worries that the US is unwilling to invest in “mitigating the effects of climate change to the degree that future safety and stability requires.”

In addition, “United States of Climate Change” provides links to both TWC’s own Climate and Weather vertical and the blog Weather Underground. It also gives users a quick, way to share its stories with others via Facebook or Twitter.

The US of Climate Change project is a partnership with Center for Public Integrity, InsideClimateNews, The Marshall Project, Food & Environment Reporting Network, The Lens and other media and non-profits.

Let’s hope Pruitt spends some time visiting the US of Climate Change site before he dives into his 2018 priority of junking Obama’s Clean Power Plan, which was the former president’s climate change regulation centerpiece.

Or better yet, let’s pray that members of what Vice has called one the “most anti-science Congresses in history” check out the TWC site to view how their unwillingness to accept scientific facts is impacting their home districts. O

—Kevin McCauley
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Influencer presence on Instagram doubled in 2017

Photo-sharing site Instagram has now become the top channel for influencer marketing, according to recent data from social media analytics and intelligence platform Klear.

Using the #ad or #sponsored hashtag now mandated by the Federal Trade Commission to identify influencer-endorsed posts, Klear in January reported that the number of posts on Instagram sponsored by influencers nearly doubled between 2016 and 2017 to account for more than 1.5 million posts worldwide last year.

Klear’s findings, which were published in its “The State of Influencer Marketing 2018 Report,” claim that the total use of influencers in online marketing campaigns grew by 198 percent in 2017, with consistent month-over-month average growth of five percent. The report revealed that influencer-sponsored Instagram posts generated about one billion total “likes” globally last year, averaging about 682 “likes” per post.

Klear’s data also found that young people and women overwhelmingly comprise the majority of Instagram’s influencer economy, with nearly 84 percent of #ad posts in 2017 coming from women, and three-fourths of those posts coming from influencers between 18 and 34 years of age.

When it comes to what sectors are now leveraging influencers the most to raise brand awareness and drive engagement, Klear’s report claims the number-one spot currently goes to the fashion and accessories industry, followed by beauty and cosmetics, food/beverage, automotive and consumer electronics. Travel, entertainment, retail, tech and fitness/wellness rounded out the top ten, respectively.

### Instagram was social media star of 2017

January estimates by digital market research company eMarketer found that Instagram, which now counts about 594 million regular total users, is quickly catching up with Facebook in terms of becoming the leading social platform, and now accounts for nearly a quarter — 24 percent — of all social network users worldwide.

While Facebook still accounts for the lion’s share of social media activity — with more than 1.5 billion people, or about 62 percent of all social network users worldwide, logging onto that site at least once a month last year — eMarketer’s report suggests that online photo service Instagram is quickly catching up, revealing big gains in new members and accounting for an increased share of total global social network users.

eMarketer now predicts that nearly 700 million people worldwide will use Instagram at least once a month in 2018, representing more than 26 percent of all social network users. By 2021, that share is expected to surpass 30 percent.

eMarketer reported that nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide — or about one in three living on the planet today — logged onto a social network in 2017. In a development that should come as no surprise, eMarketer claims that mobile now constitutes the primary means by which Internet users access social media sites. eMarketer estimates that 82.5 percent of all social network users worldwide used a mobile device to access social sites at least once a month in 2017, and 74.7 percent of all mobile phone Internet users worldwide used their device to access a social media site.

eMarketer predicts that social media’s future growth across the globe will come as a result of improvements to Internet access in developing nations, itself a consequence of government investments in mobile broadband coverage and the availability of affordable consumer smartphones.

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## Trump Hotels, CNN among most polarizing brands

Brands reflect ideological associations, and keeping in the spirit of the present political climate, it appears that some have never been more divisive than they are today.

According to a recent study of the most polarizing brands in America conducted by digital politics and policy outlet The Morning Consult, companies, organizations or brand names seen as pro- or anti-Trump reveal massive gaps in favorability, depending on Americans’ political affiliation.

The Morning Consult’s study asked respondents to rate how they felt about particular brands, and brands were then ranked in terms of the differences they exhibited in net favorability (favorable ratings minus unfavorable ratings), to determine which are the most divisive among those who identified as Republican or Democrat.

The long and the short of it should come as no surprise: Republicans immensely dislike brands critical of President Trump, and Democrats view any pro-Trump or Trump-associated brand as anathema.

President Trump’s hospitality company, Trump Hotels, was rated the most polarizing brand in America in The Morning Consult rankings, with the study’s greatest net favorability divide (78 percentage points) between Republicans or Democrats.

Democrat-favored news network CNN was number two (with a 66 percent net favorability divide) while right-leaning Fox News and left-leaning NBC tied for the third-place (both with a 54 percent favorability gap).

In terms of overall aversion, Trump Hotels, Wells Fargo, DirectTV and Phillip Morris are among the brands with the highest unfavorable rating among Democrats, while the National Football League, CNN, MSNBC and MTV are some of the brands most disliked among Republicans. The NFLs unusually high ranking, cited as the single most disliked Republican brand, was undoubtedly influenced as a result of the league’s First Amendment player protests against police brutality, which eventually boiled over into a spat with President Trump.

U.S. media companies accounted for the brands that divided Democrats and Republicans the most often. The New York Times took fifth place in the list, beating out MSNBC, which was number six. The Washington Post was ranked tenth. Overall, media brands comprised 19 of the top 30 most polarizing brands in America, and accounted for all but one brand in the top ten (Trump Hotels).

The rankings brought to light other political battlegrounds among brands as well. Walmart is more popular among Republican shoppers, while Democrats see Target in a more favorable light. The NBA is a Democrat favorite, while Republicans prefer NASCAR. National pizza chains such as Papa John’s, Little Caesars and Pizza Hut are enjoyed overwhelmingly by Republicans.

Morning Consult’s “Most Polarizing Brands” study was based on survey interviews with more than 360,000 U.S. adults conducted online between early Oct. 2017 and early Jan. The top 30 brands were drawn from a prospective list of about 1,900.
Trust in U.S. institutions collapses

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer finds trust in US institutions registers the biggest drop in the poll’s 18-year history. Trust in media also is in free fall.

By Kevin McCauley

The just-released 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer finds that trust in US institutions showed the biggest drop in the poll’s 18-year history, plummeting nine points to 43 percent among the general population and a staggering 23 percent plunged 45 percent among the “informed public.”

Among the informed public, trust in American institutions ranked dead last, lagging behind countries such as Russia, Poland, South Africa, Turkey and Mexico.

Commenting on the dismal trust numbers, Richard Edelman said the US “is enduring an unprecedented crisis of trust.”

He noted that it’s the first time that the massive plunge in trust wasn’t linked to a faltering economy or catastrophe. “The root cause of this fall is the lack of objective facts and rational discourse,” he said.

The Barometer finds a buoyant China surging to the top of the trusted list among both the general and informed publics. India, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates trail China.

The report finds the media in free fall, ranking for the first time as the least trusted institution. It pins the lack of confidence in media on the collapse of trust in platforms such as search engines and social media.

The poll finds that nearly 60 percent of respondents believe the media are politicized and about half say they are elitist. Nearly two-thirds agree that the average person cannot distinguish between good journalism and false information.

In the Barometer’s executive summary, Edelman warns of a world “without common facts and objective truth, weakening trust even as the global economy recovers.”

He blames the rise of disinformation for undermining the very essentials of rational discourse and decision-making.

“Fortunately, we are already seeing the first signs of regret about over-dependence on peers and blind reliance on populist leaders,” wrote Edelman. “People’s concern about fake news and their willingness to listen to experts show that they yearn for knowledge.”

The media, which is suffering from economic and political restraints, can’t solve the trust problem alone. “Every institution must play its part by educating its constituents and joining the public debate, going direct to the end-users of information,” wrote Edelman. “That means taking the informed risk to join the battle for truth so that facts triumph over fears.”

PR employment lags behind industry peak year

While they have risen for four consecutive years, jobs figures in the industry aren’t yet back to their pre-recession levels.

By Steve Barnes

While employment figures in the PR industry have risen for four consecutive years, they still lag behind the peak levels reached in 2009, according to a new report from PR Underground.

The study, based on data compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, says that the industry added 11,620 jobs in 2016, hitting a total of 209,910. Despite that hike, the number of jobs still lagged behind 2009’s total by about 5,000.

The growth trend did not float all boats equally, however. When it comes to pay, the gap between managers and non-managerial employees continued to widen. From 2008 to 2016, managers saw 10.98 percent growth in real income, with an average 2016 salary of $123,360. For non-managerial employees, a combination of small pay raises (up to an average of $66,540 for 2016) and increasing inflation led to a microscopic .09 percent growth in real income during the same period. Things are even worse for entry-level workers, who have seen their real income drop by 4.42 percent.

Location proved to be a major factor in both number of PR jobs and in the salaries that those jobs pay, the study says. Washington, D.C. has seen a PR employment boom, with 325 percent more jobs in 2016 than in 1999. States that have seen big employment jumps include Maryland (up 257 percent from 1999), Texas (up 183 percent), Massachusetts (up 169 percent) and Hawaii (up 138 percent). States that have seen declines for that period include Wisconsin (down 41 percent), Connecticut (down 25 percent) and West Virginia (down 18 percent).

The nation’s capital also ranked near the top in salaries paid to both managerial and non-managerial employees, with only the Bay Area averaging higher pay for non-managers and the New York metro area topping D.C. for managerial salaries. However, when the cost of living is factored in, Providence, RI sits at the top of heap for non-managers, while managers do the best in the Durham-Chapel Hill area of North Carolina.

Another takeaway from the study is that trade associations and other business groups have shifted a significant part of their lobbying budgets from traditional lobbyists to PR firms. In 1999, the report says, there were twice as many lobbyists as PR professional in D.C. By 2016, that ratio was inverted.

But the four-year growth trend may be hitting a wall in 2018, according to research from staffing firm The Creative Group. In a survey of approximately 200 marketing execs and 200 ad execs, only five percent of respondents said that they planned on expanding their staffs this year. That contrasts with nine percent for the second half of 2017 and 12 percent for the first half.

Most firms planned to “maintain” their firms, i.e., just filling vacated positions. The survey numbers say that 78 percent of respondents plan to follow that course this year, up from 64 percent in the last half of 2017 and 67 percent in the first half.

The good news: Zero percent say they plan on reducing staff in 2018.

The areas in which the survey saw the most room for growth were content marketing, brand/product management and digital marketing.
Disaster situations present unique communication challenges for brands, and PR professionals have an obligation to utilize effective messaging in a sensitive and timely manner to ensure their clients are represented in a positive light.

C itizens across the globe last year witnessed several of the worst natural disasters on record with the destructive fire season in California, ravaging hurricanes impacting the Caribbean and continental U.S., and deadly earthquakes in Mexico and Iran.

These moments of crisis lead to unique challenges in communication for national and local brands alike; how do you as a public relations professional ensure that all messaging is sensitive and timely in disaster situations? It’s vital to be prepared to ensure appropriate efforts are made. Companies need to avoid being demonized for capitalizing on tragedy and instead become a source of assurance and reliability.

**Plan ahead**

While you can’t place natural disasters on your calendar, it’s important to have a plan in place well beforehand on how to effectively manage the crisis. This is especially true for events that occur annually, such as hurricane season in the late summer and early fall.

If you represent a client that produces a product used in disaster situations — i.e. batteries, blankets, dry goods, etc. — creating a separate budget for donations to affected areas allows for a timely response without unnecessary red tape. Proactively developing disaster messaging that’s strong and consistent, and that all parties agree on, goes a long way in ensuring your client is represented in a positive light throughout the crisis.

You should also be prepared to postpone sponsored posts and articles as messaging that’s normally innocuous can be easily viewed as insensitive during a crisis. Review any scheduled social media posts, influencer promotions or sponsored articles for messaging that can appear insensitive during a disaster. Should your target demographic be affected by the disaster, pause all branded and promotional messaging until an appropriate time has passed.

If your business will likely be affected by disasters, be prepared with messaging to communicate with your audience via social media and key news outlets on the status of your business and how your audience may be impacted.

**Be adaptable**

In a crisis, it’s paramount to have a strategy in place, and be adaptable with resources, relief efforts and messaging. For example, within 24 hours of learning about a leading non-profit’s project to raise funds following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, call center ListenTrust coordinated two major telethon events, set up two on-site phone banks and even sent an employee to each location to oversee the operations. Timely reactions such as these require adaptability and clear communication. The company took more than 80,000 donation calls in a three week period, depicting the call center as a company that cares to give back to both the local community and communities around the world.

In a crisis, having clear and approved messaging in addition to a strategy is key to an effective public relations plan. Identify the spokesperson who will be in communication with media and the public. Media moves fast during a crisis, and being able to provide up-to-date information and professional reaction will help the company be portrayed as a reliable source to media and an expert in the field to the public.

When pitching to media, tell stories as opposed to platitudes. As many companies, celebrities and non-profit organizations will step up in a time of need, consider what will make your company stand out. Effective messaging will incorporate human interest and tell the stories of real people, not be canned messages offering support and cliché well wishing. By providing media with compelling human-interest stories told by real people, your company will be able to successfully tell the story of the support you provided to those affected at ground zero.

**Be sensitive, not punny**

Making jokes or puns in any messaging related to natural disasters is a sure-fire way to receive backlash and negative publicity. For example, in 2012 in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, Urban Outfitters received negative backlash after advertising a sale by saying, “This storm blows (but free shipping doesn’t).” The company’s adverse promotion landed it in Business Insider’s article “The 9 Biggest Brand Fails Exploiting Hurricane Sandy.” As many companies have learned the hard way, humor has its place in marketing, but not during a time of disaster.

Beyond keeping a serious tone, make sure your brand’s messaging puts brand building on the back burner. A company should see a natural disaster as an opportunity to develop stronger relationships with customers rather than increasing profits and placements. Focus messaging on employees and community first, and business second. Let the company’s actions lead the story and set the tone. Be sure to maintain a respectful voice and avoid positioning charitable efforts as a way to win placements for your client. Humanitarian relief should be placed in the light of kindness, not of business strategy.

As a communication specialist, it’s your job to provide wise counsel and manage client expectations. Advise the business on the importance of communicating with caution as talking about relief efforts too soon can result in negative feedback. All messaging needs to be well thought out and planned to avoid articles that are poorly timed or places the client in a bad light.

**Run the marathon, not the sprint**

It can be tempting to focus messaging around a natural disaster for a short period of time, but the positive community relations you can build surrounding calamities are best created with time. Consider how a business can benefit from both short-term relief efforts and long-term involvement. For example, it’s important immediately following disasters that public relations efforts focus on bringing back tourism to the affected areas. Not only is it good business, but it also helps rebuild the affected community and economy.

The key to ensuring that your messaging is sensitive and timely in disaster situations is to view everything through two frames: the immediate emotions and states of your client’s community and the longer view of building goodwill and trust. Remember that sacrificing placements and sales in the short term can be the best option to building a strong community that trusts your brand. During disasters, people have very strong memories and they’ll remember the brands that were there during the challenging times, be it positive memories of the supportive brands or brands that took advantage of them and the disaster.

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Advertising becomes fake news’ latest target

The fake news phenomenon has evolved beyond phony Internet stories to afflict the digital marketing realm as well, damaging consumers’ already plummeting trust in digital media and leaving industry professionals at a loss for what can be done to solve the problem.

By Jon Gingerich

In January, an outbound link purporting to be an ESPN.com article appeared on the New York Post’s homepage. It reported that Cavaliers legend LeBron James was under an NBA investigation after being caught using a performance enhancing drug called Primal Growth Testosterone. The headline read: “LeBron James Surrounded by Questions as Investigation Sparks!”

But it wasn’t true. In fact, the link wasn’t even an “article” at all, but an advertisement made to look like a story, placed on the Post’s site not by its editorial staff but through a third-party media buyer. Once viewers clicked on the link, they were sent to a site that sold nutritional supplements.

LeBron isn’t the only celebrity to fall victim to this latest strand in the fake news epidemic. The New York Times recently reported that similar ads have claimed that Melania Trump has moved out of the White House and that televangelist Joel Osteen is planning to leave his wife. Gone are the days when “fake news” implied hyperpartisan conspiracy sites that dupe gullible readers, or even Russia-funded social media campaigns to influence U.S. elections. The practice has now evolved to include a commercialized misinformation analogue that Google calls “tabloid cloaking,” or phony news items with attention-grabbing headlines that are actually ads, typically placed through Google’s AdWords service, which appear on otherwise legitimate news outlets. The problem is now so prevalent that, ironically, these ads have even made recent appearances on fact-checking sites such as Politifact and Snopes.

The blame game

The scourge of fake news is not merely a technological issue; it’s a psychological issue as well. It underscores the problem of confirmation biases and how we willfully gravitate toward information that parrots our preconceived worldviews. Add to this a psychological issue; it’s a psychological issue.

Any consensus regarding who’s to blame for this complex problem seems to change depending on what industry you ask. When it comes to marketing practitioners, research shows that most seem ready to point the finger at publishers. A December survey conducted by the Society for New Communications Research of the Conference Board found that 83 percent of U.S. marketers and advertisers believe publishers and media companies should be held accountable for fixing the fake news problem. Ask members of the press, however, and you’ll get a different story. An October Ogilvy survey of news professionals found that 24 percent of North American reporters lay the blame for fake news on social media, with the rest citing either a polarizing media environment or readers’ confirmation bias.

And when it comes to the public, a December 2016 Morning Consult survey of more than 1,000 U.S. adults found that a near-equal percentage of Americans think search engines like Google (67 percent) as well as the person reading the news (66 percent) bear the responsibility in preventing the spread of phony news.

Trust in social media collapses

What isn’t debatable is the fact that the rise of fake news has diminished consumers’ trust in the very real ads and editorial copy that often run adjacent to fake content online.

A September National Journal study of senior-level policy influencers in Washington found that only 23 percent now claim to trust online-only media brands as a source of news. A December consumer survey commissioned by Two Sides found that while 56 percent of U.S. consumers trust the news items they read in printed newspapers, only 34 percent admitted trusting the news they see on social media. An August report published by the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri found that web-based news outlets now account for the least trusted media brands in America, regardless of whether those outlets lean left or right.

Facebook, for its part, has promised a series of changes in recent months, overhauling its feed to de-emphasize news and other branded content in exchange for what it calls “meaningful social interactions” from individual feeds as well as more “trustworthy” news items, with an emphasis on local and regional news. Without question, Facebook’s reputation has suffered the most in the ensuing fake news furor, especially after it was revealed that as many as 126 million of the platform’s U.S. users had been exposed to Russian propaganda efforts during the 2016 election. A recent Verge survey found U.S. Internet users’ current level of trust in the social media site now trails Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Apple and even banks.

If digital media wants to move the needle in terms of regaining consumers’ trust, it might be worthwhile to consider the role each discipline plays in making that happen. One social media company can’t fix this alone. Marketers, publishers, the tech industry and even consumers have to take ownership of their respective spaces in the digital realm and ally with other uniquely positioned entities to find a solution.

One company that’s doing just that is News Corp’s social video unit, Storyful. That company, which supplies video content to networks and publishers, in 2016 added a risk and reputation initiative that provides a trust framework for publishers and brands.

Storyful Editor-in-Chief Mandy Jenkins told ODwyer that the company is now in a partnership with analytics and measurement company Moat in which they maintain a constantly-updated list of fake news sites, providing them insights into the characteristics of fake news sources and where phony ads will likely appear. Knowing the ads’ content as well as their final destination not only allows them to warm clients regarding where not to place content, it provides an opportunity to work with the programmatic and third-party ad networks and get those fake ads booted from their rosters.

“On the editorial side, we work with publishers and platforms to keep them from falling into this trap by making sure stories that come their way through social media aren’t passed along through unverified sources,” Jenkins said. “By scanning across the ad networks and seeing the current fake news sites that are out there, we can do the same thing on the brand side.”
Bridging the chasm between perception and reality

The challenge of changing minds in a world where the facts aren’t everyone’s truth.

By Megan Fairchild Anderson

This past year, ABC News polled adults across the United States about their perception of genetically modified foods. The survey, titled “Skepticism of Genetically Modified Foods,” found that 52 percent believe GM foods are unsafe, despite scientific consensus that they are. A 2015 survey from the National Chicken Council showed 77 percent of consumers believe chicken contains added hormones or steroids, despite the fact that the U.S. Department of Agriculture banned all hormones and steroids in poultry nearly 70 years ago. Finally, 2016 research from Oklahoma State University showed 98 percent of consumers surveyed incorrectly think hormones are used in pork and chicken production.

Today, many consumers perceive that conventional agriculture produces unsafe food. This chasm between perception and reality, which isn’t unique to the communications industry, is a vast divide for communications to bridge. Is it even possible? The reality is that agricultural innovation, built on science, has allowed farmers to safely and efficiently produce the food required to feed a growing global population. According to National Geographic, a farmer in the early 1900s produced food to feed a family of five. Today, one farmer can feed more than 100 people. But again, these facts aren’t everyone’s truth.

Researchers exploring the psychology of why facts don’t change our minds generally start with the concept of confirmation bias. Simply put, this means that we humans tend to interpret new information as confirmation of our existing beliefs. Some researchers suggest that we get a shot of dopamine when our brains process information that supports our beliefs, giving us pleasure. When we’re presented with information that contradicts our beliefs, this creates discomfort, or cognitive dissonance. We work to reduce this discomfort with a set of behaviors known in psychology literature as motivated reasoning. We stick to our guns, argue our point, ignore the contradictory information or forget it altogether. Research shows that trying to correct misperceptions can make things worse because we tend to double down on our current belief.

Coupled with the tendency to believe information that supports our existing beliefs is evidence that false beliefs can also be social. Our beliefs are often tied to the groups to which we belong, creating deep roots in our lives and sense of self. A study on partisanship by Stony Brook University, and reported on in The Atlantic last year, determined that high levels of media coverage are required for partisans to accept a piece of information that runs counter to their political views. According to Politico, liberals tend to demonstrate chemophobia. This belief manifests itself in the fact that Democrats overwhelmingly support bills to ban BPA from products despite evidence that shows it is safe.

While psychology presents a dim picture of our ability to change our minds — and of our ability as communicators to influence rooted misperceptions — we can strategically stack the deck in our favor.

Start with clarity

How many times have you heard “don’t dumb down my information!” from scientists, researchers and technical subject matter experts across industries? It’s a common refrain, as we communicators work toward striking the balance between accuracy and clarity. A few years ago, I was working with a scientist on a presentation of research to a trade media group. During prep for the event, the scientist was very focused on sharing the details and nuances of the research, which would have been appropriate for a group of scientists or academics, but not for trade media. We counseled the scientist that this focus on accuracy, sharing data and specifics from all angles, clouded the purpose, results and important implications from the research. He disagreed and presented the detailed research. The first media question at the event was, “Can you explain that research again? I don’t understand what the research shows or why you’re talking about it.” This illustrates an important point that if the people you’re talking to don’t understand what you’re talking about, they’ll turn to information that complements the way they already see the world.

A common example in agriculture is the confusion around the number of hormones in beef cattle given growth hormones. The scientific explanation involves nanograms, estrogenic activity and “minimal” residue. That’s hard to understand and fuels a narrative that the food is unsafe. We get clarity when we explain the difference in hormone levels between a steak from a steer that did not use growth hormones and one that did is equivalent to a blade of grass on a football field.

Inoculate against misperceptions

Current research related to perceptions and politicization of climate change shows evidence that perception can be pre-emptively protected against misinformation if people are given “cues” from experts. The study reveals one promising way to counteract the politicization of science is to convey a high level of consensus among experts about the reality of human-caused climate change.

Credibility is the name of the game. As communicators, we often counsel that if you don’t tell your story, someone else will. I would append this idiom, adding that if you don’t tell your story first and support it with clearly presented, credible expertise someone else will tell your story with misinformation that people believe.

Connection is key

One of the truths that has come out in the conversations around conventional agriculture, science and consumer cynicism is that people trust farmers. They love farmers but are skeptical of conventional farming practices. As we think about facts, expertise and the complicated business of changing misperceptions, we need to remember the power of a personal connection in delivering information. While human brains are hard-wired to keep deeply rooted beliefs, we can overcome this challenge by focusing on a connection strategy that both recognizes the human behavior that determines which information channels are best for each goal, and also reflects how channels interrelate, synchronize and work with audience behaviors.

One final thought on bridging the chasm between perception and reality: Execution is as important as strategy. Implement innovations and best practices across each channel and use best-of-breed tools to communicate efficiently and effectively.

Megan Fairchild Anderson is Senior Director at Padilla, where she provides strategic oversight for Padilla’s clients in the agricultural, animal health and environmental sciences industries.
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Is cry for PR diversity different this time?

The latest groundswell for diversity in the U.S. marketing sector seems more genuine and ambitious than previous industry inclusivity efforts.

It happens every few years, just like a Swiss watch. Cries are heard regarding the general lack of diversity within the creative services field and how it’s costing agencies and firms dearly. There are a few rounds of self-flagellation within the four walls, as the media trades run agonizing front-page stories examining why agencies remain so homogenized. At marketing industry conferences throughout the country, senior executives vow to do better. Then things pretty much return to the status quo.

However, the latest groundswell for diversity throughout marketing sectors — including the PR industry — feels different this time. PR leaders are moving beyond cocktail-party compliant conversation regarding diversity and looking to take action.

For the last year or so, a flurry of studies has been released pointing out why agency owners and C-level executives must reconfigure their hiring and recruiting practices in order to increase minority representation within their firms. But many agencies remain behind the eight ball.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the ethnic makeup of the PR industry is 10.3 percent African American, 5.4 percent Asian-American and 3.3 percent Hispanic-American.

The Ketchum-Fast Company survey of 500 creative professionals released last summer uncovered an important dichotomy: Respondents believe diversity of thought is valued by their organization (72 percent), yet an overwhelming majority think their organization still needs to do more to encourage diversity of ideas (85 percent).

Another salient aspect of the survey: 54 percent of respondents think that they work in a creative echo chamber. Company leadership was cited as the biggest factor contributing to the echo chamber (64 percent), followed by conversations with like minded people (57 percent).

“To increase the flow of diverse people and ideas into organizations, we must get vigilant about hiring from varied socio-economic and academic backgrounds and work a lot harder to make people who challenge our way of thinking and working feel welcome and included,” said Karen Strauss, partner and chief creative officer at Ketchum. “If people with different opinions, experiences, and perspectives don’t feel a sense of belonging, they disengage and leave. That’s at the heart of this issue.”

When hiring new employees, Strauss added, PR managers tend to “self-segregate,” which hampers firms’ creativity and feeds the echo chamber.

Survey participants had several recommendations for diversifying creative talent and opinion in organizations, including:

- Make diversity hiring goals more explicit
- End nepotism, cronyism and referral-based hiring
- Hire for curiosity and experience
- Hire from outside the industry
- Recruit internationally and eliminate insider jargon

Along with the industry at large, individual firms must take the lead proactively and start their own and unique diversity initiatives. They need to invest real money in programs designed not only to enhance diversity, but reduce groupthink and get hiring managers out of their comfort zone.

Take Ketchum’s LaunchPad, a “blind system” that enables Ketchum to examine a job candidate’s potential versus prior work experience or background.

Candidates compete to address a real client challenge and are selected based on a meritocratic basis. The approach has levered the playing field, making it easier for non-traditional candidates to get their foot in the door, Strauss says. The agency’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion dashboard enable managers to objectively compare data year-over-year, with results that include more diversity hires since LaunchPad debuted.

What’s more, Ketchum in 2016 partnered with Boston University to introduce the Kotcher-Ketchum Scholarship and Internship Program for African-American students.

There are many factors driving such changes. For starters, perhaps agency owners are beginning to appreciate that demographics is destiny.

By 2055, the U.S. will not have a single racial or ethnic majority. Throughout the next five decades, the majority of U.S. population growth is projected to be linked to Asian and Latin American immigration, according to Pew Research Center. One in seven U.S. infants (14 percent) were multi-racial or multiethnic in 2015, nearly triple the share in 1980.

Another reason diversity efforts now seem more legit is the growing number of Millennials working in PR, many of whom seem allergic to how previous generations staffed their agencies and cultivated talent. Indeed, Millennials are more racially accepting than previous generations and don’t get hung up on, say, interracial dating.

These are profound changes taking root in the U.S. culture. For PR firm owners and hiring managers the ability to attract people of color, members of the LGBT community and non-traditional job candidates will require commitment from the tippy top of the organizations, stick-to-itiveness and, perhaps most crucial, imagination.

Obstacles abound. According to a report released last year by the City College of New York and The Holmes Report, one of the fundamental challenges is to develop a singular definition for Diversity and Inclusion that would serve as a measurable standard across the industry.

“#PRDiversity: The Struggle is Real. Meeting Business Objectives with a 2020 Mindset” took the pulse of 16 CEOs and two former ones of global PR firms regarding the need for greater diversity. Some CEOs said another barrier to greater diversity is that the industry does not hold the “competitive financial or professional attraction that other industries, such as law or business, might have for diverse students.”

Time and energy were also cited as barriers to improving diversity. However, when you think of the challenges to improve the complexion of the PR industry, is that a legitimate excuse?

PR firm owners and C-level executives need to get in front of these trends, lest they get stuck in reactionary mode and have to play catch up. If they don’t get off the dime soon their firms increasingly will be seen among prospects as relics.

There are other factors spurring diversity efforts, of course. The only constant in life is change. But the bottom line is diversity is simply good business, broadening the firm’s brand appeal to a wider array of people, burnishing creative and carving new trails.

Women in PR seek allies when facing ethics issues

A Baylor University study found that Millennial PR practitioners were unlikely to speak up when an ethical concern arises, while senior PR pros rely on “rational approaches” when it comes to ethics problems.

When raising an ethical concern to a company’s senior executives, female public relations executives are more likely to recruit allies and form alliances first, while men typically rely on presenting research and case studies, according to a study by Baylor University.

The study, which is published in the *Journal of Media Ethics*, suggests that many PR pros don’t feel adequate in their abilities to provide ethics training or counsel, and highlights the need for PR practitioners to build internal coalitions among colleagues in the course of exerting influence and speaking out on ethics problems within an organization.

The study also found that Millennials were unlikely to speak up when ethics issues arise.

**Women seek allies, men consult sources**

PR practitioners interviewed for the study discussed possible ways to exert influence and whether they feel senior leaders value and respect their counsel.

Among those surveyed, PR women were said to be more likely than men to seek allies and form coalitions before they give ethics counsel to senior leaders. Success depended on building relationships with colleagues in other departments so that they have backup when ethical issues arise.

One woman said that “Going in force can help your case. But sometimes it can backfire … you know, if somebody wants to kill the messenger. But if several people come to you with the same messaging, I think you take notice.”

Another woman said that she was “reprimanded for being so forthright. So, I didn’t do it that way anymore.”

Some women were wary of using emotional appeals because of stereotypes about women being emotional in the workplace. “I probably erred in the other direction,” one woman said.

Men, meanwhile, are more likely to prefer informational sources of power such as research and case studies. But both genders said they ask questions, discuss, listen, share alternatives or solutions and make recommendations.

A few men and women used more confrontational descriptions, such as saying, “We absolutely put our foot down” and “Tell them it’s wrong.” But in the case of women, “some of these more confrontational accounts were used in connection with allies or coalitions,” said study lead author Marlene Neill, Ph.D., assistant professor of journalism, public relations and new media at Baylor University.

**Senior execs like “rational approaches”**

The study found that senior PR executives rely on “rational approaches” when an ethical concern arises, including research, case studies and appeals to what they feel is right and lawful.

“While our study was focused on identifying effective ways to raise ethical concerns, it was quite disheartening to hear multiple stories from the senior executives about times when they faced retaliation after raising ethical concerns through official reporting channels such as ethics committees and hotlines,” Neill told O’Dwyer’s.

Neill said survey results also indicated that Millennials “did not feel prepared to provide ethics counsel, were unlikely to speak up, and did not even expect to face ethical dilemmas.”

Another benefit of this is the fact that many PR practitioners feel they should be an “organizational conscience” in cases where they think company actions might pose an ethical dilemma with troubling consequences, and having coalitions that can work through straightforward tactics within an organization dissuades them from turning outside the company to more extreme measures: whistleblowing or leaking information to stakeholders or the media, or resigning accounts outright if they decided that client’s business isn’t worth the ethical cost.

Neill said the research also “found companies that invested heavily in ethics training and resources and then followed through by terminating employees engaging in unethical behavior and rewarding employees who were living their core values. Based on the second group, we identified best practices for building an ethical culture.”

**Page Center, PRSA funded study**

Research for the study, which is titled “The Use of Influence Tactics by Senior Public Relations Executives to Provide Ethics Counsel,” was conducted through interviews with 55 PR pros representing nearly 20 industries, many of them Fortune 500 companies. The combined sample average of individuals polled was 33 years in PR.

It was funded by the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication and supported by the PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards and PRSA College of Fellows.

Co-author is Amy Barnes, associate professor in the School of Mass Communications, University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

“What inspired us to conduct this research were findings from a study I conducted in 2016 with Millennials working in public relations,” Neill said. “When it comes to differences in how genders approach the role of ethics counselor, one reason women may recruit allies is that they tend to be outnumbered by men in the boardroom.”

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**Marlene Neill**

Ranking of influence tactics used in PR by gender.
Startups are turning traditional businesses upside down. But they’re still navigating how to stay on the right side of the very regulations they hope to disrupt.

By Doug Pinkham

Strategies for disruptive influence

Startups need more than a clever idea, money and talent to launch a business. They must also clear regulatory and legal hurdles that can delay a product, force a company to change its business model or shut down the enterprise altogether.

In highly regulated industries and professions, it can be close to impossible to overcome barriers supported by entrenched regulators, politicians and companies. But, as two Canadian researchers point out in a Harvard Business Review article published in October 2017, insurgent firms like Uber, Airbnb and Tesla have succeeded by mobilizing the public and other stakeholders to become advocates.

Guy Holburn and Davin Raiha of the Ivey Business School at the University of Western Ontario observed that disruptive companies marshal stakeholders in three ways: online petitions, partner organizations and consumer clubs.

Uber has used the petition strategy to engage consumers in at least 10 cities, chiefly in North America and Europe. In Toronto, the authors note, Uber gathered more than 90,000 signatures supporting ride-sharing — a move that helped persuade the city council to permit the company to operate. In London, one of Uber’s most important markets, a petition that gained more than 850,000 signatures gave the company a reprieve from efforts to shut it down.

Insurgent firms engage partner organizations to bring credible voices to the public policymaking table. For example, Uber has partnered with Mothers Against Drunk Driving to support studies showing that ride-sharing helps to reduce impaired driving. In some cities, MADD has spoken positively about ride-sharing at municipal hearings.

Consumer clubs are perhaps the most innovative of the three strategies because they connect users with each other and help to orchestrate advocacy activities. Holburn and Raiha explain that Airbnb’s “home-sharing clubs” in 100 cities around the world bring people together to discuss regulatory and political issues and facilitate political involvement.

Similarly, Tesla has a Tesla Owner’s Club Program that requires clubs to support local legislative efforts and assist with survey groups and new software tests. In 2014, the Washington state club helped to pass legislation permitting the company to expand its direct sales model.

These grassroots strategies don’t just work for tech-sector disruptors or small companies, however. Reading the HBR article reminded me of other examples. In 2012, Southwest Airlines wanted to fly international routes from Hobby Airport in Houston, but the city council and major competitors using George Bush Intercontinental Airport were against the idea.

That’s when the company created its “Free Hobby” campaign, which enlisted the help of employees and the local community to conduct a massive petition drive. To give its online petitions more impact, the airline printed out the signatures on paper and delivered them in boxes to city hall.

But the petition drive was only part of the plan. Media outreach, as well as T-shirts and other collateral proclaiming, “Houston, We Have a Solution,” helped to attract local and national attention to the effort, which resulted in a near-unanimous city council vote favoring the company. In the same way, Uber, Airbnb and Tesla have drawn extensive news media coverage and social media buzz to their campaigns, which have magnified their impact.

As in other areas of business, sometimes the most valuable lessons are learned when everything doesn’t go according to plan. Holburn and Raiha admit that consumer advocacy doesn’t work for every company, for every issue or in every location. Uber’s petition drive in Calgary, Alberta, in 2015 was disappointing when only 14,000 people — a little more than one percent of the city’s population — signed on. Holburn and Raiha say this outcome was predictable because the taxi industry had widespread support in the community, but Uber didn’t pay attention to polling.

For insurgents, that’s lesson number one: Don’t call for a public vote of confidence if you don’t yet have the votes.

As an update to the HBR article, I’ll add lesson number two: Once you have disrupted an industry, slow down and get things right. Uber found this out the hard way in September when Transport for London finally decided not to renew its license to operate.

New CEO Dara Khosrowshahi, in an email to Uber employees obtained by The New York Times, said he thought the decision was unfair, but that “the truth is that there is a high cost to a bad reputation.”

Khosrowshahi was referring, of course, to controversies about the company’s former CEO, workplace culture and approach to background checks, among other issues.

Nevertheless, many observers think Uber will find a way to return to London. “Any disrupter that is playing in a regulated or unionized market is going to face count- er-disruption through legislation and social protests,” said Bill Bosworth, CEO of DataStax, in an article in Forbes. “They will all have to figure out new rules.”

Doug Pinkham is President of the Public Affairs Council, a nonpartisan, nonpolitical organization that provides training, advice and research on public affairs. This article originally appeared on the pac.org blog.

Media news brief

Traditional media to gain as Facebook scales back news

Facebook’s decision to downplay news from publishers and brands in favor of what it calls “meaningful social interactions” on individual feeds will likely lead audiences back to the original sources of that news, according to a report from CooperKatz.

Citing Pew Research Center numbers, the report finds 45 percent of Americans use Facebook to access news. CK polled 250 Americans via SurveyMonkey to find out where those users will go for news once it becomes less prominent on FB.

Twitter was the new news source of choice for only six percent of the respondents, and Snapchat, Instagram and LinkedIn came in even lower. Eleven percent said they will seek no new source of information.

Traditional news sources did much better, winning 65 percent of respondents who plan to rely on them for their information.

The CK study has several implications about what this means for both news sources and PR professionals.

For news sources, the fight for loyal readers is likely to become more intense. The study notes the tendency of many people to stick with one or two news outlets rather than surf the web to pick up information from a variety of outlets. Finding and keeping a dedicated audience could become much more difficult.

FB on the other hand, will become less attractive. Breaking through on FB, the report says, will be costly and more difficult. Brands that continue to prioritize FB will need to be prepared to spend more and to devise strategies focused on user engagement.
Things to watch in year two of the Trump ‘resistance’

2018, which marks the 50th anniversary of the tumultuous upheavals of 1968, will be a frenzied year in the public arena, with a cacophony of causes vying for attention during year two of the “resistance.”

By Ben Wyskida

It’s been 50 years since 1968, the year in which protest found its voice and an awakening of the people’s power shaped public policy.

As we enter the second year of the Trump presidency, there are some obvious parallels, including a federal administration hostile to equity and inclusion, and an energized community of activists working for change.

Of course, there were no “social change agencies” back then. Fenton didn’t exist. But 1968 is in our DNA. Some of us were on the front lines of movements back then. Others weren’t born. And much of Fenton staff is two generations on, a new wave of activists using multiple instant communications platforms and tools to make change.

2018 will be a frenzied year in the public arena, with a cacophony of causes vying for attention during year two of the “resistance.” Here are a few trends to watch:

The fight for the Dreamers is on. The cruelty shown to “Dreamers,” those eligible for DACA renewal, was at the heart of the recent government shutdown. This will continue to be a significant issue in 2018, and one that has been exacerbated by a lack of credible information. Most dreamers did not receive any notification from the government alerting them of their status and opportunity to renew, instructions or deadline. They also received mixed messages on whether renewal would be a safe step for them given the current anti-immigrant environment.

Women are storming the House. 2018 has already been called “The Year of the Woman,” with nearly 400 women planning to run for the House of Representatives. The 2018 election may reach a fever pitch usually reserved for a Presidential election year, with a major shift towards digital advertising and online video.

We’re already seeing the rise of organizations like Indivisible, Swing Left and Run for Something. We’re also seeing an emergence of organizations explicitly working to build political power for people of color and women, like Sister District, Black PAC and Vote Pro Choice, who helped women candidates run on reproductive rights — and win — in 2017.

Organizations are mobilizing to stare down racism and anti-Semitism. Facing a wave of racism and anti-Semitism, many organizations are looking for ways to use communications to challenge hatred. One of the most remarkable organizations is Facing History and Ourselves, a nonprofit that for 30 years has helped schools teach children about racism and anti-Semitism and whose work is as urgently needed now as ever before. We are creating strategy and messaging for Facing History in 2018, which includes supporting a community-wide teach-in on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of MLK, hosted at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN.

Rising anger over conservation. In December 2016, after years of consultation with five tribal nations, President Obama designated the Bears Ears region of Southern Utah a National monument. Last year President Trump gave most of the land back to mining interests, rolling back protections for most of the land in Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante, another national monument that has stood for over 20 years. This is part of an overall effort by the Trump Administration to undo almost every environmental protection on the books, including a recent decision to open up both coasts to offshore drilling.

More fake news. Little threatens the integrity of our clients more than the lack of credible news sources and the proliferation of bots and trolls. As an industry, we will need to contend with “fake news” on an ongoing basis in 2018. All brands are at risk — not just political causes. As PR professionals, we have a choice: use fake news and obfuscation to help our clients at the expense of our democracy, or do our work with integrity. At Fenton, we’re part of a group working to create an “ethic engine” to spread facts and opinions of real voters on social media, as an antidote to the attacks we’re seeing on meaningful public discourse. It won’t be easy.

Fifty years ago, a year like no other roiled American history, with breaking — and often genuinely shocking — news each day.

In the second year of the Trump resistance, we are inspired by that history. And we’re expecting a year like no other in the public debate.

Ben Wyskida is CEO at Fenton.

Social media is key to CEO success

Engaging with social media may well be one of the keys to success as a CEO, according to the January “The Social CEO” report released by Ruder Finn.

“The Social CEO” analyzes the social media presence of 100 CEOs from across 13 industries. It then splits that group up into “high-performing” CEOs and “low-performing” CEOs (those whose companies had below-average stock price growth against the S&P 500 Index).

The study found that high performers have a weightier social media presence than low performers. 50 percent of the high-performing CEOs surveyed have two or more social media accounts. That number is 28 percent for low performers. The high performers also have more followers, averaging 400,566 followers over all their accounts and 244,190 followers per account. For the low performers, the numbers were 55,355 overall and 37,605 per account.

It also matters how open CEOs are on the social platforms they use, the study says. More high performers (20.72 percent) address personal topics on social media than do the lower performers (14.12 percent). The high performers are also more likely to share industry news. But they are less likely to post on such topics as current events, politics and progressive topics.

When the numbers are broken down by company sector, it appears that some industries are far more social-savvy than others. Not surprisingly, tech companies lead the way, with 91 percent of tech CEOs in the survey reporting that they had a social media presence. For the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) sector that figure is 60 percent, with pharma coming in at 56 percent and financial services at 33 percent.

The main point reached by “The Social CEO” however, is that tapping the power of social media has a strong relationship to a company’s success. “CEOs must find ways to leverage the power of social media as a means to bring their story to life and connect with customers, investors and other audiences,” said Ruder Finn CEO Kathy Bloomgarden.

Not surprisingly, tech companies lead the way, with 91 percent of tech CEOs in the survey reporting that they had a social media presence. For the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) sector that figure is 60 percent, with pharma coming in at 56 percent and financial services at 33 percent.

Ben Wyskida is CEO at Fenton.
Legendary PR man Herb Schmertz dies at 87

Herb Schmertz, the combative Mobil Oil PR exec who pioneered the use of "advertorials" to take on critics of Big Oil, died Jan. 17 from congestive heart failure. He was 87.

The former Army Intelligence Officer and organizer for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign joined Mobil in 1966, taking a leave of absence in 1968 to work on Bobby Kennedy's presidential run. He returned to Mobil in 1969 to head its public affairs office, stepping away in 1979 to work on Ted Kennedy's White House bid, before leaving in 1988 to head his own firm.

Schmertz, who advocated "creative confrontation" rather than working behind the scenes to gain influence, launched the advertorial in 1970, buying space on the op-ed page of the New York Times to express Mobil's view of the oil industry and world. The advertorials spread to other newspapers and Schmertz became a fixture on TV news programs.

As Schmertz spearheaded Mobil's attack on critics, he also softened the company's abrasive image through sponsorship of the PBS series "Masterpiece Theater." Viewers would hear that high-end programs such as "I, Claudius" and "The First Churchills" were "made possible by a grant from Mobil."

The New York Times said he was "perhaps the most visible PR executive in the US during the 1970s and '80s," while New York magazine profiled him as "Oil Slick." ○

Ruder Finn ropes in Ryan

Ruder Finn has named 20-year PR veteran Laura Ryan an Executive VP in its corporate communications practice. Most recently running LKR Communications, Ryan has big firm expertise earned from stints at Cohn & Wolfe, Ketchum and Burson-Marsteller. She has handled pharma, food & beverage, consumer, finance and hospitality clients.

RF CEO Kathy Bloomgarden praised Ryan's extensive corporate experience and ability to work across a range of disciplines including crisis PR.

She expects Ryan to strengthen the independent firm's executive thought leadership, issues, financial communications offerings and its business development push. ○

Finn Partners brings on Bona as partner

Christopher Bona, a veteran at Baxter, GE Healthcare and Abbott, has been named a Partner in Finn Partners' health practice.

Bona joins the agency from metal processor and distributor Ryerson, where he was head of communications and responsible for corporate affairs, investment community and marketing communications functions. He previously led global marketing communications at GE Healthcare for the business specializing in X-ray-based technologies. Prior to that, he was a Global Corporate Communications Director at medical device maker Baxter International Inc. and oversaw biopharmaceutical communications surrounding product launches, medical meetings and research and development.

He was also previously a Senior VP of corporate affairs at Weber Shandwick and held a series of public affairs positions at Abbott, including leading communications for the global pharmaceutical operations division and supporting the healthcare giant's pharmaceutical and corporate divisions. ○

B-M's Gee shifts to Finsbury

Finsbury has recruited Chris Gee as Managing Director to spearhead its integrated digital practice in North America.

Gee joins from Burson-Marsteller, where he handled digital/content strategy for corporate and financial clients. His credits include campaigns for ExxonMobil, Nestle Waters, Walgreens Boots Alliance, Colgate-Palmolive and MassMutual.

Prior to B-M, Gee was Chief Digital Officer at RF|Binder and Managing Director of digital and social strategy at Teneo. ○

Smith bolsters APCO west coast operations

Tim Smith, who was Executive VP at Edelman, has joined APCO Worldwide as Managing Director in Seattle to spearhead the DC-based firm’s West Coast push.

He joined Edelman’s Seattle in 2009 and rose to lead the office’s corporate and PA practice. Prior to work at the No. 1 independent firm, Smith held the Senior VP slot at Waggener Edstrom Worldwide, where he led the technology-oriented shop’s PA, issues management, crisis and CSR offerings.

Smith has a wealth of overseas corporate experience gained from stints at Japan Tobacco International (VP-Global Affairs and Communications in Moscow and Geneva) and RJ Reynolds (Senior Director-Corporate Affairs in Moscow).

He also worked as a commercial officer for the State Dept. with postings in Russia (Moscow and Vladivostok) and Uzbekistan (Tashkent). ○
Tips for gaining Instagram followers

By Anthony Coggine

Instagram is one of the most popular and successful social media tools on the market today. Since 2010, the photo sharing platform has grown rapidly and now boasts more than 500 million users, making it one of the top social media outlets used by businesses to showcase their products.

For those new to Instagram, it may be tempting to pay for followers. It’s a seemingly easy way to strengthen your numbers and speed up the growth process, but buying followers comes with a lot more risk than benefit. Accruing fake fans is a lot like get-rich-quick schemes: basically too good to be true. Rather than running the risk of being seen as non-transparent and spammy, take the time to build a solid reputation through meaningful content and audience engagement. While it may take more time, it’ll certainly pay off in the long run.

Never underestimate a hashtag’s power

The majority of businesses on Instagram use hashtags. Simple and easy to modify to your specific needs, hashtags allow businesses to target their audience, in addition to creating a backlog of photos and information that can be accessed with just the tap of a finger. Think of hashtags as the ultimate tool to help you spread the word. If you’re putting out a new product, or offering a promotion, adding a catchy tag will boost awareness and encourage your audience to share your content.

In addition to helping you stay organized, hashtags are also a great way to tap into current or seasonal trends on social media. Many brands tweak their content based on current global events, like the Olympics or internationally recognized holidays. By relating your product to what’s happening in your consumer’s world, you’re engaging with them on a more personal level.

Be consistent

Consistency should apply to all of the content that you post on social media, whether it’s Facebook or Instagram. A steady stream of hashtags, photos and campaigns that have a common theme will help you create an engaging storyline, which ultimately creates brand awareness. Everything from your logo, general design, to daily content needs to be easily identifiable. First decide on what you want your audience to know about your brand, and then translate that visually.

When it comes to Instagram, you need to ensure that all of the images you post are of the highest quality. It doesn’t matter if you’re posting photos of the office dog or your latest product, each photo needs to look as if it was shot with the utmost care and intention.

Create rich content

While Instagram seamlessly lends itself to visual brands, such as e-tailers and design-centric products, there are numerous companies today that don’t necessarily offer physical products, which have found ways to utilize Instagram to create brand awareness. Brands that can’t simply rely on a more straightforward approach, like posting photos, have had to get creative with their content. Several years ago, Penn State University held a “day in the life” campaign where students, staff, and alumni could share their experiences at the university through social media over a period of 24 hours. Rather than simply posting photos of the school campus, Penn State took a human-centric approach that focused on their community to illustrate daily activities as a way to generate interest in the university.

For brands that are more traditional and may be new to social media, conducting market research before you starting posting content is key. Knowing who you are speaking to, and what they want to hear, will help you create more rich and meaningful content that users will actually want to share. Making the most of tools like Google Analytics or consulting a market research analyst can help you identify these specific needs.

Engage your audience

You’d be hard pressed to come across someone who’s never heard of Starbucks. The corporate coffee giants have made a global name for themselves, so you might wonder why they would need any more press than they’ve already had. But, consumer needs are changing and a growing on-the-go generation of buyers are demanding more engaging campaigns, causing even the biggest brands to rethink their marketing strategies in order to stay relevant.

Starbucks is one of the many companies that’s turned to Instagram to freshen up their audience engagement. Inspired by customer doodles on cups, Starbucks in 2014 reached out to their audience through their My Starbucks Idea, asking them if they had any suggestions that could make their brand even better. Thus, the #WhiteCupContest was born, receiving close to 4,000 entries. The winner’s cup was sold as a limited edition item on their website.

Before you consider taking the easy way to Insta-fame, remember that it takes a bit of finesse to get the most out of any social media strategy, and putting in the work is worth it in the end. Paying careful attention to your target market, and getting creative with your content is a great way to gain traction naturally, without having to pay for followers.

Anthony Coggine is a HR professional turned business writer. He has been covering a range of topics including training, HR, recruiting and cryptocurrency news.
O'Dwyer’s guide to ENVIRONMENTAL PR & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

5W PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Ronn Torossian, Founder & CEO

5W’s public affairs practice manages everything from highly controversial local issue advocacy campaigns and international affairs programs to matters of cross-border litigation and arbitration. 5W implements all facets of public affairs campaigns to impact public opinion — polling, message development, grassroots and grassroots lobbying, coalition building, digital campaigns, media relations, crisis management and more. 5W’s distinguishing characteristic over other public affairs firms is our ability to reach our clients’ core audiences through the media. We understand how the media thinks and works, from local to national outlets, ensuring that our clients’ causes are heard by the audiences they care about most. 5W’s public affairs clients include foreign allies they care about most. 5W’s public affairs practice includes foreign allies of the U.S., international trade associations, political leaders, public employee unions, domestic and foreign NGO’s and non-profit organizations.

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Aric Caplan, President

Caplan Communications is a full-service Washington-DC area agency that carries out targeted news for legislation and advocacy. We work at the vanguard of issue-action campaigns, message design and journalism. Caplan galvanizes citizen-led groups that champion matters in the public interest to effect desired audiences to achieve timely results. Our practice aligns clients with their most desired press contacts working in the media. We advance the news value of clients with clear calls to action on the local, state and regional levels, inside the Beltway and on the national stage.

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For more than 50 years, Cerrell has been at the center of California’s biggest environmental projects and most consequential issues. Our unmatched energy and environment experience is built on decades of successfully working for some of the largest oil and gas, solar, water, power plant and recycling private and public-sector entities in the state.

Whether we’re confronting regulations from air, water and/or related agencies, or managing communications and outreach for Superfund Site clean-ups and hazardous waste remediation projects, our team has the skills and subject-matter expertise to achieve our clients’ results.

Cerrell creates strategic and targeted multilingual public affairs programs that California’s diverse environmental projects demands. The key to our success is a comprehensive approach that combines the disciplines of government affairs, public relations, land use and outreach campaigns.

We advocate for smart public policies, build effective coalitions, and tell compelling stories that get results and drive our communities forward. That’s why Cerrell is the firm of choice for local, national and global organizations doing energy and environment projects in California.

COOPERKATZ & COMPANY

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Ralph Katz, Principal
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CooperKatz has significant experience helping clients respond to complex business, public policy or environmental issues with integrated communications solutions that deliver results. Our expertise enables organizations to strategize issues, articulate key perspectives, connect with critical constituencies and leverage opportunities. Client case examples include:

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CooperKatz has developed public affairs and/or environmental campaigns for diverse clients including American Cleaning Institute (ACI), American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Association of National Advertisers (ANA), Digital Advertising Alliance, MSN, Northern Arizona University, Otis Worldwide, Philadelphia Eagles, Piaggio Group Americas, The Physicians Foundation and US Preventive Medicine.
Profiles of Environmental PR & Public Affairs Firms

CROSBY MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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Raymond Crosby, President

For more than 40 years, Crosby has helped clients Inspire Actions That Matter™ – actions that positively impact people’s lives and contribute to the greater good. From helping to save energy and protect the climate to stopping the spread of invasive species, from fighting for veterans’ rights to promoting innovation in education, Crosby partners with clients to raise awareness of today’s most important issues and call people to action.

The firm serves a wide range of nonprofits, foundations, government agencies and companies focused on the environment, public health, education, and advocacy. Crosby develops integrated marketing campaigns for clients including EPA’s ENERGY STAR program, USDA, DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Catholic Relief Services and The Wallace Foundation.

Services include marketing research and planning, brand development, public relations, community and multicultural outreach, digital marketing and web development, PSAs, and social marketing and behavior-change campaigns that deploy a mix of paid, earned, owned and shared media.

Crosby is #33 on O’Dwyer’s ranking of public relations firms and has offices in Annapolis, Md., and Washington, D.C. To see case studies, visit www.crosbymarketing.com.

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Neil Mortine, President and CEO
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Fahlgren Mortine’s public affairs professionals have a successful track record of helping clients negotiate the often difficult waters where private- and public-sector issues and concerns intersect. Collectively, we have decades of experience working with businesses, trade associations, and informal and formal coalitions, as well as government officials, public agencies and the media. Our core competencies include supporting industry coalitions; organizing and supporting grassroots advocacy efforts; planning and conducting special events and conferences; writing policy briefs, position papers, legislative testimony and other advocacy materials; and coordinating newspaper editorial board meetings and outreach to the media.

Our team of public affairs professionals has the required working knowledge of executive and legislative government processes to enable us to develop effective communication strategies, messages, materials and activities to support clients’ advocacy goals.

G&S BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

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G&S Business Communications provides clients with a strategic approach to environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosure and corporate social responsibility (CSR). We collaborate with you to improve relationships with stakeholders and realize greater business value from sustainability efforts.

With headquarters in New York, offices in Chicago, Raleigh and Basel, Switzerland, and affiliates in 50+ countries, we advise on sustainability reporting, strategic messaging and stakeholder engagement, ESG disclosure and communications, materiality analysis, clean technology marketing, supply chain monitoring, and cause marketing. Our portfolio encompasses a broad array of services to implement B2B customer experience (CX) studies, brand strategy, content strategy, creative, digital and social, employee engagement, insights and analytics, media relations, and sustainability and CSR.

Annual editions of our Sense & Sustainability® Study are an authoritative source for research into consumer opinions on the corporate commitment to ESG responsibilities. G&S also advances thought leadership via programs that feature business journalists who cover ESG and renewable energy news from leading media outlets, among them Bloomberg Businessweek, Newsweek and Time magazine.

We achieve business results by precisely aligning sustainability communications with corporate strategies.

GREENOUGH BRAND STORYTELLERS

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Phil Greenough, CEO
Scott Bauman, EVP/CM

Greenough Brand Storytellers expertly moves audiences toward affinity and action with compelling stories. Whether we’re educating consumers about energy efficiency and solar investment or helping to influence state legislators and policy-makers for a greenhouse gas initiative, wind energy or a ballot issue, every campaign starts with the central issues and a qualitative and quantitative understanding of the characters. Greenough’s energy practice excels at delivering national, local and hyperlocal media results, developing and distributing journalistic-quality stories through owned and paid channels. It begins with “Brand Journalism,” our program framework that comprises PR and marketing tactics based on journalistic discipline. We are effectively your in-house investigative reporting team, uncovering the meaning behind issues and offerings by presenting them through the lenses of the target audiences themselves. Our energy campaigns actively engage viewers, readers and listeners, encouraging them to think, share and act.

MARKETING MAVEN

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Marketing Maven’s sophisticated share of voice and sentiment

_ Continued on page 22_
MARKETING MAVEN

Continued from page 21

analysis tools help to shape campaign strategy for public affairs and environmental clients. Aligning with key influencers and utilizing grassroots social media tactics, paired with traditional media relations, this generates significant impact for clients.

From high profile litigation, emergency announcements, public affairs issues with utilities companies and law enforcement associations to reputation management surrounding tech companies with data breaches, our strategic execution is core to the success of our campaigns for environmental and public affairs clients. Marketing Maven executes these campaigns in both English and Spanish.

Marketing Maven is a federally recognized Native American Owned 8(a) and WOSB certified company. We are also a certified Small Business (SB) with the California Department of General Services (DGS), a certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) with METRO, a certified Women/Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE) through the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), and a certified Women’s Business Enterprise (WBE) with the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

MARKETNG MAVEN supports WaterAid America by educating U.S. consumers about WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and how to impact the global water crisis in-country with advocacy initiatives.

Photo: WaterAid/Tom Greenwood

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MWWPR, one of the world’s top independent PR agencies, has decades of experience building relationships with the national, state and local advocacy groups that matter most. We help clients turn a spotlight on key issues they care about, move policy that makes a difference and establish them as thought leaders in the environment in which they work.

Our Public Affairs professionals have worked at the highest levels of the executive branch, congress, and state and local governments, as well as in a variety of advocacy groups and political entities. Our strategies are built on data-driven insights and human intellect and instinct. With an approach to public affairs that goes beyond the boundaries of expected thinking, we help you matter more to the stakeholders who matter most.


PADILLA


Matt Kucharski, President
Tina Charpentier, Senior Vice President, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Lead

Padilla is a top 10 independent public relations and communications company comprised of 240 employee-owners. Padilla builds,
grows and protects brands worldwide by creating purposeful connections with the people who matter most through public relations, advertising, digital and social marketing, investor relations and brand strategy. Padilla includes the brand consultancy of Joe Smith, the food and nutrition experts at FoodMinds and the research authorities at SMS.

Padilla’s Agriculture and Environmental Sciences team brings the best of what the agency has to offer — smart, invested people dedicated to helping clients achieve their purpose — along with a passion for companies and organizations engaged in protecting, managing and optimizing the earth’s natural resources. Whether it’s in agriculture, energy, clean water and air or environmental remediation, Padilla’s Agriculture and Environmental Sciences team collaborates with clients to plan and implement communications strategies to grow their businesses, serve their customers, build alignment with stakeholders and sustain our natural resources.

Clients in the agriculture and environmental sectors include The Almond Board of California, Cargill, CHS, Dominion Energy, Land O’Lakes, Pentair and U.S. High-bush Blueberry Council.

Padilla is a founding member of The Worldcom Public Relations Group, a partnership of 143 independent partner offices in 115 cities on six continents. Make a connection at PadillaCo.com.

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Peppercomm is an award-winning, integrated communications and marketing agency headquartered in New York City with offices in San Francisco and London. The firm connects brands, messages and people through data-driven insights, cross-channel communications and brilliant customer experience. Employing an omni-channel approach, the company uses customer insights and platforms to help clients reach, engage and influence customers along their path to purchase.

Founded in 1995, Peppercomm has received numerous accolades, including The Holmes Report’s North American Corporate/B2B Agency of the Year and Bulldog Reporter’s Midsized Agency of the Year. The agency has been listed as one of Fortune’s 10 Best Workplaces in Advertising and Marketing, 100 Best Workplaces for Women, 50 Best Small and Medium Workplaces and 50 Best Workplaces for New College Grads.


For more information, visit www.peppercomm.com.

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Perry Communications Group is an award-winning, full service strategic communications firm. Led by Kassy Perry, PCG shapes ideas, galvanizes opinions and influences decisions ultimately leading to social change. The PCG team helps clients positively impact public policy issues not only in Sacramento, but throughout California and the U.S. PCG tackles high-profile issues such as health care, energy and environment, finance and water.

Whether the politically savvy PCG team is managing a complicated issue, running a statewide initiative campaign, leading a high-profile coalition or helping clients communicate, shape and influence with a mix of traditional and digital strategies, we achieve success by building strong relationships with policymakers, the media and corporate influencers. We excel at working with local and state governments. Since the company’s founding, we have worked with Fortune 500 companies, major industry associations and charitable organizations.

PCG provides public affairs services for an array of clients including: California Chronic Care Coalition, California Manufacturers and Technology Association, California Association of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons, EHS Medical Group, Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America, West Health Policy Center and ZGlobal, Inc.

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Jill Allread, APR, CEO
Pamela Oettel, CFO & COO
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Experience distinguishes PCI as a go-to agency on green issues from local to global. We serve a diversity of environmental clients, from advocacy organizations and professional associations, to nationally and internationally ranked zoos and aquariums, conservation groups and regulatory agencies.

It is an agency priority to use sustainable business practices daily at PCI because we share the belief with our environmentally conscious clients that it’s important to live sustainably.

Several PCI senior counselors have significant experience working in and for environmental organizations. This first-hand experience brings extraordinary insight and benefits to our clients — from PCI’s creative strategies to knowing what words resonate and prompt public engagement on green issues.

For most of our 55 years, PCI has represented clients in the conservation and environmental fields. Today a growing segment of our business consists of clients who seek international, national and regional counsel on issues, including land use, water quality, wildlife conservation, animal care, marine life protection and living sustainably.

We create and launch campaigns, operate consumer awareness programs, celebrate announcements and milestones, manage social media campaigns and create content and strategies that inform, excite and connect with our clients’ messages. This includes handling crises, developing digital strategies, coaching spokespersons and providing an outside-in perspective that is difficult for people within an organization to muster.

More than 75 percent of PCI’s new business is generated through word of mouth, including referrals and personal recommendations from our clients. This is particularly true within our conservation and environment practice because PCI has established a reputation of understanding our clients’ needs and delivering results.

Once clients begin working with PCI, they stay. Nearly half of our clients in the conservation and environmental fields have been with us 10 years or more and our clients benefit.

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Rasky Partners is a nationally recognized public and government relations firm with more than three decades of experience providing exceptional client service to organizations that operate at the intersection of business, politics and media. With offices in Boston and Washington, DC, Rasky Partners offers a comprehensive range of services including media strategy and public relations, government relations, reputation management, crisis communication and digital media.

Rasky Partners’ Public Affairs practice has extensive experience representing multinational clients’ interests before all levels of gov-
eminent and helps clients capitalize on the firm’s strong relationships with elected officials in New England and on Capitol Hill.

The Energy and Environment practice excels in helping clients including large utilities, clean tech startups and renewable energy companies achieve their business objectives through integrated communications strategies.

An independent firm, Rasky Partners provides consistent, strategic hands-on engagement, with client teams — including the senior professionals — highly engaged throughout each client engagement.

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Joan Schneider, Chief Executive Officer & Founder
Phil Pennellatore, President

At Schneider Associates, we define public affairs as anything that impacts public opinion and drives behavior. Whether you’re facing a media crisis, securing town permitting approvals, advancing social or environmental causes, or trying to influence decision-makers at all levels of government, Schneider Associates can help.

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

**WEBER SHANDWICK**

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Paul Massey, President DC
Cindy Drucker, Executive Vice President

Weber Shandwick is a leading global communications and engagement firm in 79 cities across 34 countries and operations extending to 127 cities in 81 countries.

Through our Social Impact and Energy offerings, we bring clients a full-range of strategic, integrated communications services along with in-depth subject matter expertise needed to navigate the complexities of the social responsibility, sustainability and energy-related arenas. Weber Shandwick’s Social Impact practice is an award-winning global team that builds engagement strategies for purpose-driven organizations. The team creates best-in-class engagement campaigns, partnering with leading corporate, foundation, and nonprofit clients to advance shared value and progress on complex business and social issues with consumers, thought leaders, media and other key stakeholders. Our professionals bring long-standing expertise working with corporations to distinguish sustainability progress and leadership, often through multi-stakeholder engagement.

Our global Energy team provides tailored communications, public affairs and engagement services designed to help clients navigate the evolving energy landscape, build reputation and advance organization and business goals in the areas of renewable energy, energy innovation & technology, energy efficiency, climate change, sustainable cities, science-based goals and reporting across a wide spectrum of industries.

Weber Shandwick counsels clients on social responsibility, sustainability, energy issues management and public affairs strategy, in partnership with the agency’s specialized public affairs division, Powell Tate, based in Washington, D.C. Powell Tate staff includes top communications and policy experts from both parties on Capitol Hill, the White House, federal agencies, trade associations, advocacy organizations and the media.

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How Bannon got played

By Fraser Seitel

Steve Bannon’s fall from grace was so rapid, so precipitous and so conclusive — not to mention so unexpected — that recalling his name now requires some thought. Never before in the annals of power politics has such a close personal advisor to the President been offed so definitively. Talk about “Gone in 60 seconds.”

How Bannon, the self-acknowledged smartest man in Washington and primary creator of the Trump strategy, got “played” by a notoriously untrustworthy and conniving journalist, should be a cautionary tale for any PR person who deals with the media.

The story by now is well known. Michael Wolff, a strange and prodigiously disliked Wall Street/media columnist for such publications as Vanity Fair and New York Magazine and frequent TV contributor, approached Bannon — then Donald Trump’s strategic advisor — about access to the White House for a book Wolff was writing on the new administration.

Bannon, a former Goldman Sachs manager, movie producer and Breitbart executive, was outspoken in his contempt for the mainstream media and particularly what he saw as its contempt for his candidate. Trump and Bannon led the campaign to demonize the “fake news” delivered by the usual suspects, from CNN to the New York Times. And it was Lt. Bannon, in particular, who served as Gen. Trump’s point man on his anti-media flank.

The Trump-Bannon combination continued to thrive until the publication of Wolff’s book, “Fire and Fury,” which tells the inside story of a hopelessly dysfunctional White House, where most of the senior troops lament the ignorance, naiveté, insecurity and childishness of the man they serve. While it’s impossible to know how much of Wolff’s best seller is true and how much is baloney, it remains a mystery how someone with a reputation as sleazy as Wolff managed to finagle his way into the inner sanctum of the Trump White House, and why his new friend Bannon awarded him carte blanche access to the West Wing staff for nine solid months, which ultimately resulted in Bannon’s self-immolation.

Within weeks of the book’s first leaks, Trump fired “Sloppy Steve” and presumably severed ties with his former top aide. Bannon’s financiers followed, as did his employer, Breitbart. Today, Steve Bannon is an historical afterthought. Finished. Over. Kaput.

Here are the three simple public relations reminders he leaves in his wake.

Don’t trust reporters

Or at least the ones you don’t know.

The simple rule that every public relations professional must know is that reporters and sources have different objectives: the latter want good stories about their employers; the former want stories that sizzle. That’s why one must always be wary of reporters.

Bannon, no doubt, was impressed with Wolff’s pedigree. After all, the man was an outstanding writer, winning two National Magazine Awards, and had worked for the highest-rated publications in the country. He was a published author, sought-after TV media critic and a friend to media movers and shakers, some of whom he partnered with in an attempt to buy media giant Primedia Inc. Perhaps most important to Bannon, Wolff was disdainful of the working media, preferring to rub elbows with power players rather than ink-stained wretches.

What Bannon apparently didn’t realize was that Wolff was a snake. Sure, he was a “good reporter,” just not “good” in terms of fairness, honesty or ethics. Michael Wolff was known for his provocative prose and producing stories people wanted to read. But he was equally well known — as described in a most public 2004 cover story in the New Republic — as someone who couldn’t be trusted. That’s why other reporters had no particular use for him, but since Bannon had no use for them and because the Trump strategist obviously didn’t do much homework, he opened the White House tent for the snake to slither in. The dope.

Don’t believe your own press

Good public relations people know that any publicity — good or bad — should be believed by half, always playing down expectations.

But Steve Bannon — the President’s architect, his top man, the chief arbiter of policies that affected millions — was flying high for the first time in his life and loving it.

So, when the conniving Wolff approached him with a proposition to write the book that would memorialize Bannon’s place in history, the gullible Bannon ate it up. He believed that in Wolff, a writer who regularly hobnobbed with the moguls to whom Bannon compared himself, he had found a writer who could properly discern the superior thoughtfulness that he possessed and the Svengali-like impact he had on an eager believer like President Trump.

This book, the self-inflated advisor thought, would provide the true context of his own policy-making authority and the outsized role that the President’s key advisor would play in reshaping America and the world. Michael Wolff, in other words, would be Steve Bannon’s Arthur Schlesinger.

So Steve Bannon dropped his guard and spilled his guts.

Among other pearls, Bannon, according to Wolff, declared Don Jr.’s infamous meeting with Russians in Trump Tower, “treasonous.” He admitted his antipathy to Trump daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner and dismissed the two as “Jarvanka.” Ivanka, Trump’s favorite, was evidently a particular Bannon target. Wolff quoted him as calling her a “@#$% liar” and gleefully extolling after the United States pulled out of the Paris climate agreement that Ivanka championed, “Score. The bitch is dead.”

Now the only feasible reason anyone would open up so graphically about his employer’s family, no less, was that Bannon trusted Wolff to keep some comments off-the-record and protect him as a source. Surprise!

Organizations supersede individuals

PR professionals understand that your first loyalty is always to he or she who pays the check. In this case, it’s the President who gets the credit, made the decision or wrote the speech (as White House speechwriter Peggy Noonan famously found out when she bragged that she was the one, not President George HW Bush, who invented the term, “thousand points of light.” Neither Poppy nor Mommy Bush were pleased.)

Stated another way, the organization’s welfare always comes before your own. Steve Bannon, so consumed with his own presumed place in history, either forgot or didn’t realize that simple truth.

So he hungrily swallowed the Wolff Kool-Aid, let the Trojan Horse through the gates and proceeded to backstab his employer. By enabling Wolff to paint the White House as a dysfunctional organization and Trump as an unprepared, dim-witted, way-in-over-his-head buffoon, Bannon sealed his fate.

So intent was Bannon to ensure that he, himself, was memorialized, he never realized that in assisting the devious Wolff, he was committing the cardinal Trump World sin, disloyalty, and sealing his own demise.
Tax changes for PR firm owners and their agencies

By Arthur Solomon

This year has brought us the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act,” which will impact PR agency owners personally as well as their agencies. This column will review the key provision changes that we will be facing in 2018 and beyond.

New income tax rates and brackets

To determine your regular tax liability, there are now new tax rate schedules. There will be four tax rate schedules based on filing status. Under the pre-Act law, individuals were subject to six tax rates: 10 percent, 15 percent, 25 percent, 28 percent, 33 percent, 35 percent and 39.6 percent. The new tax law introduces seven brackets for individuals: 10 percent, 12 percent, 22 percent, 32 percent, 35 percent and 37 percent. For example, a married couple with taxable income over $165,000 but not over $315,000 will incur a tax of $28,179 plus 24 percent on the excess over $165,000 up to $315,000.

There are basically three ways to measure tax rates: marginal tax rate, average tax rate and effective tax rate. The marginal rate is the tax rate that applies to the next additional increment of the taxpayer’s taxable income. The average tax rate is the average rate of taxation on each dollar of tax income. The effective tax rate is the rate of taxation on each dollar of total income (both taxable and nontaxable). In my view, most taxpayers focus on the effective rate.

The standard deduction

We all know that the tax act eliminates the deduction for state and local taxes that are more than $10,000 and reduces the amount that can be deducted for home mortgage interest (see below). The new standard deduction is $24,000 for married filing a joint return, $18,000 for head-of-household filers and $12,000 for all other taxpayers. Note, no changes are made to the current law additional standard deduction for the elderly and the blind. The deduction for personal exemptions is effectively suspended by reducing the exemption amount to zero.

Homeowner deductions changed

Under the pre-Act law, the mortgage interest and home equity loan deduction was limited to acquisition indebtedness of up to $1 million ($500,000 in the case of married filing separate), plus home equity indebtedness of up to $100,000.

The new law allows a qualified employee to elect to defer for income tax purposes the amount of income attributable to qualified stock transferred to the employee by the employer. The deferral period is made by election no later than 30 days after the first time the employee’s right to the stock is substantially vested or is transferable, whichever occurs earlier. (Note: the balance of the rules are complex and professional advice is needed!)

Obviously, I can’t review every provision in this column. However, one important provision to understand is the new deduction for pass-through income. Generally, the new law allows a non-corporate taxpayer, including a trust or estate, who has qualified business income from a partnership, S corporation or sole proprietorship to deduct what is known as the 20 percent deduction. Have you been told this will now work for PR agencies? We’ll discuss this next month.
Prime Policy Group is working with the American Immigration Council as it seeks a bipartisan legislative alternative to President Trump’s decision to kill the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals immigration status, which covers nearly 800,000 people, in March.

Beth Werlin, Executive Director of the Council, said the White House’s move on DACA ignores “our American identity of being a nation of immigrants” and fails “to embrace the energy, innovation and opportunities that immigrants bring to our country.”

PPG, which is part of Burson-Marsteller, also reps the Council on the “temporary protected status program,” which provides immigration status to people living in countries that experienced armed conflict and environmental disasters.

Trump ended TPS for 200,000 people from El Salvador last month.

The Council criticized Trump’s move as a “tragic decision” for people “who have lived here, paid taxes and registered with the government for nearly 20 years.”

PPG Chairman Charlie Black, former Aide to Ronald Reagan/George Bush I and Republican National Committee Spokesperson, leads his firm’s five-member lobbying team.

Immigration Voice, a national grassroots advocacy group committed to addressing problems in the U.S’s green card system and changing immigration laws to support legal, high-skilled foreign workers, has tapped D.C.-based government relations firm Twinlogic Strategies in response to a contentious immigration bill currently making its way through Congress.

The San Jose-based non-profit, which was founded in 2005, has hired Twinlogic to advocate on behalf of H.R. 392, the “Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act of 2017.” That bill would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to lift the U.S’s current per-country cap for employment-based green cards.

Currently, arbitrarily-defined per-country limits in the employment-based green card system create a massive backlog for many immigrants, who arrive in the U.S. on work visas but wait decades for permanent residence, particularly those originating from high-population countries such as India or China, nations that now receive the same amount of visas as sparsely populated countries.

The bill’s lead sponsor is Rep. Kevin Yoder (R-KS). It was previously introduced last year by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), who retired from the House of Representatives in June and assumed a contributor role at Fox News.

Twinlogic co-Founder Elizabeth Frazee manages the IV account with a three-person team.

McDonald’s has hired Glover Park Group to lead its government relations and PA push in Washington.

GPG, which is part of WPP, will focus on issues such as agriculture, food, nutrition and sustainability.

McDonald’s kicked off its beef sustainability program in 2014, forming the industry’s groundbreaking “Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef” with World Wildlife Fund and suppliers JBS and Cargill.

In 2016, the fast-feeder focused on coffee sourcing, committing to buying 100 percent of its coffee from sustainable sources by 2020.

GPG’s Grant Leslie (Aide to former Democratic Leader Tom Daschle and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack) handles the McDonald’s account with Joel Leftwich (ex-Majority Staff Director on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry and Congressional liaison at Agriculture Dept.).

Dan Meyers, who spent nearly a decade at DCI Group, has joined APCO Worldwide as Senior Director and head of advocacy in the firm’s PA practice.

As VP at DCI, Meyers managed federal/state/local political campaigns, overseeing messaging, field operations, finance/compliance, digital and paid advertising.

Meyers was Press Advance Rep. for the George W. Bush White House, Special Assistant to the Political Director for the Republican National Committee during the 2006 mid-term elections and personal Aide to former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani for his 2008 presidential run.

Evan Kraus, APCO president, believes Meyers “extensive experience as a Republican political operative” will be invaluable to clients as they navigate the dynamic DC environment.
Ketchum touts Turkey

Ketchum is handling media relations in the US and promoting Turkey as a desirable place for business investment, on behalf of the Turkish Exporters’ Assembly.

The Omnicom unit also will arrange meetings and interviews with academics, authors and business leaders with TEA representatives focusing on Turkey.

Relations between the US and Turkey have been fraught with tension following the April beating of protestors in Washington by bodyguards of Turkish strongman Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and U.S. support for Syrian Kurdish forces that Erdogan considers terrorists.

The U.S. and Turkey had tightened visa requirements, but both sides dropped those restrictions at the end of 2017.

TEA chairman Mehmet Büyükekşi projects a record year for Turkish exports in 2018, buoyed by growth in international trade and favorable policies advocated by Erdogan.

Global Vision focuses on Taiwan

Taiwan has signed Global Vision Communications to a $560,000 contract to provide lobbying, PR and strategic communications services.

GVC's consulting pact began Dec. 1 and runs through Jan. 30, 2019. It calls for outreach to the major industrialized nations of the world in the G-7 and G-20 groupings, excluding the US.

The Washington-based firm will make the rounds of Embassy Row, conducting meetings with officials and producing marketing kits and materials to support the Taiwan Civil Government.

The People's Republic of China views Taiwan as a breakaway province and is committed to its re-unification with the Beijing Government.

The Financial Times reported that China is stepping up pressure on corporations that refer to Tibet or Taiwan as independent countries. After a Shanghai media outlet fingered Qantas for identifying Taiwan as an independent destination, the Australian carrier adjusted the “offending” drop-down menu. The FT also reported that Chinese aviation officials warned Delta Air Lines about its listings.

Neal Hare, former Corporate Communications VP at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and content director at USLaw.com, heads GVC.

Grassroots Political Consulting works Yemen Crisis

Grassroots Political Consulting has a $180,000 one-year pact to represent the Southern Transitional Council of war-torn Yemen. The contract went into effect Jan. 1.

The Washington-based firm is to provide political and strategic advice to the STC on how to achieve its goal of declaring an independent state comprised of the southern part of Yemen.

A coalition of Arab nations entered Yemen in 2015 to wage war on Houthis rebels, who control the north, including the capital, Sana. The conflict has killed and wounded more than 60,000 people, while millions of others have suffered from famine and cholera.

Coalition members Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are now split over the future of Yemen, according to a report in Aljazeera on Jan. 22. The Saudis, who support Yemen’s government, now “want out,” while the UAE is backing the STC and has become more involved in the war.

Aljazeera reports STC’s ultimate goal is to overthrow Yemen’s government.

NEW FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATIONS 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.

Crossroads Strategies LLC, Washington, D.C., registered Jan. 18, 2018 for Government of Victoria, Australia, Melbourne, Australia, to develop a communications strategy targeted at US companies illustrating the opportunities available and the appeal of investing in Victoria.


Ogilvy Public Relations, New York, NY, registered Jan. 22, 2018 for Government of India, New Delhi, India, to provide support for the Government of India’s Ministry of Food Processing Industries, including media relations, materials development and on-site support for media interviews.

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.


Twenty-First Century Group, Inc., Washington, D.C., registered Jan. 24, 2018 for NeuroRx, Wilmington, DE, regarding research and treatment related to suicide prevention for veterans and patients with bipolar depression.

Morrissy Strategic Partners, LLC, Annapolis, MD, registered Jan. 22, 2018 for Printing Industries of America, Washington, D.C., regarding matters pertaining to association health plan legislation.
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