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Why the gun debate is different this time

There's an appreciable irony astir among Americans who maintain the belief that we should "drain the swamp" in D.C. of special interests, who also ignore — or even support — a gun lobby whose largess funds more than half of our state representatives. You can't treat special interests as anathema while ignoring the highly unusual influence the NRA exerts over our elected officials without sounding, at the very least, confused in a very deep and fundamental sense.

Every few months the script repeats. Another school shooting happens somewhere in America. Amid cries for change and the same recycled headlines, Congress offers little besides sympathy card condolences, requisite thoughts and prayers. Sometimes we're mollified with empty promises; our leaders debate an increase to wait periods, a ban on bump stocks, possibly rising the gun purchasing age. In the end they do nothing and things eventually blow over, business as usual. This cycle has become another American tradition. Ever wonder why?

The National Rifle Association, which began as a hobbyist group, is considered one of the most powerful lobbying organizations in the U.S., but it's hardly the most well-heeled. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Assn. of Realtors, the National Retail Federation and about a dozen others spend far more money on Capitol Hill. Only five percent of the gun-rights advocacy group's funding comes from the firearms industry, with the majority of its financial support originating from small donations. Its annual expenses regularly outpace its revenues.

The NRA is powerful because it provides a function for the GOP similar to what labor unions once gave the Democratic party. Even better than deep coffers, it counts an unusually large member base — more than five million members — and wields an even larger sphere of influence outside of those ranks, the nearly 10 million in the U.S. who own a collective total of nearly 300 million guns. President Trump wasn't wrong when he said during a Feb. 28 televised meeting with lawmakers that Republicans are "afraid of the NRA." Aside from being able to deliver cash to candidates, it can deliver millions of votes from Americans who take their voting cues from the organization, the same way that many voters who weren't necessarily union members used to cast ballots to elect pro-union candidates, which is what gave the Democratic Party control of Congress between 1931 and 1995.

So, it's little wonder why our leaders have repeatedly cowed to the gun lobby's demands and have refused to budge in any foreseeable way regarding legislation that could anger the private influence to whom they are so deeply beholden. This is the apotheosis of the swamp; just imagine the same litany of excuses being used to prevent legislative change every time a domestic terrorist attack occurred, or a major health outbreak, or a financial crisis. The greatest barriers to change we have are the representatives we've elected to enact the laws we want.

Unfortunately for them, it's become clear that America's gun debate has been different in the wake of the Parkland, FL shooting than it was after Las Vegas, Orlando, Newtown, Columbine or Virginia Tech. The victims have grown up in a time where everyone's one click away from becoming an activist, and they've been emboldened by the recent #MeToo movement, which proved that social media outrage can engender change. The protests currently being held around the country underscore a change in American attitudes regarding gun control, with 70 percent of U.S. adults now wanting stricter firearms laws, the highest percent in 25 years, according to a February Politico / Morning Consult poll.

Perhaps this is also why another sector has stepped in to take the lead in creating change as government continues to dig in its heels. American corporations are cutting ties with the NRA at a fast clip: insurance giant MetLife recently ended its NRA member discount program, Delta and United Airlines announced they were ending their contracts with the association, and car rental companies Avis Budget Group, Hertz, Alamo, Enterprise and National followed suit by slashing their NRA member discount plans. Even Walmart has joined the fray, raising the age limit on gun purchases to 21.

These entities are hardly civic rights leaders. Many of them support conservative causes and have been emboldened by Trump's pro-business agenda. The private sector is ditching any association with the NRA because they recognize that boycotts have become a regular part of America's response narrative, and conversely, companies that take stances on social or political issues stand to initiate a conversation with customers by offering them the kinds of changes they want.

Americans have seen the gun debate play out enough times to know how the sausage gets made in Washington. They recognize the production process behind the machine, see the hands pulling the strings of legislative theater. The private sector's response in the wake of the Parkland shooting has made it clear that America's gun debate has shifted, providing a counterbalance to the inaction in Washington that has hindered any progress on this issue for years. The 200 million-plus Americans who don't own guns can convince Congress to follow the free market's lead. The people have spoken. Companies are listening. Will our leaders do the same? ○

— Jon Gingerich

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Trump supporters share most fake news

By Jon Gingerich

Supporters of President Trump and hard-right conservatives are far more likely to share unreliable news items via social media than any other political group in the U.S., according to a new study published as part of Oxford University's "Computational Propaganda Research Project."

Oxford's researchers conducted analysis on more than 13,000 "politically active" Twitter users and nearly 48,000 Facebook pages in the three months leading up to Trump's Jan. 30 State of the Union Address. Based on the data they sampled, social media users were separated into groups based on ideology; categories included "Democratic Party," "Republican Party," "Progressive Movement," "conspiracy," "resistance," "hard conservatives" and "Trump support."

Researchers also separately identified more than 90 media sources providing content they described as "junk," or online publishers that "deliberately publish misleading, deceptive or incorrect information purporting to be real news about politics, economics or culture." Junk news sources included both right- and left-leaning sites such as Breitbart News, mediaite.com, newsmax.

com, occupydemocrats.com and InfoWars.

Examining how that content was distributed across social media, Oxford's study discovered that sharing "junk" political news is a practice uniquely concentrated among Trump supporters, with that group and "hard conservatives" on Facebook responsible for sharing more fake news stories than all other political groups combined.

In its sample of Twitter data, the study revealed that 55 percent of all junk news traffic came from users falling under the "Trump support" category. Trump supporters on Twitter were responsible for sharing 95 percent of the study's "junk" stories, with 96 percent of Trump supporters sharing a junk news link via Twitter in the days leading up to the State of the Union.

On Facebook, 91 percent of the "hard conservatives" group shared junk news — even topping members of the study's "conspiracy" category — and accounted for 58 percent of all junk news traffic.

By contrast, the "Democratic Party" group on Facebook accounted for just 12 percent of junk news traffic on Facebook. Together, "Democratic Party" and "Progressive Movement" groups accounted for

only one percent of junk news traffic on Twitter, according to the study.

The study concluded that political polarization is driving, and could also be the result of, social media news consumption patterns, as "limited overlap" of news sources existed between content shared by Democrats and Republicans online, with Democrats engaging primarily with mainstream media sources and Republicans interacting mostly with conservative media groups. ○

TV ads reign supreme

By Jon Gingerich

TV advertisements retain a unique value for brands' ability to connect with consumers, as most consumers view TV advertisements as memorable and effective, and prefer them over ads seen via different mediums, according to a new survey of consumer advertising preferences conducted by Washington, D.C.-based research and consulting firm Clutch.

More than half of respondents polled in the Clutch survey (58 percent) said they prefer TV advertisements over any other medium, followed by online ads (13 percent), and ads that appear over social media sites and in print (both 11 percent).

A majority of consumers polled (65 percent) said they could recall TV ads more than any other medium. Most (53 percent) said they prefer ads that are humorous. A similar number (51 percent) said they enjoy ads from brands that appeal to them.

Consumers said the primary reason they dislike ads is because they didn't learn anything about the product (51 percent) or that the advertisement in question wasn't relatable (48 percent) or was unappealing (46 percent).

With digital advertising, by contrast, the survey found Facebook is the most favored platform, preferred by 36 percent. This is followed by banner ads (21 percent), video/interactive (19 percent) and Google search (nine percent). The survey also discovered that very few consumers like retargeted advertisements (two percent), or ads that use cookie-based technology to reach audiences based on sites they've recently visited.

Males are more likely to enjoy ads featuring technology or sports products (both 49 percent), while women are more likely to enjoy ads involving fashion and beauty (69 percent) and travel and leisure (54 percent). Both sexes (88 percent women and 70 percent men) agree that food and drink are the preferred advertising category. ○

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Consumers expect brands to act on social issues

A series of recent reports suggest that Americans want companies and c-suite leaders to take stances on social or political issues, but brands experimenting with corporate advocacy might run as much of a risk alienating consumers as they do increasing engagement.

By Jon Gingerich

Consumers place high expectations on brands and their corporate leaders to take a lead in addressing the most pressing social, environmental and political challenges facing the world today. An overwhelming majority — 95 percent — of stakeholders now believe companies have the ability to shape a better society, and 88 percent believe businesses' resources and innovations offer vital solutions in solving some of society's greatest problems, according to a six-month corporate advocacy research project conducted by D.C.-based communication firm APCO Worldwide.

APCO's "Five Acts of Corporate Advocacy" report, which explored how corporate advocacy work influences consumers' opinions regarding corporate brands and their reputations, suggests that corporate governance has a clear role in today's divisive political and social climate. 90 percent of stakeholders polled said they expect brands to take a stand on issues affecting the world, with 93 percent stating the best companies are those that do good for their shareholders while also doing good for society. A similar majority (89 percent) said they think companies should support social issues that are consistent with their business focus and expertise, and 71 percent claimed that it's acceptable for a company to take a stand on a political or social issue even when it's controversial.

The survey also found that whether consumers identify as Republican or Democrat offers a likely predictor regarding what role they feel is appropriate for companies and their CEOs to take on in the course of addressing a social issue.

On the whole, Republicans are more averse to the idea of companies and their CEOs stoking controversy: while 81 percent of Democrat respondents believe it's acceptable for companies to take a stand on a potentially controversial issue, only 56 percent of Republican respondents believe this; and while 65 percent of Democrats believe it's important for CEOs to voice strong political opinions, only 47 percent of Republicans agree.

The report found that while this disparity remained constant across social issues, it increased markedly depending on the issue in question. For instance, while Democrats and Republicans revealed a 20 percent favorability divide regarding whether it was always okay for CEOs to speak out

on the issue of access to education (57 percent Republican vs. 77 percent Democrat) other issues, like gun control (60 percent Republican vs. 25 percent Democrat) and transgender discrimination (77 percent Republican vs. 33 percent Democrat) revealed far more polarizing battlegrounds.

When it comes to what a company can do to be a good steward to society, nearly a third of those polled (29 percent) cited good treatment of employees, followed by serving customer needs (21 percent), enacting environmentally friendly operations (15 percent) and ethical corporate governance (12 percent).

And as it turns out, money can't buy everything when it comes to corporate advocacy. More than three-quarters of all respondents (77 percent) said they actually have more admiration for a company when it uses its business interests and expertise to address a social issue, as opposed to a company that merely donates money to a worthwhile charity (23 percent).

Political stance drives engagement

Americans love it when companies take stances on social or political issues, but brands that throw their hat into the political ring run as much of a risk alienating consumers as they do increasing engagement, according to a recent survey conducted by digital politics and policy outlet Morning Consult.

Morning Consult's survey, which asked Americans the extent to which they care about a brand's involvement in social and political issues, found that a majority of all consumers (59 percent of Democrats and 55 percent of Republicans) consider a company's stance on a social or political issue important when buying a product or service. And nearly half (49 percent) of all respondents said they care about donations made by businesses insofar as going to causes they believe in.

Of course, making partisan or controversial political alliances always runs a great deal of risk. Three-tenths of all consumers polled said they've boycotted a brand or abstained from purchasing a product or service because of its stance on a political or social issue, and nearly a third of those consumers (29 percent) said they've done so in the last year. Nearly three-quarters of those who have done so (74 percent) said they continue to boycott that brand.

Some topics make bigger waves than oth-

ers, depending on the audience. Democrats are particularly driven to purchase a product or service if a company supports efforts to reduce climate change (65 percent), and a similar number (63 percent) said they're willing to do the same for a company that donates to Planned Parenthood. Republicans, by contrast, are least likely to purchase from a business that calls President Donald Trump a "racist" (61 percent) or supports transgender individuals' use of the restroom of their choice (57 percent).

Perfectly illustrating how ideologically split the country has become is the audience divide surrounding the issue of the forthcoming construction of a U.S.-Mexico border wall. While more than a third of all consumers (37 percent) said they'd be less likely to buy from a company if they knew it supported the construction of the wall, the issue becomes particularly divisive when it's drawn along partisan lines: 59 percent of Republicans said they'd be motivated to purchase from a company that they knew supported the wall's construction, while 61 percent of Democrats said they'd be less likely to do so.

A majority of all respondents (64 percent of Republicans and 53 percent of Democrats) said they'd be more likely to purchase from a company that they knew supported undefined "religious liberty." However, stark divisions arise once religious liberty policies are specified, like the issue of supporting a contraception mandate. By contrast, the greatest unifying action measured among all consumers involved brands that donate to charities benefiting veterans and military families: 74 percent of consumers left and right said they're more likely to buy from a company that does so.

The survey also found that most consumers are at least occasionally willing to put ideology aside when making a purchase. More than half of Americans (55 percent, including 64 percent of Democrats and 59 percent of Republicans) said they at least rarely make purchases from a company with a political position they disagree with. Price seems to be a big determining factor in this: 45 percent said cost was the top reasons why they've purchased products or services from a company with political or social views that conflict with their own, followed by the quality of the product or service (45 percent) and convenience (37 percent). ○

The challenge of being a woke diner in 2018

Diners can be agents for change by demanding professional and respectful environments for those working in the restaurant sector.

By Melissa Musiker

Restaurants have recently been drawn into the #MeToo movement's storm, with a regular cadence of public revelations regarding celebrity chefs and their unsavory back-of-the-house and after-hours behavior. Unless you were connected to the restaurant world, these revelations likely came as a surprise. It's a challenge to reconcile the dissonance between the progressive public personas of the chefs and restaurateurs who promote their fresh, local, organic, sustainable and ethical foods against their offensive — if not illegal — behavior towards employees (frequently women, people of color, LGBTQ and other vulnerable individuals) entrusted with preparing these carefully curated and cared-for foods. The workplace challenges in the sector extend beyond harassment or abuse. Tipped wage has a long, sordid history, and often workplace protections and leave policies don't apply to many restaurant workers. Cultural appropriation of food traditions is another equally challenging question to grapple with.

As a talented, albeit amateur eater, I've been comparing the current environment with my own professional work focused on reputation, issues and influencers in the food space. There's no consensus amongst industry thought leaders regarding the responsibility of food journalists, restaurant critics, rating groups like Michelin and Zagat and rankings like The Worlds 50 Best to consider workplace culture or Corporate Social Responsibility alongside décor, hospitality, service and food. As this group actively debates these questions in traditional and social media, I've been surprised how little has been said about the responsibility of diners to demand professional and respectful work environments for those working and making careers in the sector.

This new-found public awareness presents a dilemma to the woke diner: How is one to know which chefs and restaurateurs are the "good guys" and which are the "bad guys"? And once I know who the "good guys" and "bad guys" are, how do I use that information to make choices? What can I do as an eater to be an agent for change?

Change comes when all parties involved demand it. Over the past ten years, there's been a wave of influencers and policymakers publicly challenging the status quo of the U.S. food system. As a result, expectations of transparency and the trend of making values-driven food and dining choices

have made sustainable nutrition a lifestyle for many consumers. By giving their business to companies that align to their values and choosing products that enable them to demonstrate their support of this lifestyle, the food system has shifted in a meaningful way. There's no reason this same feedback loop of business and societal pressure won't create similar change again.

Transparency and external awareness is the catalyst. We remove stigma by moving this conversation to the public space. Demand for information is at an all-time high and while this risks devolution into a witch hunt, those in a position to be impartial brokers of information, notably journalists, need to consider and investigate both professional leadership and unprofessional behavior as part of the story when writing about restaurants, restaurateurs and chefs. Eater Editor Amanda Kludt announced in February that it would no longer review or promote restaurants affiliated with known abusers. Admittedly, this is a gray area and presents a host of journalistic dilemmas, but it's likely that others will follow.

ESG factors are a standard part of corporate evaluation and can be applied to restaurants. Those evaluating, awarding or ranking restaurants can also consider the professional behavior of leadership, policy decisions and business practices alongside food quality and diner experience. Examples of awards and rankings considering these factors abound. This should start as a reward for those who are doing it best or breaking new ground. As with many changes in corporate practice, what begins as CSR amongst the most progressive and sophisticated in the industry, over time evolves into industry standard. Danny Meyer of Union Square Hospitality group has been recognized as a leader in this area by eliminating tipping and offering paid parental leave to full time employees. Others can and should receive similar positive recognition. The James Beard Foundation has already asked its voters to focus on professionals who should be held up as "role models" and not nominate those where a voter might have concerns about behavior or culture.

More must be done to promote and support female chefs. Chef Amanda Cohen of Dirty Candy said it succinctly in a recent essay for *Esquire*: "I've worked in food for 20 years. Now you finally care about female chefs?" The problem of disproportional under-representation of women and mi-

norities as experts on a topic isn't unique to food but it is one that can be rectified with more commitment and awareness. Female entrepreneurs also note that they don't have the same access to investor capital or quality employees. Increased validation and coverage by media can help level the playing field and address common stereotypes surrounding female leadership.

Readers and eaters need to vote with their time and dollars. Impressions, click-throughs and retweets matter to media outlets, journalists and advertisers. Read, comment and share articles that give women equal play. Eat at restaurants owned or helmed by women. Treat restaurant staff with respect. More female restaurant workers have experienced sexual harassment by customers than co-workers or managers. If you have concerns about the negative impact of tipped wage, eat at restaurants that have eliminated the practice and are known to be struggling to convince the public of the value of the change.

In the era of social and digital media, this often-uncomfortable increase in awareness doesn't come as a slow, steady trickle but as a torrent of bad publicity. When this happens, it isn't just that business slows for the owners and chefs; there's also a decline in tips and job security for staff, many of whom have already been victimized. Remediation, addressing toxic culture and changes in leadership are critical internal steps to be externally communicated. Once these steps have been taken, diners and reviewers need to return, or we risk creating scenarios where there are no benefits to those who come forward or make difficult changes.

There's no straightforward pathway to shift cultural norms. A new generation of restaurant industry leaders and eaters, much like their peers in other sectors, come to this topic with a lower level of tolerance for bad behavior and higher expectations for workplace professionalism and egalitarianism. This is a good thing. My prediction is that in five years, we'll be having a very different conversation.

Melissa Musiker, MPP, RD, is Senior Director of APCO Worldwide based in New York City. She leads the agency's influencer engagement and is also the creator of APCO's proprietary Telescope model for influencer mapping and engagement. In addition to her role leading influencer engagement, her day-to-day client work is focused on food, nutrition, health and wellbeing. ○



Melissa Musiker

New opportunities for creating meaning and value

Several factors are currently driving big changes in the food, beverage and nutrition sector, presenting new opportunities for the industry to create meaningful and valuable connections with tomorrow's consumer today.

By Laura Cubillos

If you work in the food, beverage and nutrition sector, chances are you're busy. Rapidly changing consumer values, big changes in food and nutrition policy, and data-driven insights are working together to drive major change in every single part of the food and beverage industry. Today, there is no status quo. And hopefully, like me, you're more excited than ever about what that means, the possibilities and what you can do about it.

We're seeing several incredible opportunities for the industry to make products and brands more meaningful and valuable in the coming years. I'll highlight two especially exciting areas where we've invested in building deep knowledge: food values and sustainable nutrition.

Food values

Have you ever sized up someone from the contents of their shopping cart? Most people have. A bag of chips is more than a bag of chips; it's a reflection of that person's food values and an expression of personal identity. Food values are derived from our core values. They reflect our gender, life stage and experiences, education, income, geographic location and culture. They evolve and are shaped by changes in society, politics, regulations, agriculture, and technology. And of course, food values represent intensely personal preferences and beliefs — they're emotional. Ask someone what they think about a certain food or beverage or way of eating and you're likely to get a passionate point of view.

As "what consumers value" changes, it drives changes in the food system. These values, and our understanding of them, have moved well beyond just taste, cost and price. They are impacting the way food is grown, how it's produced and consumed and every step in between. More consumers want to know exactly what's in their food and where it comes from. They want to know where it was grown, who produced it and how, and who touched it before it arrived in their home — and they're driving extreme transparency in the food system. Technology is helping fuel a faster cycle of change than the industry has ever experienced, and there are no signs of it letting up any time soon. Together, these influences are creating an incredibly dynamic and competitive landscape, causing companies to rethink and rework the way they do business.

Product development, rebranding, reformulation and repositioning is going on at an unprecedented pace. Large companies that once took months or years to reformulate or develop new products are changing their ways to do this work at a much faster pace. They are also buying more up-and-coming brands and products that align with consumers' wants, needs and — vitally important — their food values.

Savvy brands are eager to learn as much as they can about the changing food and nutrition landscape and consumer values. Fortunately, they have better analytical tools and more data-driven insights at their disposal than ever, including FoodMinds' Food Values Factor Analysis. As we sought to understand the implications of changing food values, we created a framework for consumers' converging and diverging values around food and drink: a lens through which we could identify and analyze the factors impacting these values. The framework we developed considers several interrelated social, political, regulatory, agricultural and technological factors, that are changing the way food is produced, distributed, marketed, regulated, sold and consumed. It provides fundamental context and perspective that effectively elicits more meaningful insights into the diversity, interconnectivity and depth of consumer food values today. It also provides a pathway for applying those values to products and brands.

The foods and beverages you see today are a social and cultural commentary. They tell the story of how consumer values are driving change in the food system. In the coming years, we expect the story will continue to be action-packed.

Sustainable nutrition

As we look at the direction of social commentary and consumers' changing food values, we see a clear interrelationship between values and sustainable nutrition.

Climate change is a huge topic. Within it, sustainable food systems have been identified as a priority in the U.S. and around the world. This conversation has been mostly focused on addressing the food systems impact on the environment.

A growing area of interest within this larger movement is sustainable and nutritious food systems — essentially, producing nutrient-rich, safe, affordable and culturally acceptable foods in a way that

limits environmental impacts. Research in this area has exploded in recent years, and there is a growing dialogue in global public health communities, on the need to better understand the convergence of nutrition and sustainability. The conversation centers around the need for the most nutritious foods to be grown in the most sustainable ways possible, to feed the world's growing population in the future.

While some groups have been championing the importance of looking at sustainability and nutrition together for years, it has certainly not been a mainstream conversation. However, climate change — and value-driven consumers — are changing that.

Thinkers and leaders in public health, agriculture, nutrition research and the food industry have initiated conversations and projects around sustainable nutrition. In fact, the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee advocated for inclusion of guidance on sustainable diets in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Although it didn't make it into the policy document, we expect the issue to be addressed in some way, somehow, even if outside of the DGA process.

With consumers changing their food values, where sustainability was once one conversation and nutrition another conversation, they are becoming the same conversation.

That means there is an opportunity for food and beverage companies and brands to do something with sustainable nutrition. But getting it right is essential. It's critical that companies take both a science- and fact-based approach to the sustainable nutrition conversation, and they take time to think about their sustainability and nutrition work together.

While changing the food system will take time, consumers can change their minds overnight. Considering the pace of consumer-driven change, the competitive advantage of the future will go to the companies who put food values top-of-mind today.

Laura Cubillos, RD, is FoodMinds Founder and Executive Vice President of Padilla. ○



Laura Cubillos

As food goes high tech, U.S. brands boost authenticity

Today's food and beverage brands are staying true to their authentic values while creating higher tech, vivid content that can be easily shared by a diverse and specialized cast of influencers.

By Lorna Bush

Today's U.S. food and beverage brands literally have the world at their fingertips when it comes to product sourcing, consumer reach and public engagement. As the business of food becomes more complex geographically, the challenge to maintain authentic and true to core brand values can be a challenge. How are today's food and beverage brands embracing opportunities for growth and technological innovation, while continuing to deliver an authentic brand experience?

In recent conversations with our agency's clients, more food and beverage communicators are embracing artificial intelligence technology, specialized influencer marketing and increasingly sophisticated social media content to increase brand authenticity and improve the overall consumer experience.

Artificial intelligence? Wine not?

For many food and beverage artisans, the environment in which a product is grown or made is a vital part of the overall product experience. Quintessa is a renowned 280-acre wine estate in Rutherford, one of Napa Valley's most distinctive properties, with five soil types, hills, valleys, a lake and a river. The diverse estate inspires the impressive wines for which it is known.

"At Quintessa, our strongest asset and differentiator is the world-class estate from which we source our wine," said Leslie Sullivan, DWS, Napa Estates Director of Huneeus Vintners, who manages communications for Quintessa. "For those consumers and trade who are able to visit the estate, we are able to build ambassadors; however, our reach is limited. As a result, we've begun to better utilize technology to connect with our consumers and trade. For instance, we've used video, drone footage, 360 video and virtual reality to allow our consumers and trade to engage with our property. While nothing compares to the full sensory experience of enjoying a glass of Quintessa at the estate, we are able to better express and share what Quintessa is all about."

Community, convenience, quality

With a 68-year heritage and nearly 12,000 locations worldwide, Dunkin' Donuts continues to evolve while keeping its focus on fast, friendly service and community involvement.

According to Public Relations Senior Manager, Justin Drake, Dunkin' Donuts maintains its focus on fast, friendly service while delivering innovations that today's consumer expects from sophisticated food brands:

"As Dunkin' Donuts continues to grow and evolve, remaining authentic to the core of our brand is very important. Dunkin' Donuts was founded as a brand offering high-quality coffee and baked goods to our guests, all served with fast, friendly service and at a great value, and we remain true to this mission to this day."

"We've expanded our coffee and espresso menu in recent years to include options like Cold Brew, Rainforest Alliance Certified Dark Roast Coffee, and Macchiatos. These menu additions remain true to our 68-year heritage as a coffee company, while also staying on trend in terms of what customers are looking for today from a coffee brand. We've launched On-the-Go Mobile Ordering for DD Perks members through the Dunkin' Donuts mobile app, where guests can place their order in advance and then speed past the line in-store to pick-up their order. This innovation remains true to our mission of offering fast service and unparalleled convenience to our guests."

Community giving is a core value for Dunkin' Donuts that empowers franchisees around the world to give back and strengthen their own communities:

Continued Drake, "At Dunkin', we feel fortunate that our restaurants are part of the fabric of so many communities and neighborhoods around the globe, and our franchisees value the role they can play in strengthening their communities. Our franchisees donate millions of dollars annually to local non-profits. Additionally, our organization collectively supports our national foundation, The Joy in Childhood Foundation, which is dedicated to bringing joy to sick and hungry children."

Consumers seek, expect info online

For family-owned poultry producer Foster Farms, a robust social media presence is required to address the questions and provide the reassurance that consumers actively seek.

"Increasingly consumers are asking more and more questions about where their food

comes from and how it is made," said Ira Brill, Foster Farms' Director of Communications. "Our commitment to product quality is at the heart of authenticity, and Foster Farms as one of the west's true authentic brands — having been founded in 1939 on the values of locally grown, and continuing as a family owned company today — has continuously evolved to include digital and social media tools to enhance our consumer engagement and contribute substantively to consumer conversation. From engaging influencer programs, to enticing recipes and social media content, Foster Farms aims to be a part of the discussion at every touchpoint."



Lorna Bush

Building authenticity with influencers

Social marketing strategists at Collectively understand how deeply consumer brands and consumers value authenticity.

"Influencer marketing works best when creators are empowered to make decisions about how best to present a brand story to their audiences," said Natalie Silverstein, Collectively Vice President of Brand, Marketing and Culture. "Creators are truly the experts in understanding what resonates with the people they're in dialogue with every day. Authenticity shines through when an influencer actually believes in the product and has integrated it into their content in a way that feels almost effortless."

"For our food and beverage clients, we're bringing opportunities to a wider set of creators beyond the more expected food and cooking influencers — lifestyle, health and wellness, parenting, photography, and more."

Silverstein agrees authenticity is a higher priority now for food and beverage brands: "'Authenticity' has been the most-used buzzword of the industry for quite some time, and it continues to be a key goal for most brands. We believe this is a direct result of the broader cultural transformation around trust in institutions and other traditional gatekeepers of information."

Lorna Bush is Senior Vice President of Fineman PR in San Francisco. ○

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Serving up value in 2018

Restaurateurs are looking for new ways to attract customers and stand out in the marketplace, and just as they seek to provide value to their patrons, PR professionals must similarly challenge themselves by adding value in new ways and building long-lasting partnerships with clients.

By Caroline Callaway and Adrienne Wojtaszek

As of last year, the restaurant industry was projected to hit nearly \$800 billion in sales in the U.S., according to the National Restaurant Association. With more than a million restaurant locations across the country, restaurateurs are constantly working to differentiate themselves, attract new customers and build and maintain a loyal customer base. Many turn to the help of PR agencies and professionals, seeking to increase awareness and reach new audiences.

Just as restaurateurs are trying to rise above the noise of the market, PR agencies must do the same to attract and retain restaurant partners. From lavish grand opening events and publicity stunts in Times Square to small budget campaigns with single-location restaurants, PR professionals must find ways to maximize the value of everything they do and drive foot traffic to the restaurant.

Know the value of communication

In all communication, we want to share not only what the client needs to know, but also anticipate future needs, and hence deliver more value. What's going on in the industry, and in the world, and what impact might that have on the client? What are competitors doing and how does that affect this client?

We challenge ourselves to provide added value in every client communication. Just a small example, but when sending press clips, we include the outlet's social media handle for easy cross-promotion on the client's owned social networks and relevant hashtags to include. When creating prep sheets for media interviews or influencer tastings, we include a photo of the contact, a description of their work and links to prior posts or articles so the client can familiarize themselves with the reporter or influencer and know what to expect. In something as simple as sending an email to acknowledge receipt of a deliverable, we include context on how we'll leverage this information or asset in our overall strategy.

The value isn't only in the communication itself, but when and how it's communicated. We have to keep in mind how quickly things move in the restaurant world, so we challenge ourselves to be incredibly responsive to our clients' needs. We challenge our-

selves to constantly bring new ideas to the table, provide the full scope of information needed for the client's approval and move on it quickly. In this way, we're maximizing every interaction to keep up with the client's everyday pace.

Do something different

Every restaurant is unique, so it follows that every restaurant PR campaign should be unique. We challenge ourselves to think differently and not simply do what we've always done. At the start of a partnership, we think about what makes this particular restaurant special. Sure, there are lessons learned and tried-and-true tactics that we know will drive results, but it's how we apply those lessons and customize our approach that adds value.

In partnering with a national fast-casual chain for grand opening campaigns in multiple markets across the country, we applied what we already knew about the brand but then approached each restaurant as an individual client. We evaluated what was unique about each specific location. We researched each neighborhood to understand what those communities really care about and, from there, identified potential local partners and cross-promotional opportunities. If the brand didn't already have a presence in a particular market, we approached the campaign in a slightly different way to educate the public about the brand in addition to raising awareness for their new location. We couldn't rely on what we'd always done; each restaurant deserved its own strategy and plan focused on what would drive results for that particular location.

When we partnered with a small, single-location restaurant, we heard the owner's concern about lacking lunchtime sales despite being in a busy, walkable downtown location. We immediately tapped into the community in a hyperlocal and meaningful way, reaching out to local event organizers and influential local businesspeople, such as realtors, bankers and consultants, to offer promotions and referral opportunities. We layered our traditional media relations strategy with influencer outreach, corporate partnerships, nonprofit partnerships, social media marketing and grassroots community relations. While we had em-

ployed many of these tactics in the past, it was how we shaped them in a focused and hyperlocal way that made all the difference and drove a significant increase in lunchtime traffic to our client.

Be a true partner

From working long hours and addressing myriad reviews, to cooking, cleaning and ordering ingredients and supplies, we can only begin to understand the life of a restaurateur. To be a true partner, we must understand our client's business and do what we can to make their life easier. After all, they have a restaurant to run.

When scheduling events, we should always step back to understand the demands on the kitchen staff. When coordinating a media or influencer tasting, we should be aware of the chef's and owner's ability to step away and welcome their guest. For staff members who haven't been exposed to media or influencers, we can take the opportunity to provide some extra guidance and training.

For the CEO of a fast-growing restaurant chain, we scheduled desk-side interviews with the editors of top outlets. We coordinated the interviews and delivered the day's schedule and interview prep sheets to the client. Then we stepped back and evaluated how we could make our client's life a little easier. How could we add more value? That's when we insisted on picking the client up at the train station that morning and driving him to each appointment. The value was in allowing the client to completely focus on his interviews and not spend a moment worrying about the logistics and opening an app to line up his next ride. He nailed those interviews and we've had an amazing relationship that's lasted for years.

The opportunity

In everything we do on behalf of our restaurant clients, we can't just go through the motions; we must be prepared to do the heavy lifting. No matter how well we communicate our ideas, or just how brilliant they might be, ideas mean nothing if not executed in a thoughtful and proactive



Caroline Callaway



Adrienne Wojtaszek

— Continued on next page

Humanity in a world of algorithms

Technology is just another means for maintaining personal, human connections. Here's how we can balance these experiences with the digital-first approach that today's fast-paced food and beverage environment demands.

By Jason Stemm

It was 2006. MySpace was the most popular website, the Flip camera was the latest technology, and the iPhone was still a year away. I pitched the brand manager of a boxed rice and noodle product an online video contest. Little did we know, a major chip brand was crowdsourcing its Super Bowl ad. He was skeptical, but the CEO entered the meeting and recounted a recent introduction to YouTube by his teenage children. He recognized the powerful way they connected with videos, and he greenlit the project.

We have all read about and experienced the rapidly evolving communication space. While there are still generational differences, more people are putting down a newspaper and picking up a smartphone. Once connected, we are likely filtering the information through a few social networks, websites and news aggregators. Major media outlets are taking a "digital first" approach as they see the growth of inbound traffic through social channels. Further, Google and Facebook alone account for nearly three quarters of digital advertising and even a greater percentage of the growth. Advanced algorithms and retargeting are impacting the types and variety of information we consume.

What has been lost in this increasingly programmatic world is the human touch. Technology is the interface. When we talk about a digital first approach, it is about creating experiences and exchanges that are enjoyable, meaningful and personable.

For example, food is a highly personal

conversation for many people that is connected to health, happiness, experiences and memories. This is likely why NPD research shows that while food, and perishables in particular, is seeing gains in e-commerce, it still trails nearly every other category. They do expect this to catch up as new players emerge, and traditional players evolve to turn their expansive real estate into miniature distribution centers to solve that last mile challenge for food delivery.

The customer journey also is evolving, which means our touchpoints as communicators are changing. Awareness and research are happening through social channels and online. The point of sale can be anywhere. For food marketers, what it really comes down to is convenience, experience and connection.

It starts with the individual. Rather than targeting a demographic, we are looking for a type, a personality. Identifying the commonalities that consumers share gives us better opportunities to meet them in the right place, at the right time, with the right message.

The greatest challenge for professional communicators today is the battle for time. With increasing noise and decreasing attention spans, we should not be surprised at the prevalence of memes and click bait. Infographics and listicles are great ways to package and deliver information, but if you are not telling a compelling story, it is little better than a poorly written news release.

The human connection is where the magic happens. We can communicate the logical benefits (convenience, health) or the emotional benefits (joy, altruism), but when we combine the two into meaningful connection, we change hearts and minds. Technology is just the medium. Brands need to rethink this connection and experience. Our food choices and values make a statement. Where we shop and eat, the brands and characteristics we shop for and the foods we choose to serve our family and friends all say something about our values.

Challenger brands have had success connecting with purpose. While some are being gobbled up by multinationals, there are many that continue to grow independently. Their nimbleness and lack of a tried-and-true playbook for marketing have provided flexibility and innovation in product development and the way they go to market. Many are inspired by the lack of alterna-

tives in the marketplace. Others are focused on removing ingredients and processes of which consumers are becoming more skeptical. Their offerings go beyond taste, price and convenience and strike an emotional chord with customers.

E-commerce, subscription marketing and expanding channels are not only changing the way we do business, but also the way we connect with stakeholders. For food products, that can mean a digital-first approach, while not forgetting the importance of the experience. People love to talk about food, ask questions of others, get recommendations from peers and experts, and discover new products and flavors. These conversations used to largely take place in stores and restaurants. Now someone may order directly from a recipe they discover online with one click and never enter the establishment. They may order lunch from a "restaurant" that doesn't have a storefront.

Food is full of personal and shared experiences and memories. While technology use is increasing as retailers solve the last mile challenge, there is a consumer experience that brick and mortar retailers still have the opportunity to leverage. This is where internal communication and culture become paramount. Food retail can learn a lot from hospitality when it comes to employee training. Customers will interact most with employees on the floor, so invest in them. They have the potential to become ambassadors and resources that improve the shopping experience.

At the end of the day, as technology advances and strategies are adjusted, the basic principles remain. Connect with stakeholders in meaningful ways to tell a better story. A table-to-farm approach that starts with insight into the consumer and leverages technology to make connections along the way will deliver meaningful experiences that nurture advocates to share your story.

Jason Stemm is Vice President at Padilla, where he oversees integrated marketing campaigns that combine public relations and promotion programs, and provides strategic counsel for companies looking to build awareness and grow sales. ○



Jason Stemm

SERVING UP VALUE IN 2018

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way. And we must be prepared to adapt our tactics rather than doing what we've always done; all the press coverage in the world doesn't matter if it's not driving traffic through the door, increasing online orders, increasing catering business and, ultimately, increasing food and beverage sales.

The need continues to increase for both restaurateurs and PR agencies to differentiate themselves. What value are you bringing to the table this year?

Caroline Callaway is President and Founder of Bolt PR, and Adrienne Wojtaszek is Bolt Senior Director of Agency Services. ○

PR revenues slipped across congloms in 2017's Q4

PR/PA revenues were down for Interpublic, WPP and Publicis Groupe at the end of last year, while revenues at Omnicom Group's PR units were flat.

By Kevin McCauley

IPG reports Q4 growth

Interpublic reported 3.4 percent growth in Q4 revenues to \$2.3 billion and flat net income of \$317 million. Organic revenues advanced 3.3 percent with 3.7 percent growth in the U.S. and 2.9 percent overseas.

IPG CEO Michael Roth said the financial performance was a "testament to the talent and dedication of our people around the world and the work we do to help clients win the marketplace."

IPG's constituency management group, which includes Weber Shandwick, DeVries Global, Current Marketing and Golin, rebounded to grow 2.7 percent to \$409 million during the quarter. For the full-year, it was down 2.8 percent to \$1.5 billion.

Weber Shandwick CEO Andy Polansky said the PR component of CMG was "slightly down" on both an organic and reported basis from "single-digit growth" of a year ago.

Current Marketing was a "stand-out performer," while DeVries posted "solid growth," according to Polansky. Weber Shandwick and Golin are well-positioned for growth this year. "We're getting positive vibes as clients are becoming more positive about the outlook for 2018," said Polansky.

IPG bolstered its dividend 17 percent to

21 cents per-share and reauthorized the repurchase of an additional \$300 million in stock, moves that Roth said reflected the firm's "continuing operating success" and confidence in the future.

WPP PR/PA revenues dipped in late '17

WPP reported that PR/PA revenues dipped during the second-half of 2017 but rose 1.7 percent for the full-year to the \$1.6 billion mark.

Revenues (on a constant currency basis) slipped 0.9 percent and 0.8 percent in Q3 and Q4, respectively.

CEO Martin Sorrell said Cohn & Wolfe, Glover Park, Ogilvy Government Affairs and Buchanan "performed particularly well" in comparison to Burson-Marsteller, Hill+Knowlton Strategies and Finsbury.

WPP enjoyed strong PR/PA growth in the UK and Middle East during Q4, while North America and Continental Europe lagged.

Sorrell summed up 2017 as "not a pretty year." He said the major factors influencing WPP's lackluster financial performance "were probably the long-term impact of technological disruption and more the short-term focus of zero-based budgeters, activist investors and private equity than, we believe, the suggested disintermediation of

agencies by Google and Facebook or digital competition from consultants."

Sorrell, who on Feb. 27 announced the consolidation of Burson-Marsteller and Cohn & Wolfe to forge Burson Cohn & Wolfe, expects "further simplification of our structure" and the "sharing of functions, systems and platforms across the group."

His goal is to step up the "pace of WPP's development from a group of individual companies to a cohesive global team dedicated to the core purpose of driving growth for clients."

Omnicom's Q4 net slides 27 percent

Omnicom Group in February reported a 27.4 percent drop in Q4 net income to \$254.4 million, following a \$106.3 million charge for enactment of the "Tax Cuts and Jobs Act." Excluding the charge, net was up 3.0 percent.

Q4 revenues slipped 1.5 percent to \$4.2 billion. Organic growth advanced 1.6 percent, sparked by a robust 8.2 percent across Europe.

North American organic growth fell 0.8 percent, while the UK dipped 0.7 percent and Latin America slipped 0.3 percent.

OMC's PR group (Ketchum, Fleishman-Hillard, Porter Novelli, Brodeur Partners, Kreab, Cone Communications) showed 1.1 percent growth during the quarter to \$362.8 million.

The PR units chalked up flat revenues of \$1.4 billion for the full year.

OMC's stock is down eight percent to \$76.16 on the earnings news.

Publicis' Q4 revenues slip 3 percent

Publicis Groupe reported a 3.1 percent decline in Q4 growth to \$3.2 million, which the French ad/PR combine blames on negative exchange rates. At constant rates, revenues advanced 2.7 percent.

Organic growth during the period rose 2.2 percent, sparked by a robust 4.5 percent rise in the U.S., which generates more than 50 percent of overall revenues.

Noting that Publicis is "in the midst of its own transformation," CEO Arthur Sadoun said "the quality of our results demonstrates Publicis Groupe's strength and our ability to adapt to the deep changes affecting our industry."

Sadoun said U.S. business grew in Q4 due to the ramp-up of accounts awarded since the summer of 2016 (Lowe's, Wal-Mart, Synergy Pharmaceuticals and USAA), plus the addition of wins in early 2017 (Molson Coors and FirstNet).

Europe was flat in Q4. Publicis gained in the UK (+5.5 percent), Italy (+4.0 percent) and France (1.1 percent) but crashed in Germany (-6.9 percent). ○

Salaries up in PR industry, bonuses down

Salaries are up in the PR business, but bonuses have taken a hit, according to the Official PR Salary & Bonus Report, published by executive search firm Spring Associates.

The report, which analyzes compensation statistics from SA's database of more than 24,000 vetted PR and corporate marketing communications executives, found that pay in the corporate marketing comms arena was flat for 2017 while their bonuses suffered a slightly smaller drop than those of their PR peers.

"Before compiling this year's Salary & Bonus Report, we sensed a general feeling of optimism from both candidates and clients alike, that the salary and bonus numbers would increase markedly," said Spring Associates president Dennis Spring.

The data don't quite justify that optimism. Nationwide, PR execs received salaries averaging \$108,400 last year, up 3.2 percent from the previous year's \$104,900, while average earnings for corporate marketing comms

pros dropped from \$136,400 to \$136,000. Bonuses for PR execs averaged 9.1 percent of base salary, a 6.2 percent drop from the previous year. Corporate marketing comms exec saw their bonuses shrink 5.6 percent to 19 percent of base salary.

The study found geographical variations in compensation as well. In what the study refers to as the eight key metro areas (New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Houston, Washington and San Francisco), the average salary for PR execs came in at \$112,850, while outside those areas the number was \$99,500. For corporate marketing comms pros, pay in the key metro areas averaged \$145,550, while for the rest of the country it was \$128,400.

The study says hourly billing rates were up 1.7 percent overall, with the rates in the Midwest showing the largest rises and those on the West Coast reporting drops.

"We still remain optimistic that the PR business will show a jump in salaries and bonuses later this year," Spring said. ○



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Securing coverage in today's food and beverage space

How to increase high exposure media coverage for new food and beverage products in a crowded marketplace.

By Andrea Pass

There were more than 21,000 new food and beverage products introduced to the marketplace in 2016 alone, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. That can break down to 58 new launches each day. If you aren't representing an already established and recognized brand, there can be a challenge when it comes to securing that much-needed media coverage to increase sales and ultimately, shelf-space.

The food and beverage space includes sub-categories such as snacks, bakery, dairy, meals and entrees, desserts, side dishes, breakfast cereals and more. Start by researching media coverage noting those specific product types to identify the press contacts who will find your food or beverage items most relevant to their area of coverage.

Contact trade publications. These magazines and newsletters are key to reaching buyers to secure additional retail opportunities for your brand. With trade media, editorial content focuses on the basics of the new product coupled with the value of retailers to carry the food item. Make sure to have both clear packaging and lifestyle imagery to accompany brand news.

Long-lead planning benefits year 'round holiday meals

Recognizing buying habits contributes to successful press coverage. While milk, bread and eggs will always be staples on a shopping list, today's consumer is looking for healthy choices, ready-to-eat options, portion-control packaging, modifications for dietary constraints — gluten-free, low sodium, vegan, vegetarian — as well as the tried-and-true snack and cereal categories.

Review media editorial calendars to tie-in press pitching with holiday food planning. For long-lead glossy magazine consideration, Thanksgiving review begins in the Spring while Christmas/Hanukkah preparation kicks off right after Memorial Day. February is Heart Health Month. Summer is all about grilling and, beginning in 2018, griddling. Begin long-lead media outreach in September. Tie your news in with specific holidays meals and target audiences to highlight the value of your new brand. Innovation in food is the trend for 2018. Recognize what makes your food product on-trend and work the angle.

Remember that every audience eats and drinks. Media outlets highlighting food are

certainly important in your PR plan, but women's, men's, parenting, travel, health, sports and general lifestyle press, for example, also offer opportunities for reviews and incorporation of food and beverage in coverage.

Work with a chef or cookbook author to secure editorial coverage

There are a variety of ways to secure media coverage in the food and beverage space. Unfortunately, 2018 is turning into the year of pay-for-play in the world of what was once purely legitimate editorial coverage. To overcome the challenge and land television interviews, work directly with an established chef or cookbook author. This gives the opportunity to highlight the book while effectively working in the brand.

Satellite Media Tours offer an opportunity to conduct multiple television interviews around the country via one set studio on one set date. Oftentimes with a smaller budget for lesser known brands, the SMT provides a more cost-effective solution than traveling from city to city for broadcast segments. Keep in mind that most SMTs air on smaller market television outlets outside of the city limits from those in the top-tier designated market areas.

Bloggers and influencers effectively reach target audiences

New food and beverage brands can reach target audiences through relationships with key bloggers and influencers in specific categories. Influencers have a direct effect on the purchase decision by influencing the behavior or opinion of others. Those following bloggers and influencers are dedicated audiences. Vegans follow other vegans. Parents follow other parents. Beer lovers follow other beer lovers. The list goes on and on. Every day, new blogs appear. Every day, influencers grow their audience base.

While many influencers charge to write a review or post on social media, others are willing to provide honest reviews for receipt of product. An effective campaign will have a balance of both.

Tie in cause-related marketing

Budweiser secured tremendous media coverage by canning water and shipping to areas felt by devastating hurricanes and wildfires including Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and California. The company's Super Bowl ad drew high praise and strengthened the public's positive impression of Anheuser-Busch.

er-Busch.

For brands that are newer to the marketplace, local charitable contributions also garner positive media exposure. A soy milk company in New Jersey donated soy products including soy pudding to local food pantries. Local print and broadcast outlets covered the donation and the food banks were thrilled to have added recognition of their charitable work.

Provide clear, effective insights

The basic who, what, where, when, why and how still pertains to food and beverage public relations. While one might assume that the press understands a smoothie, for example, your brand's smoothie must have unique characteristics, flavors, ingredients, price points and availability.

Demonstrate impact

How do you demonstrate to your client that you successfully broke through the clutter? Measure it! What was the share of voice for the brand at the beginning of the campaign, what was it mid-way through the campaign and what is the final outcome? Did the brand sentiment improve as a result, was market share taken from competitors in the appropriate product categories? Be sure to repurpose the media coverage via social media channels, email marketing, share with stakeholders, include in retail buyer presentations, and include on the news page of the website.

Andrea Pass is Vice President of Media Relations for Marketing Maven, based out of its New York City office. She can be reached at andrea@marketingmaven.com. ◉



Andrea Pass

Media brief

Vox Media cuts 50 staffers

Vox Media is cutting 50 staffers, according to a memo to employees from CEO Jim Bankoff.

He wrote that SB Nation, Curbed, Racked and the video services team will bear the biggest impact of the cutbacks.

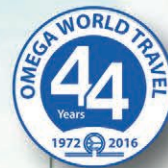
About a dozen employees will get new job functions, and "there will be some smaller changes elsewhere in the company" to reduce costs.

Bankoff noted that he and top Vox leadership took the cutback decision very seriously. "We know it has a big impact on the lives of our co-workers who will be leaving, as well on the morale of those who remain," he wrote.

He promised to treat departing staffers with "professionalism, compassion and dignity."



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Taste, tech and the battle for mindshare

How technology is impacting consumer choice in addition to the foods we eat.

By Atalanta Rafferty

As competition in the food industry thickens, food brands, both new and old, are looking to stand above the noise and win mindshare. In the past, food companies focused on competing through innovation in ingredients, flavors, branding and packaging. But now, forward-thinking food companies are raising the stakes. Enter technology: the newest way for food companies to improve customer experience. Technology is what's next in food, and it's set to help food brands develop an entirely new competitive edge focused on one core consumer benefit: convenience.

The recent launch of the Amazon Go store in Seattle is an example of just that. By simply using the Amazon Go app, Amazon subscribers can select and purchase their favorite foods without ever waiting in a line, thanks to new AI technology. Other partnerships have similar implications: Ford Motor Company and Domino's have been testing driverless delivery cars since last August; and Toyota and Pizza Hut recently announced their partnership to explore driverless pizza delivery.

Large CPG companies are also embracing

technology to pair convenience with better product standards. PepsiCo's Drinkfinity, a customizable pod-based flavored water with a reusable water bottle, is ordered online and delivered directly to consumers' homes. What's more, it contains no artificial flavors or sweeteners and is more environmentally friendly than a standard water bottle. With the integration of technology, PepsiCo has been able to completely upgrade their customer experience, while simultaneously tapping into the issues that matter most to their customers.

As companies continue to innovate, it's important for communications professionals to recognize how the value proposition for a food brand will evolve. For those of us who have worked in the food industry for years, we know that taste has always been paramount. But in this competitive, ever-changing environment, it's no longer the only factor at play. As technology advances, so will customer experiences and convenience. We must be ready to re-position brand narratives and build tactics that bring consumers value above and beyond taste alone.

At the same time, we need to remember that technology for the sake of it is almost as dangerous as no technology at all. We are responsible for grounding our clients in decisions they make insofar as improving their overall brand experience with technological advances, and striking a balance between taste and overall experience. We must keep a critical eye and ensure brands are staying true to themselves as they evolve.

As competition grows, so will innovation within the food industry. From innovation at retail and by brands, consumers are expecting more from the foods they eat and are increasingly demanding convenience. The food industry is, without question, rising to the occasion. For communications professionals, the implications are clear: tomorrow's brand value is different than today's, and the story we tell consumers will change. In a new era of engagement, 2018 promises to be a year of evolution, and we're excited for the challenge.

Atalanta Rafferty is Executive Managing Director at RF|Binder. ○



Atalanta Rafferty

The secret to successful food videos

When planning a video shoot involving food — whether it's for a web video, or satellite media tour or an appearance on-set of a show — some ingredients are always essential.

By Joan Auritt

High production value and amazing food styling are essential for a successful segment, yet only part of the recipe for a great on-camera piece. You can pull out all the bells and whistles and still flop. Why? Because producing a food video is always about more than just the food.

Before you can even talk about or showcase your amazing product and/or recipe, you have to connect with your audience. Your chef, R.D., brand spokesperson, wine or other expert has to reach them in an authentic way. To make sure your story resonates, select a spokesperson who's got the goods: the personality, talent and warmth people will respond to. Then craft a story that will appeal to your key market. Make sure to shape your messages to fit organically into the story. Your spokesperson has to find a reason to talk about your product that flows naturally. Finally, encourage your

spokesperson to share personal experiences that the audience can identify with. Finding connections is key.

When it comes to the food, select recipes with a twist which are still accessible with easy-to-find ingredients: Bolognese sauce without the meat; pizza with a cauliflower crust; and brownies with espresso powder and cinnamon.

Consult a food stylist or experienced food producer to help break down recipes to highlight the essential steps. If the platform is a guest shot on a show or SMT, remember that time is short. Keep the process to three simple stagings designed to keep the audience interested.

Be sure to add color and sound for excitement: a sizzling frying pan and rich, deep colors make for mouth-watering segments. Close ups are key when showcasing food; encourage your spokesman to use small, precise movements with steady hands.



A satellite tour Auritt produced with Skinnymom founder Brooke Griffin for her cookbook, "Skinny Suppers."

Here are some DOs when planning your food segment:

- Use colorful food for your demo when you can, avoiding bland creams and browns. Or add a pop of color to brighten the dull dish. Picture strawberries on top of a bowl of oatmeal.
- If raw beef and or fish is your key ingredient, surround it with fresh vegetables and

— Continued on next page

What's on the menu for food and beverage brands in 2018

The food and beverage industry is always in flux: changing ingredients, trends, promotions, industry stars and guest experiences to name a few. This ever-changing landscape offers both a challenge and an opportunity for food and beverage communicators to up their game, put guests before brands and, when the stars align, stay ahead of what's next.

By Maggie O'Neill

With a consumer base that spans all ages, with tastes that are even more varied, brands in the food and beverage industry need to focus. Successful brands find a way to lock into their core value proposition — think TGI Friday's and their Endless Apps — listen to customers at all touchpoints and remember to address key elements in the entire dining experience from Google restaurant search to paying the tab. Ready for a drink yet?

With this large task at hand, here are four factors that are shaping the way consumers embrace brands today, all of which look poised to stay on the menu for some time to come.

Local, local, local

Whether shopping or dining, consumers continue to look for all things local. And while larger restaurants or food and beverage brands may struggle to actually be the corner bar, there are elements of communications that can support this consumer desire.

For example, when developing an activation in restaurant, make sure you take the local flavor and tastes into account. Partner with a local distiller for special cocktail nights, or look to a local food source to add some new spice to traditional dishes. In addition to the in-restaurant experience, actively work to create content that can be shaped by the local establishments to better appeal to their fan base and followers. Find a local ingredient to add to a salad promotion on Caesar Salad Day, or engage with a

local employee to talk about their favorite salad toppings. Don't be so regimented with a corporate brand voice that local cannot be a part of a guest's experience.

Think like Sam Malone

For those who remember Sam Malone from *Cheers*, this is a pretty simple statement. People like to feel they belong at their chosen bar or restaurant ("Where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came ..."). Looking at a food-and-beverage brand through this lens can help make the drinking and/or dining experience all that more appealing, and can increase loyalty and subsequent visits.

In restaurant, brands need to focus on their staff to ensure they are acting the part and bringing the brand to life for each and every guest. Outside of a restaurant, Sam Malone can come to life in multiple ways. Brands should look to reinforce their own personal Sam Malone with expert mixologists, bartender wisdom, wine aficionados and approachable chefs. These voices (and faces) can serve to elevate the brand through social content and media lifestyle engagement. And the Sam Malone mindset must go across all channels, communications and engagements in order to be effective. Brands and agencies that don't apply this mindset will be left behind.

Think guest-tech, not just tech

Technology for technology's sake has never really succeeded, and that is even truer in the world of food and beverage. From digital waiters and mobile payments

to high-tech wine openers and the latest in kitchen gadgets, many restaurants are trying to out-tech each other, leaving some guests unhappy. For brand leads and communicators responsible for launching and talking about the latest tech, one rule stands true: technology must be guest-forward first.

Take the Coravin Wine Preservation Opener. While not completely new to the market, the technology is showing up more and more in the dining experience. For brands incorporating this gadget, communications should not focus on its availability, but on the wine experience it can deliver: better access to normally unopened bottles, fresher wine, etc. Focusing too much on tech can quickly disinterest a guest.

Foodies: forever influential

Influence continues to come from the foodie community. Whether influence comes from Instagrammers, bloggers or other platform leaders, the food culture continues to drive the food and beverage experience. Their influence is becoming more dynamic, more complex and more important. Brands and communicators need to work with these food-forward influencers to create an image for their brand that is authentic, relevant, engaging and anything but staged. These Foodies can, and should, be engaged with at both macro and micro levels to support brand needs, as well as through both paid and organic initiatives. In addition, the influencers' core followers are foodies at heart, so engagement should not just encourage Instagrammers to snap the latest food porn, but inspire their followers to join them for dinner as well.

So eat and drink up! The menu of opportunities is endless when communicators focus on the guest over the brand and look at the whole experience over just the entrée.

Maggie O'Neill is Partner and Managing Director at Peppercomm, and provides agency-wide communications and brand experience support to the agency's expanding portfolio of consumer clients. In addition, she is the founder and driver of Peppercomm's experiential service offering, responsible for its growth and direction. ○



Maggie O'Neill

SUCCESSFUL FOOD VIDEO TIPS

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take the focus off the "raw."

- Avoid ingredients that will melt or turn brown when exposed to air. If items like avocados, banana or ice cream are a must, consult with a food stylist for tricks of the trade to keep everything looking fresh.

If your talent has had little or no on-camera experience, the wisest thing you can do is have them trained by a media coach. Even chefs who know their way around the kitchen blindfolded will find that cooking on video is a whole different experience. It's important for them to become comfortable cooking and talking, talking and cooking pretty much non-stop. It's harder than it looks and takes practice, practice and more

practice.

The goal with any food segment on TV and online is to leave your viewers with an indelible memory and a desire to learn more. Find that one concrete tip that is the "ah-ha" moment. For example: how to tell if an avocado is ripe; how to cut a mango; how to tell if an egg is fresh; or how to correctly store cheese.

Going beyond impressive camera work and lighting means your food video vividly showcases your brand and your spokesperson connects with audiences, forming a lasting impression that people will remember indefinitely.

Joan Auritt is CEO and Founder of Auritt Communications Group. ○

O'Dwyer's guide to FOOD & BEVERAGE PR FIRMS

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Ronn D. Torossian, President & CEO

It's hard to open a magazine, scroll through social media or turn on the television without seeing information about a new food or beverage trend. Often, the 5W food & beverage PR team is the source of those stories.

With new brands, lines, products, and restaurants introduced each day, we understand competition for space (in shopping carts, on shelves and in the media) is fierce.

From facilitating the launch of new products to developing long-term creative strategies that ensure maximum traditional and social media coverage, sell product, increase distribution and win market share, our experience and results in the food and beverage arena are unparalleled.

We understand the food and beverage space and are experts at crafting compelling Public Relations narratives for health and wellness beverages, alcohol and spirits, functional beverages and much more.

Client experience include Purity Vodka, Sparkling ICE, ZICO Coconut Water, Anheuser-Busch, Evian Natural Spring Water, Santa Margherita Wines, Whole Foods Market, GAEA Viki's Granola, M&Ms, Welch's Fruit Snacks and many others.

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Artisan Production House is a full-service production house specializing in food & lifestyle publicity. We create brand content that resonates with your audience, keeps them engaged and brings value to their lives. Our innate understanding of story relevance and personal relationships with TV producers and media influencers throughout the country gets your story heard. We'll help you deliver your messages seamlessly and with style utilizing our high-end production capabilities (including film-style shooters and graphic designers). Artisan's in-studio & on location satellite junkets include quality bookings that are actually seen, spot-on custom craft services and a fresh, modern design aesthetic ... because taste matters. Additional services include stunning branded content food videos, original book promotional videos and select matchmaking between celebrity talent and brands.

Our clients include Food Network, Penguin Random House, The Wonderful Company, Le Creuset of America and commodity boards ranging from the National Onion Association to Grapes from California.

AT THE TABLE PR

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Cheryl A. Miller, CEO

At The Table PR has been committed to food and beverage marketing for 35+ years. We are a full-service boutique

agency offering overall branding, strategic planning, social media strategy and implementation, media relations, international marketing, blogger coordination, local store marketing, franchise marketing, videography, product launches, advertising, packaging and design, food photography, grand opening PR and marketing and special event planning and implementation.

From the farm to the table, At The Table PR is dedicated to serving our clients by promoting their brands with our team of experienced professionals and creative partners, specializing in all areas of the food industry. We represent a diverse group of clients, from pecan and produce farms to vineyards, all the way to the tables of some of the best eateries. Our relationships with our clients are forged with trust and integrity and the desire to bring the freshest ingredients and finest products and services to the table.

Results are what matter to us, so we continually try to produce fresh ideas and create long-term relationships. We offer each client the personal involvement of a customized team of skilled, passionate professionals.

Whether your objectives are to increase sales, strengthen consumer loyalty, build your brand or improve your public image, we have saved a place for you At The Table.

AURITT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

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Joan Auritt, President

Auritt Communications Group is an award-winning full-service broadcast and digi-

tal media production company recognized as a leader in the area of culinary video production. From media tours to webcasts and event production our expertise had been honed from 25 years of working with chefs, food celebrities, cookbook authors, registered dietitians, brand spokespeople, wine and lifestyle experts. We help them find their best stories and craft them in a way that connects with their audience. Media training is a key element in our process, ensuring spokesmen effectively deliver key messages while doing a recipe demo. As full scale partners, our clients reap the benefits of our close, enduring relationships with the media. Our flexible and cost-effective production packages increase brand awareness, reaching influencers and targeted audiences in prime media markets. With strategic execution, our team of media experts and network-credentialed producers deliver promised results.

What we do: video production for broadcast and online, corporate events, and training; TV satellite, radio, online media tours; integrated media tours; partner media tours; media training; social media campaigns; webcasts and live streamed interactive events; video, audio, multi-media news releases; B-roll packages; and PSAs.

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Matt Kovacs, President

BLAZE PR is the trusted partner of choice for lifestyle contender brands hungry for a real piece of the marketshare. BLAZE PR has been retained



Bolt client Sablon Chocolate Lounge was live on WFAA's Good Morning Texas program to showcase its nationally renowned shakes and decadent chocolate treats.

by a growing number of savvy clients who want integrated PR, influencer and social media strategies — and flawless execution. BLAZE PR senior level professionals play a hands-on, day-to-day role with clients. With more than two decades of relationships and a solid team founded in strategic approaches, BLAZE PR is adroit in advancing client objectives and nimble to the quick-changing pace of media technologies.

Clients include: Bacon's Heir, Chronic Tacos, Evan's Brewing Co., John's Incredible Pizza, Liquid IV, Robeks, Stonefire Grill, Tom's Urban and Weihe-Stephan

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We are strategic, savvy and unwavering in our commitment to your success. Our business is

The April issue of *O'Dwyer's* will profile firms that focus on social media, as well as video & broadcast service companies. If you would like to be listed, contact Associate Editor Steve Barnes at 646/843-2089 or steve@odwyerpr.com

growing yours.

Bolt Public Relations is a national, award-winning and independently owned agency with four offices throughout the country. We develop impactful plans that lead to the generation of meaningful conversations with key audiences, consistent publicity, attention in the marketplace and, most importantly, increased foot traffic in the door, increased online orders and increased catering orders.

From traditional media relations, strategic partnerships, and event planning and publicity, to social media, digital and influencer marketing, website design and community activations, Bolt PR evaluates the goals, target audiences and budget/time allowances to develop a highly strategic and results-oriented plan. Our expansive communications expertise allows us to identify which tactics will give our clients the highest return for their dollar, whether a national fast casual chain, a fine dining establishment, an award-winning chef, a winery or a bakery products company. We develop the ideas, do all the heavy lifting to execute, drive impactful results, and allow our clients to do what they do best: run their businesses. We know how to leverage results across numerous channels to maximize time and investment to the fullest.

Allow our People, Strategy & Results to exceed your expectations.

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Carolyn Izzo-Feldman, President
Kate Wark, Senior Vice President

Carolyn Izzo Integrated Communications (CIIC) is a highly respected public relations firm in the food and beverage space. Our staffers bring many years of experience from several of the country's top PR firms and for 21 years, CIIC has been dedicated to servicing food and beverage brands with top-tier public relations campaigns and award-winning results.

CIIC got its start by putting Krispy Kreme Doughnuts on the map in the Northeast in the '90s. Since then, CIIC has represented a number of F&B brands, including The Original Soupman, Sandella's, Morton's The Steakhouse, Kona Red Beverages, New Leaf Brands iced teas and lemonades, California Pizza Kitchen, The Bohlson Restaurant Group, Coney Island Brewing Company, Opal Apples and more. We are adept at launches, openings and franchisor relations, and we are known for our networking expertise and extensive con-

tacts in the trade, media and influencer categories, which we leverage to increase the level of reach, media coverage, and access for our clientele.

The CIIC team is made up of enthusiastic and connected PR professionals. Your CIIC service includes day-to-day principal-led servicing from company executives, media specialists in New York and Miami who can build and escort an A-list media tour, arrange your appearance on network television shows, manage product sampling, and plan top-level events in your key markets. It is our implicit goal to deliver the best value and the best results.

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For almost 30 years, Fineman PR has been consistently recognized for its award-winning food and beverage campaigns. The agency specializes in brand PR, crisis communications and multicultural engagement for a full range of food and other CPG categories, including conventional and organic foods, nutritional supplements, confections, and wine and spirits.

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CIIC's Grand Opening at Coney Island Brewery, June 20, 2015.

FINEMAN PR

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Fineman PR excels in building category leadership for its clients. We demonstrate why a client's brand promise merits audience trial and trust. Fineman PR's high-profile crisis communications work, including product recalls, labor negotiations, activist demonstrations, brand defamation, high profile lawsuits and workplace accidents, is nationally renowned. We safeguard and reinforce client reputations.

Recent work includes full-service marketing communications and issues management for Foster Farms poultry; leadership positioning for brands and company executives; blogger and influencer relations programming; social/digital content strategy and development; media training; cause marketing and community relations; and internal and retailer communications. Fineman PR's lifestyle, wine and multicultural divisions add specialty services tailored to each client's needs.

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At FoodMinds, we put passion into practice by harnessing science, public affairs, food values and communications to meet our clients' business and public health objectives — a capability we created and define as food and nutrition affairs. FoodMinds is the only agency with more than 20 registered dietitians and a PhD on staff, and a Global ExpertBench™ of nutrition science, policy and communications professionals around the world. Capabilities



San Francisco-based Fineman PR developed a content-rich strategy, heavily weighted on influencer marketing, to help poultry client Foster Farms redefine comfort food. The campaign drove engagement with the brand and made in-roads with new audiences, resulting in more than 148 million impressions.

include: food and nutrition affairs; sustainable and nutritious food systems engagement; personal wellness strategy; food values insights; strategic planning; thought leadership; nutrition, health + wellness science; partnerships and coalitions; health professional and influencer communications; influencer mapping; strategic insights; consumer engagement and media relations; issues & crisis navigation. We are not just another PR agency. We help our clients tell a better story.

FoodMinds works with more than 30 leading commodity boards, food companies, brands and associations in the U.S. and around the world, including several *Fortune* 500 companies. Contact us to learn more.

FoodMinds is a division of Padilla. Between FoodMinds and Padilla Food + Beverage, we are happily consumed by food all the time. Together, we're re-imagining why, what and how the world eats and

drinks — to help build a stronger, flourishing future for all. We are building, growing and protecting brands and reputations by creating purposeful connections with the people who matter most to our clients. Together, our services span the ecosystem of food, beverage and nutrition — from research and insights to branding, creative and digital, to marketing communications and our unique culinary center.

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French/West/Vaughan (FWV) is the preeminent integrated marketing firm in the

Southeast and one of the nation's leading public relations, advertising and digital media agencies. The firm is the winner of the *Bulldog Reporter* 2017 Stars of PR Awards, including the Grand Prize for Best PR Agency of 2017. FWV earned first-place Gold Awards for Business-to-Consumer PR Agency of the Year, Midsize Agency of the Year and Most Innovative Agency. Additionally, the firm is the *Holmes Report* 2016 Consumer Agency of Year recipient. Founded in April 1997 by Agency Chairman & CEO Rick French, FWV employs 103 public relations, public affairs, social media, advertising and digital marketing experts between its Raleigh, N.C. headquarters and New York City, Los Angeles and Tampa offices.

FWV is home to one of the country's largest food and beverage practice areas and has been ranked in the top 20 nationally by *O'Dwyer's* for more than a decade. FWV specializes in creating maximum brand exposure for its clients through strategic partnerships, paid endorsements, sponsor relations, event management, social media, mobile and experiential marketing and traditional earned media outreach programs that stimulate product trial, increase brand awareness and drive purchase intent.

FWV's food and beverage clients include some of the world's leading companies and brands, including Hood River Distillers, Pendleton Whisky, Josh Cellars, Yellow Tail, Melitta Coffee, Moe's Southwest Grill, Atlantic Natural Foods, Lidl, North Carolina Pork Council and Certified Angus Beef.

FWV has also produced award-winning campaigns that significantly increased product sales for the likes of The Coca-Cola Company (NESTEA, Gold Peak, Minute Maid, DASANI and Simply Orange), Celebrity Chef Lorena Garcia, the North Carolina Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association,

Brinker International (Magiano's Little Italy restaurants), Elevation Burger, House-Autry, ConAgra (Slim Jim, Pemmican Beef Jerky), Nabisco Foods, Brown-Forman (Jack Daniel's), Whole Foods Market, Diageo North America (Bulleit Bourbon), BRAND Napa Valley, Grain and Barrel Spirits and Smithfield's Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q, among many others.

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Hemsworth Communications is an award-winning hospitality, F&B, travel and lifestyle public relations agency with regional, national and global reach. We combine unparalleled passion, insight and connections to wow our clients, providing personal client service and generating powerful results.

While our expertise is diverse, we are collectively passionate about two things — our industry and yours. As seasoned PR pros, we are driven by the desire to create fresh, innovative, impactful campaigns. With leadership team members who have launched and operated their own restaurants, we think like owners and understand the intricacies of the business, as well as the need to simultaneously drive both recognition and sales.

Hemsworth specializes in promoting individual restaurants, restaurant groups/brands, franchise development, chef/personality publicity programs and ongoing support programs to create sustained buzz for food, wine and spirits brands. Specific capabilities include strategic planning, branding, grand openings/special events, social media campaigns, influencer marketing, awards programming and more.



Hunter PR kicked off TABASCO® Brand's 150th Anniversary in New Orleans with the revival of *TABASCO: A Burlesque Opera* at Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré to celebrate the city, and people, who have made TABASCO® an essential ingredient in classic and contemporary cuisine. The comedic operetta, which hadn't been performed in its entirety for over 120 years, follows a shipwrecked sailor as he searches for an acceptable spicy ingredient for an Ottoman ruler's lunch. Not only did the production mark a milestone year for McIlhenny Company, but it was also an official event of the New Orleans Tricentennial Commission, celebrating the 300th anniversary of the city.

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Hunter PR is an award-winning, consumer products and services public relations firm and the second largest food and beverage agency in the U.S. Hunter's creative approach and client-led orientation has led to some of the most enduring client relationships in the business including TABASCO® Brand Pepper Sauce, who was our first client 28 years ago, and still a client today. Other clients include some of America's most iconic and respected companies and brands including Post Consumer Foods, Diageo North America, Red Bull, Smithfield, Pompeian, Campbell Soup Company, Keurig Green Mountain and Mondelēz.

With offices in New York and London and a strategic footprint in markets across North America, Hunter's 120-person firm is perhaps best known for creative, equity building campaigns that drive conversation and insert brands firmly into the lifestyles of their target consumers. From breaking through the "dusty" single malt whisky category to make Lagavulin go viral, building equity programs that span over 10 years on behalf of Barefoot Wine & Bubbly, to curing #DairyEnvy by correcting common misconceptions about lactose-free products, and setting the first-ever GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title for the Largest Grilling Lesson for Smithfield, there's very little Hunter hasn't tackled in the food and beverage arena.

In addition to our core competencies, we also offer specialized PR services for food & beverage clients including: recipe development and photography; culinary + nutritional trade shows; food service + industrial campaigns; partnerships with government and non-profit

agencies; third-party research development; relationships with bartenders, mixologists, chefs and celebrity food influencers, as well as health care professional outreach.

Hunter served as the founding member of the Food + Beverage division of the Public Relation Society of America, and conducts an annual Food News Study, now in its 15th year, to help keep our clients abreast of what is making news in the industry and which media consumers trust most.

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Established in 1998, ICR partners with companies to develop and execute strategic communications programs and advisory services that achieve busi-

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ICR

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ness goals, build credibility, and enhance the long-term value of the enterprise. The firm's highly differentiated service model, which pairs capital markets veterans with senior communications professionals, brings deep sector knowledge and relationships to clients in more than 20 industries. Today, ICR is one of the largest and most experienced independent advisory firms in the world maintaining offices in Boston, Connecticut, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Hong Kong and Beijing.

Clients: Boot Barn, Chunghwa Telecom Co. Ltd., Cobalt Int'l Energy, Dave & Busters, FleetCor Technologies, Inc., Fossil, Inc., Freshpet, Genuine Parts Co., Gildan Activewear, Harman, Herbalife Ltd., HubSpot, IAC, Jarden Corp., Lazard Freres & Co. LLC, La Quinta Holdings, Inc., Legg Mason & Co. LLC, lululemon athletica, Mobileye, Michaels, Michael Kors, New Relic, Ocwen Fi-

nancial Corp., Pandora Media Inc., Paramount Group Inc., Planet Fitness Inc., Red Hat Inc., Shake Shack, Starwood Property Trust, VF Corp., Williams-Sonoma, Inc., Wingstop, Workiva and Zoës Kitchen.

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Ink Link Marketing is a full-service marketing communications firm that specializes in franchised businesses in the restaurant, foodservice and service industries. The firm offers PR, promotions, LSM, new product launches, grand opening support, corporate and employee communications and crisis response. Ink Link is headquartered in South Florida with satellite operations in Los Angeles and Brisbane, Australia. Clients include: Church's

Chicken, Little Caesars, The Krystal Company, Ovation Brands, On The Border Mexican Grill & Cantina, Tropical Smoothie Café, Forever Yogurt, Fishbowl and United Franchise Group and its portfolio of concepts.

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LANE, a Finn Partners Company, builds buzz and drives trial and sales for brands from coast to coast. With over 25 years of experience across the food, beverage and wellness industries, LANE's seasoned specialists know how to target messages and elevate brands.

Drawing on insights garnered from firsthand experience as well as from media, influencer and consumer circles, LANE's integrated campaigns connect across traditional and digital media, retailers and restaurants, and events.

LANE's award-winning campaigns have produced measurable results for national and international clients in the wine, beer and spirits; water, juice and coffee; and natural, organic and specialty food categories including Northwest Cherries, International Olive Council, Oregon Strawberry Commission, Snake River Farms, Double R Ranch, José Andrés Foods, Olympia Provisions, Moonstruck Chocolates, Steaz, Portland Roasting Coffee, Tree Top, Wines from Spain, E. & J. Gallo Winery, Pernod Ricard, Cupcake Vineyards, Sokol Blosser Winery and 10 Barrel Brewing.

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Named to the 2017 *Inc.* 5000 List of Fastest Growing Companies in America and *Entrepreneur* magazine's 2016 Entrepreneur 360 List as one of the Most Entrepreneurial Companies in America, Marketing Maven's sophisticated share of voice and sentiment analysis tools help to shape campaign strategy for food and beverage clients. Aligning with key influencers and utilizing grassroots social media tactics, paired with traditional media relations, generates significant impact for clients.

From an online cooking school to patented functional ingredients, the bicoastal team at Marketing Maven knows how to navigate food and beverage PR and social media campaigns. We specialize in showcasing your brand and increasing sales with unique pitch concepts distributed to top media for national TV, ra-



For the last five years, Marketing Maven has managed the publicity for the Casa Pacifica Angels Food, Wine & Brew Festival benefitting Casa Pacifica Centers for Children & Families.

dio, newspaper, magazine and online coverage.

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) and a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) with the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).

MARX LAYNE & COMPANY

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www.marxlayne.com

Leslie Pardo, Senior VP and Food & Beverage Lead

Marx Layne has been providing cost-effective marketing, public relations and digital media on a local, regional and national basis to the food and beverage sector since 1987.

Services offered to clients include media relations, social media, grand openings, product launches, special events, crisis and issues management, internal communications, community engagement programs, sampling events, blogger relations, online reputation management, direct mail, eblasts, graphic design, web development and design, content creation, brochure and newsletter production, and expanding concepts into new markets.

Industry experience includes fine dining, fast casual, QSRs, supermarket chains, and food and beverage manufacturers and suppliers. We have successfully introduced concepts new to Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Florida and other markets.

Our creativity is boundless. For example, Marx Layne conceptualized and managed all aspects of a product launch for a global restaurant brand that featured Nik Wallenda walking a high wire 80 feet above the City of Detroit, generating national media coverage and

tremendous social media buzz. Wallenda later went on to break Guinness World Records crossing Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon.

PADILLA

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PadillaCo.com

Ed Hoffman, Senior Vice President

Padilla's Food + Beverage Practice is one of the strongest and most experienced in the country. Representing both brands and marketing cooperatives, the agency covers all audiences: consumer, foodservice, retail and manufacturing.

Consumed by food, Padilla's team includes food experts; wine and spirits experts; writers and publicists; registered dietitians; recipe developers; and research, branding and digital specialists. Unique in-house resources include a culinary studio near national media in New York City and an extensive food and beverage library.

Together with FoodMinds, a division of Padilla, the agency is re-imagining why, what and how the world eats and drinks — to help build a stronger, flourishing future for all. Clients in the food and beverage sectors include Almond Board of California, Bordeaux wines, the Federation of Quebec Maple Syrup Producers, Hass Avocado Board, Prosciutto di Parma, U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council and Welch's.

Padilla is a top 10 independent public relations and communication 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.



Nik and Lijana Wallenda walked a high wire 80 feet above the City of Detroit to promote McDonald's coffee. The event and media campaign orchestrated by Marx Layne & Company generated national media coverage and tremendous social media buzz.

Padilla is a founding member of the Worldcom Public Relations Group, a partnership of 143 independently owned partner offices in 115 cities on six continents.

PEPPERCOMM

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Steve Cody, Co-CEO and Co-Founder
Ed Moed, Co-CEO & Co-Founder
Ted Birkhahn, Partner & President
Ann Barlow, Partner & President, West Coast
Deborah Brown, Partner & Managing director
Jacqueline Kolek, Partner & Managing director
Maggie O'Neill, Partner & Managing Director
Mike Friedin, Chief Digital Officer

Peppercomm is an award-winning strategic, integrated communications and marketing agency headquartered in New York City with offices in San Francisco and London. The firm 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 to determine the right mix of tools 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.

Services include Branding, Content Strategy & Development, Creative Services, Crisis Management, Digital Solutions, Experiential, Insights & Strategy, Licensing, Public Relations & Social Media and Research & Measurement.

For more information, visit www.peppercomm.com.

POLLOCK COMMUNICATIONS

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Louise Pollock, President

Pollock Communications is

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POLLOCK COMMUNICATIONS

Continued from page 29

an independent PR and marketing communications agency that offers cutting-edge expertise in traditional and social media outreach for food, beverage, health, wellness, and lifestyle clients. With an established background in reaching influencers who affect change, Pollock provides impactful and successful communications campaigns for its clients. Pollock pioneered communications for the functional food movement, creating some of the major food trends of the past decade, including making tea the healthy drink of the new millennium and making chocolate a healthy indulgence. Most recently, Pollock positioned cranberries as the superfruit of millennials through a creative, award-winning social media campaign that helped to create a new generation of cranberry lovers. The Cranberry Friendsgiving Photo Contest, which encouraged millennials to share their Friendsgiving cranberry creations on social media, increased awareness of the superfruit among a key target, drove sales and positioned cranberries at the center of a new American tradition of Friendsgiving.

For more than 25 years, we have been powering change for *Fortune* 100 food and beverage companies and global commodity foods, working to direct, shape and amplify their health and wellness stories. By strategically targeting and influencing food policymakers, traditional and social media, retail professionals and the healthcare community, Pollock delivers results that change consumer perceptions and protect and enhance a brand's position in the market.

In addition to PR practitioners and marketers, our staff includes media-savvy registered dietitians who can address health & nutrition issues



Pollock Communications engaged and educated nutrition influencers on the benefits of Dannon Light & Fit at the annual Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo.

that are top-of-mind for today's print, broadcast and online journalists. Pollock Communications has built a broad network of influential spokespeople, including media registered dietitians, celebrity chefs, social media celebrities, medical doctors and scientists, who are available and ready to deliver key messages for a variety of our clients in broadcast, print and social media.

We believe in pushing boundaries, breaking barriers and asking, "what if?" We diligently do our homework to develop an executable, strategic plan that delivers measurable results ... every time.

Clients include: A2 Milk, California Walnut Board, Cranberry Institute, Cranberry Marketing Committee USA, Fifty50 Foods, Gourmet Factory, Seafood Nutrition Partnership, Tea Council of the USA, The Dannon Company, The Danone International Institute, USA Rice Federation, Whey Protein Research Consortium

QUINN

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Quinn represents a select group of Food, Wine + Spirits clients.

We are the agency of record for these brands: MR CHOW, Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouses, Del Frisco's Grilles, Sullivan's Steakhouses, Merriman's Restaurants (Hawaii), Graziano's Group (South Florida).

Among a select group of indi-

vidual restaurants we represent are: Unagi (NYC), opening of Fete (NYC), opening of La Centrale (Miami), Joel Robuchon (Monte Carlo), ZUMA (Miami), Michelin-star Plume (Washington, DC) and The English Room (Chicago's North Shore).

We help our clients define their visions, build brands and drive business.

RF | BINDER

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www.rfbinder.com
Amy Binder, CEO
Atalanta Rafferty, Executive
Managing Director, Food &
Beverage

RF|Binder is a full-service, independent communications consultancy based in New York City, with offices in Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. At RF|Binder, we build transformative communications programs that solve business challenges. Our campaigns connect with key stakeholders, build corporate reputations, and educate on important issues, to ultimately define and distinguish industry leaders. We pride ourselves on being an agency of entrepreneurial thinkers who always challenge convention, in an effort to help our clients think, act and be different.

Food, beverage and nutrition is a cornerstone practice at RF|Binder. We have worked with over 60 food and beverage companies, brands and institutions that are building or seeking better solutions for people and planet, that offer consumers better options, more choice, more enjoyment, or that are building a more sustainable food future. We've worked at both the brand and corporate level, for both *Fortune* 500 food and beverage companies and start-ups, and spanned the industry with QSR, restaurant, B2B ingredients and CPG brands as well as wine, beer and distilled spirits brands, country trade groups and industry associations. We have a growing specialty in working with

emerging food innovations, such as food technology and plant-based ingredients. With our deep understanding of the food and beverage landscape, we help clients discover what's next for their business.

ROGERS & COWAN

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Mark Owens, CEO
Holly Beverly, Vice President

How do you whip up excitement for the "McDonald's of the future," with touchscreen ordering and mobile payment, or shine the spotlight on aspiring artists vying for their first break into filmmaking in the Coca-Cola and Regal Films Competition?

Partner with Rogers & Cowan, a global IPG-owned firm with a decades-long track record in talent and entertainment PR that also has a deep bench of food, beverage and hospitality experts.

Programs for McDonald's, Coke and others routinely rack up millions of impressions, boost brand image, drive social sharing and influence cultural conversations.

The agency also counts Betty Crocker, Bertolli, Illy, Nestea, Evian, Edible Arrangements, Heineken, Wheaties, Cheerios, Le District, L'Appart, Harry's, Esther & Carol, Two Forks, the Pennsy Food Hall and Mayacamas Vineyards among its roster of clients, using a mix of owned, earned and paid media, celebrities, digital influencers, live events and data-driven tactics to produce measurable results.

ROSICA COMMUNICATIONS

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Chris Rosica, President

Rosica Communications is an integrated PR and online

marketing company that promotes and protects companies, brands and people. Founded in 1980, the firm serves a diverse clientele with deep expertise in food and beverage and consumer products. Agency President Chris Rosica is a culinary school graduate (Johnson & Wales University) and worked in the hospitality/hotel, food manufacturing and foodservice industry for more than a decade. He is also a graduate of Florida International University's School of Hospitality Management. The agency's PR and communications capabilities include positioning and messaging, thought leadership, media relations, social media management, influencer marketing, crisis communications, content marketing, corporate communications, cause marketing, direct marketing, media training and blogger outreach. Rosica's social media services include strategy, management, branding, content development/optimization, and follower acquisition. The agency's online marketing team, based in New Windsor, NY, is a Google Certified Partner and specializes in SEO, online reputation/reviews, online advertising (PPC and social ads), website development, and WordPress security.

As a "thinking partner" focused on achieving clients' objectives, Rosica creates and executes thought leadership programs with clearly defined KPIs/metrics. The national PR firm creates and disseminates compelling, authentic stories and messaging to tell our client-partners' good news in a powerful, effective fashion, while supporting their sales and communications goals. Rosica's process includes:

- Strategically identifying clients' business and marketing goals/objectives;
- Identifying target audiences, influencers and key opinion leaders;
- Honing client positioning, stories and key messages, tailoring them to each audience;

- Developing measurable, integrated and creative PR, social media and internal/external communications programs;

- Proactively communicating with clients;

- Aggressively securing results, evaluating against pre-determined strategic objectives; and

- Repurposing and leveraging content and PR coverage to augment SEO, sales activities, online reputation, tradeshow marketing, analyst relations and direct marketing.

Clients Include: Bridor, Copper Chef, CELSIUS, American Flatbread Pizza, Power Air Fryer Oven

Please visit www.rosica.com for case studies and additional information.

SCHNEIDER ASSOCIATES

Member of the Worldcom Public Relations Group

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Joan Schneider, CEO & Founder
Phil Pennellatore, President

How do you make ice cream newsworthy in winter, motivate the media to swoon over grilled cheese sandwiches, or build consumer and influencer awareness for a startup or emerging brand? Ask Schneider Associates. We are passionate about creating and executing innovative and measurable campaigns to launch, re-launch and accelerate growth for food and beverage brands. We know how to craft fully integrated communications programs that create news while solving business challenges.

SA also specializes in multi-unit marketing, creating grand opening events and launching new products or programs for franchises. Services include messaging, media relations, social media, special events, creative design, digital marketing, spokesperson training, influencer outreach and crisis communications.

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 and communities to build awareness, excitement, and sales. Visit www.schneiderpr.com

TAYLOR

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Tony Signore, CEO & Managing Partner
Mike Costabile, Managing Partner

Taylor partners exclusively with category leading consumer brands that utilize lifestyle, sports, and entertainment platforms to engage consumers and drive business growth.

Named "Consumer Agency of the Decade" by *The Holmes Report*, Taylor has more than 100 employees with headquarters in New York and offices in Los Angeles, Chicago, Charlotte, and Atlanta. The agency provides a full array of services including: brand planning; creative; digital strategy and social media; strategic media relations; consumer insights; measurement and evaluation; event creative and production, multicultural; and talent procurement and training.

Taylor develops and executes marketing communications programs for category leading food and beverage brands, including — for the past 30 years — Diageo, the world's leading premium drinks business. Via social campaigns and strategic media relations, Taylor has successfully launched new products, reinvigorated iconic brands and sustained momentum in the marketplace for Diageo's adult beverage favorites such as Crown Royal, Guinness, Captain Morgan, Smirnoff and Bulleit, among others.

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TAYLOR

— Continued from page 31

The agency also partners with leading consumer food and QSR brands for a wide range of services, including product introductions, sponsorship activations, and digital strategy/social activation.

TREVELINO/ KELLER

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Trevelino/Keller has established its food, beverage and franchising practice as one of the more accomplished in the U.S., targeting emerging and middle-market companies across four channels: restaurants, franchising, manufacturing and associations. With its progressive foodie agency culture, from wine making to its own organic bee colony to seasoned salt production, as well as programs such as Red With Ted and Farm to T/K, the firm is sought after for international, national and hyperlocal programming in four core offerings: Public Relations, Digital/Social Marketing, Demand Generation and Creative Services.

With a commitment to launching new brands and re-establishing lost leaders, Trevelino/Keller's disruptive approach to strategy and creative makes it one of the more innovative agencies in the industry. Its success cross fertilizing its food and beverage practice with franchising, environment, health, lifestyle and even technology, gives it a leg up on those agencies limited by a franchise or food and beverage only focus. Its balanced base of experience in B2B and B2C enable companies to con-

solidate their agencies for an integrated approach. The firm's growth in digital/social marketing has resonated with those brands and concepts interested in a dual national and hyperlocal approach with tactics ranging from paid search, organic social, remarketing and social lead gen and the launch of its integrated SEO PR program.

Notable work includes Johnny Rockets, Corner Bakery Café, TCBY, Moe's Southwest Grill, Starbucks Coffee Company, Mrs. Fields, National Foundation for Celiac Awareness, Great Southern Craft Beer Competition and the Atlanta Food & Wine Festival. The firm extends its commitment to food and beverage four times a year with its original Winepreneurs event series, hosted in partnership with Silicon Valley Bank, for entrepreneurs who love wine.

WEBER SHANDWICK

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Gail Heimann, President
Janet Helm, MS, RD, Chief Food and Nutrition Strategist, North America

Weber Shandwick has built one of the largest and most successful food and nutrition practices in North America. Our clients include many of the world's leading food companies, and we've been behind some of the most iconic campaigns for food brands in the country. Weber Shandwick also has deep expertise in turning food categories like milk, mangos and pecans into brands with award-winning campaigns that change perceptions and build demand.

Our food clients range from the indulgent to functional, and they each have a story to tell. In today's "always-on" world, we help brands engage always. We manage the online communities of our multiple food clients and have extensive experience in



Taylor executed brand story-telling and consumer engagement for Bulleit Bourbon's Frontier Works campaign — a collaboration of artists and makers forging new frontiers. Taylor flipped the script on traditional advertising, uniting tattoo artists to create a 32 ft. tattoo billboard in LA. The feedback and resulting business impact were so strong that Taylor again drove top shelf business results through a customized partnership and cause marketing model, this time honoring neon. Iconic neon artist Lisa Schulte (AKA, The Neon Queen) was tapped to create a dynamic neon billboard in LA's Grand Central Market, generating donations for The Museum of Neon Art. The campaign was then extended to consumers during the holiday season via a sale of neon art inside Bulleit bottles, with all proceeds benefitting neon sign restoration.

creating engaging content and managing issues. Our work involves launching new products, reinvigorating brands, establishing thought leadership, and leveraging scientific research to change the way consumers and influencers think about specific foods or ingredients.

We have a dedicated food and nutrition team that includes some of the industry's most strategic senior counselors and content experts — including registered dietitians, PhD nutrition scientists, former and current journalists and trained chefs. These imbedded experts have extensive experience in public-private partnerships, alliance building, food and agriculture policy, food regulations, sustainability, food safety and crisis communications.

We have strong relationships

with food and nutrition influencers, including registered dietitians and bloggers, who are increasingly influencing the media landscape. Members of our food practice are even influencers in their own right as accomplished food writers, bloggers, Instagrammers and podcast hosts. Weber Shandwick created and continues to support the Nutrition Blog Network — an aggregator of more than 1,000 blogs written by registered dietitians. Our food specialists have extensive experience in engaging the communities that matter most to our food and beverage clients. ○

View & download profiles of hundreds of PR firms specializing in a dozen industry areas at:
www.odwyerpr.com

O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

FOOD & BEVERAGE PR FIRMS

Firm	Net Fees (2016)	Firm	Net Fees (2016)
1. Edelman , New York, NY	\$116,626,000	25. O'Malley Hansen Communications , Chicago, IL	\$626,000
2. Hunter PR , New York, NY	16,500,000	26. Quinn , New York, NY	617,460
3. APCO Worldwide , Washington, DC	16,283,900	27. Trevelino/Keller , Atlanta, GA	600,000
4. Padilla , Minneapolis, MN	14,895,275	28. Stuntman PR , New York, NY	541,613
5. Havas Formula , New York, NY	8,337,000	29. Maccabee , Minneapolis, MN	541,060
6. Taylor , New York, NY	8,244,000	30. Inkhouse Media + Marketing , Waltham, MA	498,300
7. Finn Partners , New York, NY	5,105,000	31. J Public Relations , New York, NY	466,735
8. Coyne , Parsippany, NJ	5,100,000	32. The Buzz Agency , Delray Beach, FL	364,945
9. RF I Binder Partners , New York, NY	4,915,523	33. rbb Communications , Miami, FL	343,278
10. 5W Public Relations , New York, NY	3,700,000	34. North 6th Agency (N6A) , New York, NY	325,315
11. Jackson Spalding , Atlanta, GA	3,563,655	35. Singer Associates, Inc. , San Francisco, CA	322,572
12. French I West I Vaughan , Raleigh, NC	2,713,433	36. Power Group, The , Dallas, TX	239,275
13. Konnect Agency , Los Angeles, CA	2,419,303	37. BizCom Associates , Plano, TX	230,000
14. 360PR+ , Boston, MA	2,407,825	38. Moore Communications Group , Tallahassee, FL	184,965
15. Fish Consulting , Hollywood, FL	1,615,000	39. MP&F Public Relations , Nashville, TN	163,563
16. SPM Communications , Dallas, TX	1,436,025	40. Marketing Maven Public Relations , Camarillo, CA	160,010
17. Peppercomm , New York, NY	1,194,444	41. Rosica Communications , Paramus, NJ	145,180
18. Champion Management Group , Dallas, TX	1,168,333	42. TransMedia Group , Boca Raton, FL	140,000
19. Lambert, Edwards & Assoc. , Grand Rapids, MI	1,040,000	43. BoardroomPR , Ft. Lauderdale, FL	100,000
20. BLAZE , Santa Monica, CA	1,020,000	44. Hemsworth Communications , Ft. Lauderdale, FL	69,024
21. Gold PR , Corona, CA	1,000,000	45. Red Sky PR , Boise, ID	49,454
22. LANE , Portland, OR	889,051	46. WordWrite Communications LLC , Pittsburgh, PA	41,000
23. IW Group, Inc. , West Hollywood, CA	782,000	47. CooperKatz & Co. , New York, NY	17,850
24. LaunchSquad , San Francisco, CA	750,000	48. Lovell Communications , Nashville, TN	9,649

Targeting the NRA

By Fraser Seitel

In a morbidly ironic way, the February tragedy of the Parkland, Florida school massacre has given Democrats new life in their battle to win back the House of Representatives in November.

Until the tragedy in Parkland, the Democrats, for many reasons, had shown little hope of mounting much of a challenge to Republican House domination.



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

Now, however, Democrats have been presented a fat, newly-vulnerable public relations target at which they can aim their mounting congressional campaign: the National Rifle Association.

First, a few facts:

- Democratic leadership is old and tired and out-of-touch. Nancy Pelosi in the House, despite overwhelming sentiment in her own party to ditch her, refuses to let go. Her Senate counterpart Chuck Schumer has become little more than a whiny obstructionist. Republican opposition in November would have an easy time picking both leaders apart.

- Democratic progressive leaders have similarly little chance of gaining traction. Obama wannabes Senators Kirstin Gillibrand, Cory Booker and Kamala Harris are nowhere near ready for prime time. And socialists Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are just plain scary.

- Democratic policy principles are either non-existent or non-starters. Priorities such as immigration reform and Dreamer continuance and Russian election interference, while laudatory, aren't exactly at the top of the list for most Americans. And Democratic revulsion at the Trump tax cuts that add money to most people's wallets is a losing battle.

But the hope, even for a party so bereft of ideas as the Democrats, rose anew on February 14, when 17 children were tragically gunned down in Florida. Republicans, despite a growing national mood to take action against guns, generally remain too timid to confront the NRA's lobbying might.

The Democrats should have no such compunction. If they want to take back the House, they should take dead aim at

the NRA by considering a public relations strategy along the following lines:

Call for a ban on assault weapons

This is the key element in any political initiative, because it's what the NRA most fears.

First, there's no earthly reason for individuals to own assault weapons — not for hunting, not for self-defense, not for nothing. This reality has been corroborated by countless military veterans, who, in editorials throughout the nation since the Parkland massacre, have reaffirmed that assault rifles are designed for war, to kill people — nothing else. That's the reason they're banned in most civilized countries and should be in the United States.

They aren't, because gun manufacturers make lots of money from the sale of assault weapons. How much? Nobody knows, because the NRA has consistently lobbied against any national gun registry that would track such purchases. Protecting the sale of assault weapons, such as the one used in Florida, is the NRA's Holy Grail, which is why Republicans, worried about NRA votes, have shied away from the topic and instead pursued "safer" compromises like banning bump stocks, raising gun-buying ages and fortifying background checks. In the midterms, Democrats should aggressively campaign to ban all assault weapons and force their adversaries to make a public choice.

Take on the new NRA chief spokesperson

The new face of the NRA, as we learned after the Parkland shooting, is the articulate and camera-ready Dana Loesch. Big mistake.

Ms. Loesch is a Glenn Beck-mentored, full-on bible-toting conservative, who tweets, blogs, authors books and appears frequently on radio and television. She's fearless and a true believer; presumably perfect to advocate for the NRA.

But after a tragedy the likes of Parkland, where innocent children were once again struck down by a lunatic with a war weapon, a tough-talking, in-your-face, take-no-prisoners true believer like Dana Loesch is the worst spokesman you could hire.

The situation screams for "empathy," especially from an NRA that's already reviled for its power and inflexibility. In the wake of Parkland, the NRA, beyond anything else, needs to convey concern and understanding and reasonableness. That's why President Trump, having apparently learned from Charlottesville, is appearing to listen to all sides and consider various options in

stopping school shootings.

Meanwhile, the NRA's Loesch singles out shoddy law enforcement and biased media coverage, rather than the need for increased gun control. Opponents, including Democrats running for Congress, should recognize that in "sticking to her guns," Loesch and the organization she represents are now clearly on the wrong side of the debate and should be exploited for it.

Go after Wayne LaPierre

For nearly three decades, the Executive Vice President and guiding light behind the National Rifle Association has been an unyielding, irremovable, undefeatable force in Washington. Not anymore.

The Parkland tragedy has altered the NRA equation. When powerful, controversy-averse companies like MetLife, Chubb, Hertz, Avis, Enterprise, Symantec, Allied Van Lines and even conservative Georgia-based Delta Airlines cut ties with the NRA, you know the ground has shifted. And both the NRA and Wayne LaPierre, its gun-toting ideological leader with the French-sounding name, are now vulnerable.

So, if the Democrats truly want to win back the House, they should begin to focus their public relations sights on the one target which, in light of recent awful events, most Americans have come to believe should no longer stand. ○

PR news brief

Evoke Group acquires AboveNation Media

Evoke Group, the umbrella entity of health marketing brands launched by Huntsworth Health unit Evoke Health, announced that it has acquired New York-based ad agency AboveNation Media.

The Huntsworth unit reported that it has acquired a commanding 75 percent stake of AboveNation Media for an initial sum of \$1.75 million.

AboveNation Media is a full-service media strategy, planning and buying agency with a focus on ad tech and proprietary media solutions. The company, which was founded in 2014 and is led by CEO Steve Minichini and president John Lee, generated revenues of \$1.3 million last year.

Leadership of the agency will remain unchanged in light of the transaction, and no staff changes were reported. Minichini and Lee will now report to Evoke Group CEO Reid Connolly.

Evoke Group in a statement said the acquisition will provide the health marketing operation with integrated advertising technology solutions across all of its advertising, public relations and influencer marketing services.

Evoke Group was founded in 2015. Huntsworth Health is London-based PR group Huntsworth's largest division.

Guidance on home equity debt, pass-through deduction

By Richard Goldstein

A few months ago, I wrote about the new tax law. At that time there was a question regarding how to treat home equity debt.

Pre-Act law

Under pre-Act law, taxpayers could deduct as an itemize deduction qualified residence interest, which included interest paid on a mortgage secured by a principal residence or a second residence. The underlying mortgage loans could represent acquisition indebtedness of up to \$1.0 million (\$500,000 for married filing separately), plus home equity indebtedness

of up to \$100,000. It did not matter what the \$100,000 was used for to deduct the interest.

New law

For tax years beginning after December 31, 2017 and before January 1, 2026, the deduction for home equity indebtedness is suspended, and the deduction for mortgage interest is limited to underlying indebtedness of up to \$750,000 (\$375,000 for married filing separately). For tax years after December 31, 2025, the pre-Act law is restored. The suspension for home equity indebtedness also ends for tax years beginning after December 31, 2025.

IRS queries

Responding to many questions received from taxpayers and tax professionals, the IRS said that despite newly-enacted restrictions on home mortgages, taxpayers can often still deduct interest on a home equity loan, home equity line of credit or second mortgage, regardless of how the loan is labeled.

Under the Act, as an example, interest on a home equity loan used to build an addition to an existing home is typically deductible, while interest on the same loan used to pay personal living expenses, such as credit card debt, is not.

Examples

Example one: In January 2018, a taxpayer takes out a \$500,000 mortgage to purchase a main home with a fair market value \$800,000. In February 2018, the taxpayer takes out a \$250,000 home equity loan to

put on an addition on the main home. Both the loans are secured by the main home and the total does not exceed the cost of the home. Because the total amount of both loans does not exceed \$750,000, all the interest paid on the loans is deductible. However, if the taxpayer used the home equity loan proceeds for personal expenses, such as paying off credit cards, the interest on the home equity loan would not be deductible.

Example two: In January 2018, taxpayer takes out a \$500,000 mortgage to purchase a main home. The loan is secured by the main home. In February 2018, the taxpayer takes out a \$250,000 loan to purchase a vacation home. The loan is secured by the vacation home. Because the total amount of both mortgages does not exceed \$750,000, all the interest paid on both mortgages is deductible. However, if the taxpayer took out a \$250,000 home equity loan on the main home to purchase the vacation home, then the interest on the home equity loan would not be deductible.

Example three: In January 2018, a taxpayer takes out a \$500,000 mortgage to purchase a main home. The loan is secured by the main home. In February 2018, the taxpayer takes out a \$500,000 loan to purchase a vacation home. The loan is secured by the vacation home. Because the total amount of both mortgages exceeds \$750,000, not all of the interest paid on the mortgage is deductible. A percentage of the total interest paid is deductible.

Guidance on the "20 percent deduction"

Of all the provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, none are likely to cause more confusion than the new IRS Code Section 199A. Put simply, the deduction, effective for tax years beginning after December 31, 2017, and before January 1, 2026, is generally 20 percent of taxpayer's qualified business income from partnerships, S corporations, or sole proprietorships. Will this deduction be available to the public relations industry? Yes and no!

To take this deduction, the PR firm must be a qualified trade or business other than a specified trade or business or the business of performing services as an employee.

A specified trade or business is any trade or business involving the performance of services other than engineering or architecture. So where does this leave the PR industry? Right now, I believe that part of the PR (or integrated marketing services) entities that render a service will not be eligible.

However, there is a threshold exception to exclusion of specified service trade or business. If for any tax year, the taxable income of any taxpayer is less than \$157,500 (\$315,000 in the case of a joint return), the exclusion for specified service trade or businesses does not apply and the deduction is available to the taxpayer, for that year. This means that the individual PR professional or any service business professional for that matter will be able to take the 20 percent deduction. ○

Cryptocurrencies become social gold mine

Cryptocurrencies have become some of the most talked about financial services brands on social media, but mixed public perception and a lack of trust in digital currencies and blockchain technologies remain potential barriers to their adoption, according to a report released by social intelligence group NetBase.

NetBase's annual report highlights both cryptocurrencies' meteoric rise in popularity as well as the realities of how that newfound awareness contrasts with current consumer opinion.

Even though cryptocurrencies comprised only nine percent of all the brands in NetBase's analysis this year, it was responsible for 40 percent of the total social media conversation volume surrounding all financial services brands, beating every other financial category in the report.

By contrast, insurance brands made up 18 percent of the overall conversations covered in the report but only three percent of the

total conversation volume, and banks comprised 27 percent of the brands included in this year's list but represented only 14 percent of conversation volume.

For the first time in the report's history, two cryptocurrencies — Bitcoin and Ethereum — also made their way into NetBase's top 10 Brand Passion Index for financial services brands on social media.

When it comes to trust among consumers, however, cryptocurrencies leave much room for improvement. Bitcoin ranked second-to-last in terms of trust in NetBase's Brand Passion Index, above only Goldman Sachs. Fellow altcoin brand Ethereum ranked seventh.

Cryptocurrencies also scored below average in terms of net sentiment, which averages both the positive and negative consumer opinions of a brand. At 49.8 out of a possible 100, crypto ranked behind payment services, investment banking, insurance companies and Internet lending services. ○



Richard Goldstein is a partner at Buchbindner Tunick & Company LLP, New York, Certified Public Accountant.

PR ties derail FRA chief

Heath Hall, acting Chief of the Federal Railroad Administration, resigned Feb. 10 after Politico raised questions about whether he was moonlighting as a PR consultant in Mississippi.

Appointed FRA's deputy administrator in June, Hall took command of the safety watchdog in January.

Hall has been on extended leave of absence since January due to a family emergency.

Previously, he had run Strategic Marketing Group in Madison, MS, but promised in his financial disclosure forms that FRA "will remain dormant during Federal service."

Politico reported that Hall's firm received \$12,000 from the Madison County sheriff's department from July through December and that his name frequently popped up as a spokesperson for the sheriff's department.

A Department of Transportation spokesperson said in a Feb. 10 statement that the DOT was unaware of allegations about Hall's PR ties.

She said it would be "troubling" if the allegations were true.

The FRA, which has a \$1.7 billion budget, is responsible for the oversight of 760 railroads. There were more than 825 railroad deaths in 2017, which was the highest death toll in a decade. ○



Heath Hall



Lyft books Insight PA

Lyft has booked InSight PA for Washington representation on a range of transportation issues.

Insight is the firm formed in December by Podesta and BGR alums to provide "purpose-driven advocacy and lobbying for companies, nonprofits and causes."

Oscar Ramirez and Dana Thompson, veterans of Tony Podesta's firm, handle the Lyft effort.

Lyft spent \$630,000 for lobbying in 2017 in areas such as ride-sharing, self-driving cars, commuter tax breaks, future of work and smart cities.

Before cutting ties, Podesta took a \$150,000 chunk of those outlays, while WPP's Glover Park Group accounted for a \$100,000 piece of the business.

Uber Technologies, Lyft's archrival, shelled out \$1.9 million in 2017 lobbying fees to a collection of firms including The Doerner Group, Franklin Square Group, Ballard Partners, Federal Hill Group and Invariant. ○

Heavy-hitters launch Potomac International Partners

Potomac International Partners has launched in Washington with luminaries such as Gerry Cassidy, former Cassidy & Assocs. chief; Ed Feulner, Heritage Foundation founder; Bill Press, CNN political contributor and Douglas Fraser, retired Air Force General and commander of the U.S. Southern Command, as board members.

PIP says it will offer clients strategic counsel, integrated programs, and campaign management in three main practice areas: government relations, advocacy communications, and international consulting.

Specific services provided are to include lobbying, regulatory consulting, data analytics and targeting, grassroots mobilization, content development and creative design, social and digital engagement, media relations, digital advertising and federal marketing.

PIP will have offices in New York and Silicon Valley as well as affiliates in Latin America, Asia, and EMEA.

Phil Armstrong (alumnus of Hill & Knowlton, Zeno Group and Euro RSCG) heads New York while Adam Rak (veteran TechAmerica and Symantec) leads the California outpost.

The firm's leadership includes Jefferson Group Founder Mark Cowan, Weber Merritt's Jim Weber & Bernie Merritt, Bond & Assocs' Phil Bond and Democratic National Committee ex-Vice Chairman Patrick Murphy. ○



Adam Rak

Schillinger invests in PA post at AIC

Emily Schillinger, who was press secretary for former House Speaker John Boehner, is now VP-PA at the American Investment Council.

She will promote AIC's message about how private equity investment creates jobs, grows the economy and strengthens retirement security for the American public.

AIC reports that the fund-raising by the private equity industry, which includes firms such as Apollo Global Management, Blackstone and Carlyle Group, rose 14 percent in 2017 to \$231 billion, its highest level since 2008.

Most recently, Schillinger was communications director at the House Ways & Means Committee, where she handled messaging for the tax cut measure.

Prior to working for Boehner, she was communications director for Sen. John Barasso (R-WY), press secretary at the Commerce Dept. and assistant press secretary in George W. Bush's White House.

Mike Sommers, former Chief of Staff to Boehner, heads AIC. ○



Emily Schillinger

Mercury targets Turkish investment

Mercury Public Affairs has inked a two-month deal through May 15 to represent the Turkey-U.S. Business Council in its effort to increase trade and investment volume between the countries.

The Omnicom unit will provide PR counsel to TUSBC and conduct outreach to American policymakers.

Though TUSBC is an association of private businesses, Mercury registered the work with the Justice Dept. "out of an abundance of caution."

TUSBC "operates under the Foreign Economic Relations Board, which in turn operates indirectly under the auspices of the Turkish Ministry of Economy," according to the filing.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met with Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan earlier this month in a bid to improve relations between the two nations.

The U.S. has criticized Erdogan for his crackdown on the media and political opponents. Turkey is upset with U.S. support for Kurdish fighters in Syria.

Following the meeting with Erdogan, Tillerson said the US and Turkey will now "lock arms" to work together to improve ties. ○

Qatar signs SGR for PR push

SGR LLC has landed a \$40,000 per-month pact to provide government relations/consulting services to Qatar, which has been under an economic blockade by its Arab neighbors led by Saudi Arabia.

FARA News



NEW FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT FILINGS

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

Gunster Strategies Worldwide, Inc., Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 2, 2018 for Pakistan People's Party (PPP)**, Islamabad, Pakistan, to assist with an upcoming visit by the Chairman of the PPP, Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and arrange interaction with members of the congressional and executive branches as well as media outlets.

CLS Strategies, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 12, 2018 for Government of Peru**, Washington, D.C., to provide strategic advice on promoting image of Peru relating to democratic values and possible entry into the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Forbes Tate Partners LLC, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 10, 2018 for Embassy of Japan**, Washington, D.C., to monitor and advise on U.S. policies and government actions of interest as well as communicate with members of Congress and their staff.

The Chwat Group, Alexandria, VA, **registered Feb. 14, 2018 for World Uyghur Congress**, Munich, Germany, to represent WUC policies and positions on human rights, democracy and issues impacting the Uyghur peoples before US Government and US public and private sectors.

Lobbying News



NEW LOBBYING DISCLOSURE ACT FILINGS

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

Jones Group International, LLC, Vienna, VA, **registered Feb. 26, 2018 for AT&T Services, Inc.**, regarding AWS-3 spectrum proceeding and negotiating with the Department of Defense and other federal users in the 1755-1850 MHz band of wireless spectrum.

Dentons US LLP, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 26, 2018 for The Havasupai Tribe**, Supai, AZ, regarding administrative decision by the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw a ban on certain mining activities in Arizona.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 23, 2018 for Cargill, Inc.**, Wayzata, MN, regarding North American Free Trade Agreement and international tax reform.

Swenson Strategies, Inc., South Jordan, UT, **registered Feb. 23, 2018 for Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA)**, Diamond Bar, CA, regarding protection and restoration of racing opportunities on the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah.

The PR engagement is through law firm Venable and calls for SGR to handle outreach to the U.S. Congress, federal policymakers and the media.

Under the agreement, Qatar's DC embassy provides SGR written directions at the beginning of each month to outline the specific actions to be performed during that period.

SGR is to receive its retainer by the 5th of each month. If payment is not received by the 10th, SGR has the right to stop its work.

The Arab states erected their blockade mid-June of last year due to Qatar's alleged support of terror groups and its cozy relationship with Iran. ○

Levick pushes trade with Korea

Levick will represent South Korea's Ministry for Trade and Energy as it works to promote the benefits of the US Korea Free Trade Agreement.

Serving as subcontractor to K&L Gates law firm, the Washington-based strategic communications shop will educate Americans on the benefits of the trade deal.

Using social media, media outreach, events, and meetings with policy influencers, Levick is expected to pitch Korea as a developed country that invests in the US economy fairly, employs US workers and contributes to American consumers.

Though Levick is still hammering out details of its work, it decided to register with the Justice Dept. "in an abundance of caution."

President Trump on Feb. 13 called the 2012 trade agreement with Korea "a disaster." He promised to either renegotiate a "fair deal" or junk it.

U.S. and Korean envoys began re-working the trade pact last July. ○

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