

## THE FOOD ISSUE

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FOOD & BEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FEMALE ATHLETES

HOW LESSER-KNOWN WINE REGIONS CAN ENTER U.S. MARKET

SMALL-TOWN FOOD SCENES BECOME TOURISM DESTINATIONS

NURTURING CONSUMER CURIOSITY ABOUT FOOD'S JOURNEY



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DO CEOS HAVE AN AI CONFIDENCE PROBLEM?





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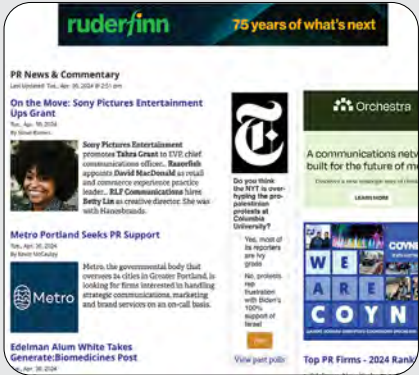
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HEMSWORTH

# The messaging battle over alcohol's health risks

The U.S. Surgeon General in January issued an advisory calling for alcoholic beverages to contain a warning label addressing the cancer risks associated with drinking. In a statement, outgoing Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy referred to alcohol as a “well-established, preventable cause of cancer” that contributes to 100,000 cancer cases in the U.S. each year, although a majority of Americans remain “unaware of this risk.”

This shouldn't be a controversial statement—health experts have known about the link between alcohol and cancer since the 1980s. Yet, the Surgeon General's suggestion that even moderate drinking may pose health risks resulted in pushback from alcohol industry advocates, who've responded with inconsistent messaging that could mislead Americans regarding the risks associated with alcohol consumption.

The scientific consensus surrounding the dangers of alcohol has evolved significantly in recent years. A spate of well-publicized studies has suggested that alcohol has no health benefits, that the methodology behind previous studies suggesting moderate drinking provides health benefits was flawed and that a direct link exists between alcohol consumption and a variety of serious health risks, including seven different types of cancer.

These findings suggest our current health messaging isn't giving Americans the full picture regarding the potential dangers of drinking. But if there is a causal relationship between alcohol and cancer, why aren't U.S. health authorities telling us about it? It's worth noting that the World Health Organization currently identifies alcohol as a “toxic substance” and “an established carcinogen” that is “associated with risks of developing noncommunicable diseases such as liver diseases, heart diseases, and different types of cancers.”

The Surgeon General's advisory comes as the nation awaits the latest updates to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the influential USDA/HHS policy statement issued every five years that provides recommendations for a healthy diet. When it comes to alcohol, the DGA's recommendations are informed by two separate scientific reviews. One comes from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), which concluded in its December report the decades-held belief that moderate drinkers have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease. (Cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in the U.S.) Alcohol trade groups such as the Distilled Spirits Council have repeated these findings in press statements ever since the Surgeon General's advisory was released in January. This reporter was sent at least one email from a PR firm representing wine brands, which stated that the Surgeon General's recent push for cancer-warning labels is “contradicting key findings” from NASEM and concluded that “Americans deserve evidence-based guidance, not fear-driven narratives.”

It's a logical stretch to conclude that moderate drinking is safe simply because it's linked to reduced cardiovascular risk, as though a reduced risk of heart disease somehow cancels out increased cancer risks. It seems discreetly reasonable that two things can be true at once: that alcohol may lower the risk of heart attack while heightening the risk for cancer. Indeed, the NASEM report also noted that moderate alcohol consumption was associated with an increased risk of breast cancer.

Current DGA guidelines also state that “emerging evidence suggests that even drinking within the recommended limits may increase the overall risk of death from various causes, such as from several types of cancer and some forms of cardiovascular disease.” So, why not put that on a warning label? Marion Nestle, a nutritionist, author and professor at New York University, told *O'Dwyer's* that the DGA committee had previously recommended revising current guidelines for daily alcohol intake, calling for only *one* drink per day for men. Those suggestions, however, never made it into the final guidelines, and the DGA continued with its longstanding recommendation of two alcoholic drinks per day for men and one for women, which is the same recommendation it has had in place since 1990.

Why are we using 35-year-old science to guide healthy alcohol practices? Here's a clue. Despite the Surgeon General's suggestions, revising the current warning labels on alcohol would require an act by Congress, which seems unlikely. Politico in January reported that more than 100 U.S. House reps. in October reached out to the HHS and USDA secretaries, “asking them to suspend a study on alcohol consumption overseen by HHS that figures to undergird the new dietary guidelines.” According to Open Secrets, the D.C.-based nonprofit that publishes lobbying data, more than \$29 million was spent on beer, wine and liquor lobbying in 2024.

South Korea is currently the only country in the world requiring a warning label stating that drinking alcohol can lead to liver cancer. In 2023, Ireland became the first EU nation to mandate a warning label regarding alcohol's cancer risks, which is set to take effect in 2026. Lawmakers in Canada had proposed a similar labeling initiative before alcohol-industry lobbyists successfully shut that proposal down. Call me crazy, but I don't think Canada is alone.

“In the face of inconsistent interpretations of the evidence on alcohol and health, you need to decide whether to take precautions—‘I will drink as little as possible’—or continue drinking as much as you like and take your chances on the consequences,” Nestle said. ○

— Jon Gingerich

# O'Dwyer's

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kevin McCauley  
kevin@odwyerpr.com

## PUBLISHER

John O'Dwyer  
john@odwyerpr.com

## SENIOR EDITOR

Jon Gingerich  
jon@odwyerpr.com

## ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Steve Barnes  
steve@odwyerpr.com

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Fraser Seitel

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS & RESEARCH

Jane Landers  
Melissa Webell

## Advertising Sales:

John O'Dwyer  
john@odwyerpr.com

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BOBBY VAN'S

# PR firms saw profit gains in 2024

More than half of North American PR agencies were profitable in 2024, with noted increases in profitability toward the end of the year, according to a new Gould+Partners report.

By Jon Gingerich

The North American PR sector had a better year in 2024 than many anticipated, according to results from an annual survey conducted by PR merger and acquisition consultancy Gould+Partners.

Gould+Partners' report, which surveyed North American public relations firms on their revenue and profitability performance in 2024, found that half (50 percent) of the agencies surveyed revealed an increase in net revenues in 2024. Only about a third (34 percent) reported a revenue decrease last year.

The report also found that 57 percent of the firms surveyed reported profitability increases (operating profit) in 2024. Earlier projections for the first nine months of the year had estimated that only 47 percent would see an increase in profits, suggesting that firms had a particularly strong fourth quarter. Gould+Partners Managing Partner Rick Gould told *O'Dwyer's* that this 10 percent swing was "major," and said that it "shows tightening management" and a "focusing on the bottom line."

Profitability was especially high among firms with between \$10–25 million in annual net revenues (64 percent). They were followed by firms with between \$3–10 million in revenues (63 percent). The largest firms (those with more than \$25 million in annual net revenues) saw increased profitability

among 56 percent, and 49 percent of the smallest firms (net revenues of less than \$3 million) experienced profitability.

When it comes to net revenue gains, the firms earning between \$10–25 million in annual net revenues saw the biggest gains this year (72 percent). For firms making more than \$25 million, 50 percent reported an increase in net revenues. 51 percent of firms with revenues between \$3–10 million saw net revenue growth and 41 percent of firms with revenues of less than \$3 million saw net revenues increases.

Billing rates were also up at 51 percent of agencies last year, a number that Gould said "appeared very high" and "surprised" him. Utilization/productivity, on the other hand, was at only 42 percent.

The survey also measured PR firm performance by region. Out of all the ten regions included in the survey, the New York/New Jersey region revealed the largest growth in profitability (79 percent) and also reported a 55 percent increase in net revenues. In southern California, 72 percent of firms gained in profitability while only 45 percent of gained in revenues. In northern California, 67 percent of firms showed increases in both profitability and net revenues. In the Midwest, 54 percent of agencies saw profitability while 38 percent experienced revenue gains.

In the U.S. Northeast, 50 percent experienced profitability and 58 percent saw revenue growth. In the Southwest, 44 percent of firms revealed net revenue gains and the same percentage reported profitability growth. In the U.S. Southeast, 42 percent of agencies experienced increased profitability while 55 percent reported revenue growth. In Canada, 42 percent of PR firms saw profitability and 50 percent showed an increase in net revenues. Only 20 percent of PR firms located in Washington, D.C. and its surrounding suburbs showed an increase in net revenues, the smallest gains out of any of the regions ranked, although 40 percent reported profitability.

More than a third of firms surveyed (39 percent) expressed confidence in the U.S. economy, compared to 30 percent who said they have a negative outlook on the current economy.

Finally, the report also found that 21 percent of the firms surveyed reported an increase in staff working in the firm's physical office full-time. Earlier projections had that number at only 13 percent, suggesting that PR pros are returning to the office at a faster rate than previously anticipated.

"I believe this will increase as time moves on, especially since the federal mandate, which is endorsed by most CEOs, that staff in the office are more efficient, with higher billability/productivity," Gould told *O'Dwyer's*.

Gould+Partners' "2024 Financial Trend Report" was based on responses from more than 100 PR firms based in the U.S. and Canada. ○

## Brands should avoid trend hopping

Brands should resist the urge to chase trends and should instead focus on original, authentic content that engages consumers.

By Jon Gingerich

Social media is the town square where trends are born, but that doesn't necessarily mean brands should haphazardly chase viral trends as a branding strategy, according to new research from social media management and analytics company Sprout Social.

Sprout's report, which surveyed 4,000 consumers and 1,200 social practitioners and marketing leaders to uncover what consumers want from brands on social media, discovered that while social remains the preferred forum where people keep up to date with trends and cultural issues, they're split on whether it works when brands participate in trends to maintain relevance.

While 93 percent think it's important for

brands to strive to keep up with online culture, a third (33 percent) of respondents said they think it's "embarrassing" when brands chase viral trends, and more than a quarter (27 percent) said they think it works as a branding strategy only when it's done between 24 and 48 hours after the trend hits.

Instead, a majority of respondents (63 percent) think brands should promote the quality of their products and rely on original content (46 percent) to stand out on digital platforms. Authenticity, reliability and entertainment were named as the most important brand content traits, according to the survey.

Social media is clearly where brands focus

on their presence. According to the report, 90 percent of survey respondents cited social media as their top resource for keeping up with trends and cultural issues, beating out family and friends (66 percent) and TV and streaming (60 percent) as well as other digital channels (54 percent), podcasts (35 percent) and print media (23 percent).

81 percent of survey respondents admitted that social media often compels them to make impulse purchases.

When it comes to what social channels consumers are using, Facebook remains the top platform for purchases overall (39 percent), followed by TikTok (36 percent) and Instagram (29 percent).

More than half of respondents (56 percent) said they plan to maintain their current social media usage this year, nearly a third (30 percent) said they'll increase their social media consumption in 2025. ○



# People doubt companies can do much good

The public lacks confidence in the private sector's ability to move the needle on important social and environmental issues, according to a recent Harris Poll study.

By Steve Barnes

The public's faith in the ability of leading companies to make a positive difference in the world around them is surprisingly weak, according to a new study from the Page Society and The Harris Poll.

Only about a quarter (26 percent) of the more than 15,000 people across 14 countries surveyed for the study said that they were "very confident" that business could move the needle on a set of 16 topics including environmental issues, corruption and technological innovation.

With a 23 percent confidence level, the U.S. ranked below the global average, but it still topped France, Germany and the UK (all at 16 percent) as well as Japan and Italy (14 percent). Countries with a more positive take on the ability of businesses to bring about change included the UAE (43 percent), India (45 percent) and Saudi Arabia (48 percent).

Differences could also be seen across a variety of social divides. For example, Boom-

ers were far less confident (15 percent) than Gen X (26 percent), Millennials or Gen Z (both at 32 percent). In addition, city dwellers were more confident (31 percent) than their suburban and rural peers (19 percent).

The top issues on which survey respondents wanted to see companies having an effect were economic stability and growth (63 percent), job creation and workforce skills development (58 percent), and corruption (57 percent).

A focus on mental health issues was much more important to younger respondents. Gen Zers rated mental health as number-two on their list of the top 6 issues, with Millennials ranking them at #3. For boomers, mental health didn't make the top 6 at all.

To find out how companies can combat this confidence gap, the study consulted 40 CCOs from across North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Those respondents pinpointed four top

risks that should be on companies' radar as they work to raise confidence levels in the coming year. They are resistance to ESG/DEI, polarization and low trust, shifts caused by policy shifts brought about the Trump administration, and such geopolitical challenges as rising populism and international conflicts.

They also give some advice for CEOs to follow in 2025. In addition to encouraging CEOs not to engage in activities that can be perceived as political or partisan, that advice includes working to better understand and listen to customer experiences and adapting company communications to the changes in the social and political environment. Stepping back in order to gain a little perspective should also be on the menu. "Don't overreact to external events," the CCOs caution.

The results of the Page Society/Harris Poll were compiled from an online survey conducted between Dec. 17 and 23 of last year. ○

## CEOs have AI confidence problem

CEOs are embracing artificial intelligence, but their confidence to handle direct oversight of the technology often doesn't match their abilities, according to a recent study.

By Jon Gingerich

The arrival of generative artificial intelligence presents game-changing opportunities for the private sector, leaving organizations with the new challenge of navigating the myriad complexities that come with this groundbreaking technology.

Among these challenges are the roadblocks AI presents regarding how this technology is implemented within a company—and by whom. According to a survey of 200 CEOs conducted by research and advisory firm the Futurum Group, one particular challenge is that executives' current enthusiasm for AI often doesn't match their capabilities.

Futurum's study suggests that CEOs are facing an inflection point when it comes to AI. Specifically, there's an alarming gap between CEOs' personal confidence on all matters AI and their ability to make decisions that result in more effective and productive AI implementation.

According to the study, 89 percent of CEOs surveyed said they recognize the strategic importance of leveraging AI for their

business, nearly two-thirds (62 percent) view AI as a positive game changer for their organizations and 80 percent report at least a moderate degree confidence in extracting measurable value from this technology.

But it appears that some CEOs may be overconfident when it comes to handling AI-related matters and this overconfidence could be hurting their companies when they insist on leading AI strategy themselves.

In fact, Futurum's report suggests that success rates with AI are highest in organizations where executive leaders delegate operational execution of the technology and relinquish day-to-day control of AI-related decisions to specialized teams that can ensure more effective implementation.

Among the organizations achieving the best results with AI, only 59 percent of those companies' CEOs reported maintaining maintain direct oversight of AI. On the other hand, among the companies reporting the least success with AI, 92 percent have CEOs who handle AI strategy themselves, suggesting that top-down control of AI can

hamper its results and that the technology is most successful when CEOs delegate its oversight yet remain part of the process as a strategic guide.

According to the survey, more than half (57 percent) of CEOs said they currently directly drive AI strategy at their company, while 43 percent delegate or share that responsibility with others. An additional 78 percent of CEOs said they feel confident about their current ability to guide AI-related decisions at their company.

Despite AI's immense potential, concerns abound among chief executives when it comes to successfully adopting AI into their business and its potential to create value. More than a third (38 percent) of CEOs surveyed still view AI as harboring some degree of hype. Nearly half (41 percent) think the disruption ushered in by AI will be "highly significant" to their business and only 25 percent think they're prepared to scale it across their organizations. More than half (57 percent) admit their companies still lack sufficient internal expertise to meet current AI needs.

Finally, it appears that most CEOs see AI adoption as more akin to a marathon than a sprint. The majority of CEOs place successful AI-related outcomes within three years when it comes to new revenue, cost savings and other quantifiable benefits. ○

# Timing really is everything

How brands can create lasting impact and achieve cultural relevance by strategically aligning with trending topics, current consumer behaviors and timely opportunities.

By Tim Schramm

Whether you call it newsjacking, culture tapping or opportunistic thinking, PR professionals are always on the lookout for ways to insert their brands quickly and authentically into an existing conversation. And with good reason. Brands strive for cultural relevance and newsjacking provides a natural opportunity to achieve that by tapping into timely events and trending topics. It's the top request we hear from new clients: "We want to be part of today's conversation!" or "How can we be more relevant?"

Since newsjacking often carries an emotional element, it also helps brands forge meaningful connections—another key priority in brand strategy. Whether through humor, nostalgia, excitement, or heartfelt moments, emotional resonance strengthens audience connections. When executed well, newsjacking makes brands relatable and memorable—while being highly efficient and cost-effective.

While leveraging the immediate news cycle is valuable, timing in storytelling goes beyond the breaking news moment. In fact, timing is the foundation of all successful stories and campaigns. You might have what feels like the greatest story in the world, but if you can't answer a reporter's eternal question—"Why now?"—then you really don't have anything.

Because the "why now" factor is both a barrier and a dealbreaker, it's helpful to take a broader view of timing. By analyzing trends, cultural moments and consumer behaviors, we can craft stories that not only resonate more deeply but also have a longer shelf life. Here are a few ways to rethink the role of time in storytelling.

## First things first—spend time on yourself

A key first step is taking the time to define or confirm who you are as a brand. This exercise includes understanding the brand voice, guardrails and "permission" (what subject matter makes the most sense for the brand to talk about and engage in). Defining who you are *not* is just as important as who you are; a scattershot approach can do more harm than good. These components may evolve with new data and insights, making brand definition an ongoing process rather than a one-time task.

## Cultural trends

"Cultural trends" shouldn't be confused with "trending." A trending topic may last twelve hours, but cultural trends endure for

twelve months—or longer. Plenty of trends have a staying power that creates excellent opportunities for communicators.

Take, for instance, the idea of "experiences over things." People are prioritizing meaningful experiences over material possessions. The media and influencers continue to highlight this mindset, and consumer research consistently supports its relevance. Recognizing this, brands have developed innovative ways to tap into the trend.

A prime example is our work with our PEEPS client and last year's PEEPS Sweet Suite. Understanding that fans of the iconic marshmallow candy crave immersive and shareable experiences, PEEPS teamed up with Home2 Suites by Hilton Easton—a bunny's hop away from PEEPS headquarters—to offer a fully immersive suite that transported fans to an Easter wonderland. The suite, which sold out in minutes, featured playful decorations, whimsical furnishings and an exclusive taste of the 2024 flavors, making it a must-visit destination for brand enthusiasts. It was such a compelling experience that a marriage proposal took place at the suite!

The campaign generated significant media attention, and timing it early in the Easter season extended the media window for the brand.

## Pulse tracking

Pulse tracking involves forecasting, taking a twelve-to-eighteen-month forward look at what could become big pop culture moments, such as new movies, albums or anniversaries that seem ripe for celebration.

For instance, last year marked the 30th anniversary of the iconic NBC hit "Friends," which is still popular with the original audience that watched it on Thursday nights, as well as new audiences who've streamed it relentlessly. Knowing that HelloFresh customers like to have fun in the kitchen and are big fans of the beloved sitcom, the brand (a Coyne client) launched the Rachel Green Trifle meal kit, bringing to life the memorable dish from one of the Thanksgiving episodes. The kits were a huge hit, selling out instantly, and media from "Good Morning America" online to Elite Daily sang the praises of the innovative offering.

Another pulse-tracking opportunity in the food space is collaborations. We've all

seen newsworthy and shareable collaborations between like-minded food brands featuring innovative flavors and interesting cross-promotions between food and non-food brands. There's a risk of overplaying your hand in developing collaborations, so it's imperative to focus on your consumer's interests and how your brand fits authentically with the collaborating brand. Failing to do so will make your brand seem inauthentic to all parties—media, influencers and consumers.

To stay ahead, brands should continuously uncover these long-range opportunities that align with their identity and audience interests.

## Looking back to look ahead

"Newstalgia" is the perfect blending of connecting the past with the present. There's ample research on why we fondly recall the past, from rekindling past shared experiences, reaffirming one's sense of self during life stage changes and finding comfort in the familiar. All generations fondly recall the past, universally believing that times were simpler, less hectic and carefree, even if the past wasn't any of those things. It doesn't hurt that a lot of nostalgia is focused on times when we weren't "adulting," making all those feelings more readily attainable!

For brands, "newstalgia" can be articulated in several ways, including resurrecting past packaging, "retired" flavors, or old campaigns with a modern twist. Interestingly, younger audiences often feel nostalgia for eras they never experienced firsthand, creating opportunities to revive past campaigns, products, or aesthetics in a way that feels fresh rather than outdated.

## Determining "days"

The tried-and-true approach to time is focusing on the calendar days: Valentine's Day, Mother's Day or the Fourth of July quickly come to mind. These will always play a role in PR and influencer campaigns, but there are emerging and adjacent days that can be explored. For Coyne client Edible, which helps people celebrate life's most special moments with gifts or treats, that



Tim Schramm

— Continued on next page



# Chef collaborations in powerhouse PR campaigns

**From trend to table: Why communications agencies are the critical ingredient in connecting the right brand partnerships with foodservice operations.**

By Danielle Pesce

If you've eaten something so unique and delicious at a restaurant that you can't stop thinking about it, odds are you'll want to go back and have it again or recreate it at home.

We're all frequently inspired by what we taste on a restaurant menu, likely because it was created by trained professionals. In some of the best cases, a viral food item of the next "it" food is created by a restaurant chef or an already existing trend can be amplified through foodservice. Count the number of times you've seen Avocado Toast, Cauliflower Crust Pizza or Zoodles on a menu. I'll wait.

While restaurants got hit harder than any other industry during the pandemic, they're working their way back to pre-pandemic levels. According to The National Restaurant Association, the restaurant industry is predicted to see significant growth in 2025, projected at 1.5 trillion dollars in sales.

The excitement fueled by tasting new flavors or food combinations and applications while dining out provides an ideal opportunity for brands to meet consumers at the table and influence their purchases. In an integrated food PR campaign, partnerships with key opinion leaders—in this case, chefs—can help brands to authentically drive awareness and sales simultaneously. While it's no secret that chefs look inward for innovation, they're also deeply influenced by their peers and the trends around them.

Strategic communications agencies are the critical ingredient in establishing and liaising effective brand partnerships with foodservice operations. At Padilla, our food and beverage team have deep relationships throughout the hospitality channel with restaurants and chefs across the U.S. that tap into their unique culinary expertise for client campaigns.

When working with a product or brand, we leverage equal parts data and institutional knowledge to develop the right partnerships to resonate with consumers and drive ROI. When designing a program, we carefully consider the operational demands of the restaurants, striving to create initiatives that add value without increasing stress or workload for our partners.

When identifying a partner, we share brand history, key attributes and goals and then allow them space to create recipes, ideate menu features and events and align

with the brand on strategic product integration that benefits both parties. This can be applied to partnerships with independent restaurants to restaurant groups and QSR and is integrated across strategies in a variety of ways, including incorporation into social media and earned media campaigns and marketing materials, creating a symbiotic relationship as we create visibility for the chef and/or restaurant, elevating the industry as a whole. Chefs and restaurants know from experience that our clients' brands are there to support them for mutual success.

Most recently, Padilla facilitated the inaugural Sea to Table Restaurant Week for Seafood from Norway, launching successful partnerships to drive alliances in New York's influential foodservice sector. Thirteen chefs and restaurants were recruited to create new dishes highlighting Norwegian salmon, cod and king crab, yielding more than 2,500 dishes served during the promotion, with more than half continuing to menu Seafood from Norway dishes beyond the promotion dates.

An integrated strategy leveraged social media, influencer partnerships, mouth-watering content and food media partnerships to generate thousands of impressions. This supported both Seafood from Norway and the participating restaurants, some of which included NYC Michelin guide locations and *New York Times* Best 100 NYC Restaurants honorees. It was a ground-breaker and the first time a seafood-centric

restaurant week had taken place in New York.

While every partnership is different and customized to each brand or product, certain things remain constant:

**Custom-built partnerships are attractive to foodservice operations.** They build product loyalty and advocacy from the industry.

**Consumers love experiential.** Trying new and innovative foods brought to life through chefs and restaurants is the perfect platform to encourage trial and repeat behavior resulting in a boom in sales and awareness.

**Integrated PR support benefits the industry.** Product features on a menu are just one element. Amplification and integrated marketing tactics such as media partnerships and curated influencer content further support the brand/product and promote the restaurant and or chef to help gain exposure and drive traffic to their operations.

Leveraging bespoke foodservice programs with the right partner can prove to be an opportunity to grow sales, drive volume and establish alliances with operators.

*Danielle Pesce is Senior Director, Food, Beverage, Nutrition and Agriculture at Padilla. ○*



Danielle Pesce

## TIMING REALLY IS EVERYTHING

— Continued from page 10

meant extending Valentine's Day to Galentine's Day, the moment on, or around February 13 that celebrates women's friendships. Through a thoughtful mix of earned media, influencer activations and social content, Edible became a go-to source for both the obvious and the emerging holiday.

Then there's the list of days tailor-made for brands—think National Pizza Day or National Donut Day. But there are plenty of others. What about National Nurses Week? Einstein Bros. Bagels recognized these unsung heroes with a buzz-worthy campaign for their new Boosted Bagels,

which included the Espresso Buzz Bagel featuring 32mg of caffeine. The integrated Nurse the Buzz campaign celebrated a group that could use a boost to keep themselves going through long shifts.

Ultimately, successful brand moments incorporate not just newsjacking but strategically align with cultural currents, consumer behaviors and timely opportunities to create lasting impact. This comprehensive approach doesn't just make a brand relevant for the moment; it cements its place in the larger cultural conversation and should be an integral part of your communication strategy.

*Tim Schramm is Executive Vice President at Coyne PR. ○*

# How lesser-known wine regions can break into U.S. market

While the U.S. wine market is fiercely competitive, it's also full of opportunities for brands willing to take a creative approach.

By Amy Sedeño

I recently read an article about Portugal shedding its reputation for inexpensive wines, which got me thinking: Does affordability hurt more than it helps? In the U.S., where prestige and price go hand in hand, is “good value” a disadvantage? And how can communicators help lesser-known wine regions gain traction? The U.S. market is fiercely competitive, dominated by legacy players and entrenched consumer habits. But great wine is being made everywhere, and with the right strategy, even the most overlooked regions can carve out a space for themselves.

## Define your value beyond price

It's tempting to lead with affordability, especially when competing with the heavyweights, but this can be a double-edged sword. Instead of focusing solely on price, emphasize quality, uniqueness and authenticity. The narrative should be about craftsmanship, terroir and winemaking traditions, not just a good deal. Consumers don't just want a bargain; they want a story, an experience and a sense of discovery. Positioning lesser-known wine regions as hidden gems rather than budget alternatives is key to elevating their status in the marketplace.

## Build relationships with trade, media

Now you've got a story to tell, but how do you get it in front of the right people? PR in the wine world is all about relationships. Distributors, sommeliers and wine journalists can be your biggest spokespeople. They need compelling stories about sustainability, innovation, or heritage. Think about how a centuries-old winemaking technique is being preserved, or how a near-extinct varietal is making a comeback. Media outlets, especially those focused on food and lifestyle, are always looking for fresh angles. Give them something newsworthy and ensure they have access to tastings, vineyard visits and firsthand experiences with the wines.

Social media is another powerful tool. Engaging influencers and wine bloggers can amplify brand recognition. A well-placed Instagram post from the right sommelier or lifestyle influencer can introduce an entire audience to a wine they've never heard of before. Being part of the conversation in both trade and lifestyle media creates a ripple effect, driving awareness and demand.

## Get in front of buyers and consumers

Trade shows, industry tastings and consumer events are excellent opportunities to showcase wines. These touchpoints build credibility and generate buzz. But it's not enough to just be present—you need to engage. Wineries should go beyond pouring samples and create immersive experiences that leave an impression. Wine dinners, interactive tastings and collaborations with chefs and restaurateurs can foster a deeper connection with both buyers and consumers.

Additionally, partnering with well-established brands in the lifestyle space—whether in travel, food, or even fashion—can be an innovative way to tap into new audiences. Finding ways to integrate wine into broader cultural moments helps it break out of the traditional wine bubble and reach a more diverse customer base.



## Leverage tourism for market expansion

Wine tourism and exports go hand in hand. If a region is seeing an increase in visitors, there's an opportunity to create demand once travelers return home. People develop strong emotional connections to wines they experience in the place they were made. This is where collaboration with tourism boards, hospitality partners and even airlines can play a significant role.

One strategy is to work with hotels and restaurants in high-tourism areas to ensure visiting consumers are exposed to these wines. Another is creating take-home experiences, such as wine club memberships or direct-to-consumer shipping options, so tourists can continue enjoying the wines they discovered abroad. A traveler who falls in love with a wine in Portugal or Chile is more likely to seek it out when they return to the U.S.—if they know where to find it.

## Maximize social media and digital strategy

I am mentioning social media twice on purpose. A strong digital presence isn't optional—it's essential. Sommeliers, wine influencers and consumers spend hours scrolling through Instagram, TikTok and YouTube for recommendations. A winery without a compelling online presence risks being invisible to an entire generation of wine drinkers.

The key to digital success is authenticity. Engaging content—whether it's behind-the-scenes vineyard footage, winemaker interviews, or storytelling around the history of a region—helps bring a brand to life. Collaborations with social media influencers and digital wine educators can expand reach beyond traditional audiences. Paid social campaigns, email marketing and targeted ads can also help build brand recognition and drive sales.

Breaking into the U.S. market isn't just about getting wines on shelves—it's about staying there and getting your product in the hands of consumers. Long-term success requires more than a one-time marketing push. It demands a clear brand identity, strategic partnerships and consistent engagement with industry stakeholders. Regular participation in trade shows, media events and tastings ensures that the wine remains part of the conversation.

Wineries should also consider exclusive partnerships or limited-time releases with key retailers or brands to build hype and maintain visibility. Offering educational experiences, such as virtual tastings or winemaker Q&A sessions, can keep consumers engaged long after their initial discovery of a wine.

The U.S. wine market is challenging, but it's also full of opportunities for those willing to take a strategic and creative approach. Lesser-known wine regions don't have to remain in the shadows. By focusing on strong storytelling, building relationships with trade and media, engaging consumers through digital platforms and leveraging wine tourism, even the most under-the-radar wines can gain traction.

It's not about trying to be the next Napa or Bordeaux; it's about carving out a unique identity and making sure the right people are paying attention.

Amy Sedeño is Vice President and Partner at CIIC PR. ○



Amy Sedeño



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# To save research, scientists must become storytellers

The Trump administration's recent proposals to slash potentially life-saving research are a reminder of the importance of science advocates to communicate the value of their work in terms that everyone can understand.

By John Bianchi

The Trump administration's focus on cutting costs and eliminating government, both through executive order and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, is already having significant impacts on public-funded science and research. Central to the President's efforts—and the tool he uses most often—is storytelling.

Advocates of science overlook this skill at their peril. Researchers, academics, politicians, policymakers—and indeed, anyone who advocates for science—must recognize that in order to blunt the administration's efforts to cut or freeze public funding for research, they need to become master storytellers themselves.

Although the President's recent freeze on funding for critical research was rescinded, these programs are still at risk. Trump's 2017 budget provides a preview of what to expect. An 18 percent cut to the National Institutes of Health was proposed. A \$1 billion cut was planned for the National Cancer Institute. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute would have seen a \$575 million cut, and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases' budget would have been slashed by \$838 million. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was slated to lose 17 percent of its budget for \$1.2 billion in total cuts and \$776 million was cut from the National Science Foundation.

Had the budget been moved forward, it would have significantly impacted human health, but Congress reversed some of the worst cuts. The outlook for publicly funded science remains challenging; the Congress of 2025 is a different body, with many lawmakers enthusiastically discussing plans for the removal of SNAP benefits, commonly known as food stamps, the rollback of the Affordable Care Act and additional cuts to programs, such as those in infectious disease and cancer research, which ensure the health and safety of all Americans.

Between Congress, the Chief Executive and the potential impacts of DOGE, the situation is fluid and uncertain. Scientists and their allies need to express that uncertainty—and its real-life impact—in terms we can all understand. Rather than imparting numbers and statistics, scientists need to start talking about people. Programs and costs may be controversial, but people who

are sick and need help are not.

When confronted with neighbors, friends and family who face medical challenges, we want to help. We do help. When leaders let us know that a member of our community or congregation is sick, we respond.

Scientists must recognize this most basic human impulse. Rather than talk about the research programs at stake, scientists need to tell the stories of the people whom these programs have helped—in some cases saved.

Growing up in Connecticut, Kara was an athlete and captain of her basketball team. But after turning 14, she noticed her muscles weakening. Unable to squat, get up and eventually run, she had to quit athletics. Kara had no idea what was going on; she found no advice online. Frightened, she kept it to herself for nearly two years, but when a physical revealed abnormal liver enzymes, she began an 11-year odyssey during which doctors found no answers. When she was 24, Kara thought she might have an autoimmune disorder, but was told she was “grasping at straws.” That doctor recommended she undergo full genetic testing through the Undiagnosed Disease Network, a NIH project that's publicly funded.

At 25, Kara was finally diagnosed with necrotizing myositis, a rare autoimmune disease. She's being treated, but her disease is refractory. Now 32, Kara is trying to enter a clinical trial for a (CAR) T-cell therapy that has shown promising results in other autoimmune disorders, such as lupus. She's upbeat and hopeful; her case is important because it alerts doctors to look for her disease when they see patients with symptoms similar to hers. She believes in government-funded research and is living proof that it works.

Scientists are comfortable talking about their work at the micro and macro scale, where it begins and how it impacts populations. They must begin to talk about the benefits of their research at the scale of real life, making connections between their innovation and the lives of individuals like Kara who've been saved thanks to our dollars at work. It's often difficult for them to do this. I've known zoologists who've said they worked with “charismatic megafauna.” But, in plain English, they worked with elephants and rhinos, which is far more thrill-

ing and exciting than the bloodless phrase they preferred to use. Those zoologists weren't alone.

Scientists, once revered by the average American, have been greatly undermined, but they and their allies are often unable to help their own cause. Science created the vaccine that saved my parents John and Rosanne from polio, discovered antibiotics that saved my wife Kathy from pneumonia and developed the inoculations that saved my daughters Julia and Dinah from measles, mumps and rubella. Science advocates must recognize the need to clearly convey the immense, life-saving value of their work.

Whether in academia, small start-ups or big pharmaceutical companies, researchers need to do more than impart dry statistics. Those in public health and government must become advocates for the wide range of individuals and communities who've been helped by the fruits of research. In short, these stakeholders must reach voters and the lawmakers who represent them, not simply with facts, but with stories that help them connect on an emotional level.

In this mission, working with professionals is essential. Skilled science marketers and communicators have the ability to identify stories that resonate, stories that not only make the public care about science but may also solve the deepening shortage of young people interested in STEM careers.

The President constantly reminds us that we're in an uncertain time, but these stories also dismiss the value of programs that keep us alive and healthy. It's telling that in one of his first executive orders, the President stopped federal health agencies from communicating with the public. The White House recognizes the importance of communication and its potential to establish or transform beliefs.

Each of us must become better storytellers. We can't all be Neil deGrasse Tyson or Carl Sagan, but we can recast science, not as a relentless pursuit of molecules and



John Bianchi

— Continued on page 17





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# Nurturing consumer curiosity about food's journey

As curiosity grows regarding where our food comes from and how it's produced, food producers and brands now have an unprecedented opportunity to educate, engage and connect with consumers in meaningful ways.

By Steve Halsey

In today's dynamic food industry, consumers are more curious than ever about the journey their food takes from field to fork. Recent research indicates that 79 percent of consumers desire more information about how their food travels from the field to the market. Based on our September 2024 survey of 357 U.S. adults who are their household's decision makers for groceries, this finding highlights an opportunity for food producers and brands to engage, educate and build stronger relationships with their customers through transparency and storytelling.

However, when you really lean in and listen to consumers, what they are truly asking is: "Who is behind this food brand, and can I trust them?" Consumers don't necessarily want every intricate detail of the farm-to-table journey; rather, they want reassurance that the people behind the brand share their values and care about what matters most to them: their health, their families and the world around them. This shift underscores the importance of fostering trust and demonstrating authenticity in brand communications.

## Growing curiosity about food production

Several factors are driving consumer interest in understanding food production:

**Increased access to information:** The digital age has provided consumers with endless resources about food and nutrition. However, navigating conflicting narratives about food safety, farming practices and ingredient sourcing can be challenging, leading to a growing demand for clarity from brands.

**Urbanization and a desire for connection:** As urban populations grow, fewer individuals have direct experiences with farming or food production. This has sparked a curiosity to reconnect with where their food comes from and how it's produced.

**Environmental and ethical considerations:** Consumers today care about the environment, animal welfare and ethical labor practices more than ever. A transparent and proactive approach from brands can help answer their questions and reinforce trust.

## What drives consumer purchases?

Our research also highlights the key factors influencing consumer food purchases. Taste, price and nutritional value remain the top three drivers, but other factors such

as animal welfare standards and environmental impact are gaining traction. This signals an opportunity for food brands to communicate their values more effectively in response to evolving consumer priorities.

To nurture this consumer curiosity and strengthen brand relationships, food brands and agricultural companies can implement the following strategies:

**Transparent storytelling:** Share authentic narratives that detail the journey of food from farm to table. Highlight the people, processes and values that define your brand. For example, MorganMyers partnered with Red Star Yeast to launch the "Platinum Moments" Bake-Along video series, featuring baking professionals guiding consumers through step-by-step recipes. This initiative not only provided valuable baking education but also fostered a deeper connection between the brand and its audience, enhancing trust and engagement.

**Engage through experiential marketing:** Create opportunities for consumers to experience the origins of their food firsthand. The Illinois Farm Families Consumer Trust Program exemplifies this approach by connecting consumers, registered dietitians and other influencers directly with farmers, fostering transparency and trust through personal on-farm tour interactions.

**Leverage digital platforms for education:** Utilize websites, social media and apps to provide detailed information about sourcing, production practices and environmental efforts. Interactive content, such as virtual farm tours or Q&A sessions with producers, can enhance understanding and engagement. For example, the Wisconsin Corn Promotion Board's "We're all for clean water." campaign utilized a dedicated website, engaging videos and partnerships with influencers to raise awareness of farmers' clean-water practices, effectively educating consumers through digital platforms.

**Third-party validation and certifications:** Obtain the endorsement of, or certification from, reputable organizations to reinforce your commitments to quality, the environment and ethical practices. Partnerships with trusted entities can further bolster credibility. For example, we helped launch a game-changing technology that enables meat and seafood brands to trace every cut from farm to table using nature's barcode—DNA. Through unparalleled data

insights, brands can increase transparency, build brand value and earn consumer trust. With undeniable precision, DNA Trace-Back provides brands with a competitive advantage and unlimited possibilities to differentiate their products with confidence.

**Responsive crisis communication:** In the event of a crisis, such as a product recall or negative publicity, transparent and timely communication is crucial.

First, keep an ear to the ground with active social listening and address issues head-on, provide clear information and outline steps being taken to resolve the situation. Second, be prepared. That's why we help the Professional Dairy Producers prepare dairy farmers and processors for a potential crisis with on-farm preparedness plans and response protocols.

## Consumers willing to switch for greater traceability

Our research also found that 44 percent of consumers are very likely to switch to a brand that offers more transparency and traceability in its food sourcing and 35 percent are somewhat likely. This data presents a compelling business case for brands to prioritize traceability initiatives and actively communicate their efforts to the public.

This creates a significant opportunity for communications professionals to play a pivotal role in fostering consumer curiosity and transparency. A few tips for success:

**Craft authentic narratives:** Develop and share stories that resonate with target audiences, highlighting the brand's commitment to quality and transparency.

**Facilitate open dialogue:** Create platforms for consumers to ask questions, provide feedback and engage in meaningful conversations with the brand.

**Monitor public perception:** Utilize analytics and social listening tools to gauge consumer sentiment and adjust strategies accordingly.

**Build media relationships:** Foster relationships with journalists and influencers who can authentically share the brand's story and values.



Steve Halsey

Continued on next page



# Small-town food scenes are becoming tourism drivers

The culinary scene is moving beyond big cities, with small-town dining no longer seen as an afterthought but now a reason to visit.

By Lacey Outten

For years, food tourism was synonymous with big cities—think Manhattan's Michelin-starred restaurants, Parisian bistros, Tokyo's famed sushi counters. But a shift is underway. Travelers are finding themselves increasingly drawn to small-town food scenes, seeking out hidden gems that offer an authentic sense of place. Today's culinary tourists crave more than just a meal; they want an experience—one that connects them directly to the heart of a destination's culture, history and people.

This evolution isn't a passing trend. Culinary tourism has become a significant economic driver that is fueling local economies and reshaping the way small towns position themselves in the travel space. From farm-to-table eateries to regional food festivals, the culinary scene within small-town dining is no longer an afterthought—it's now a reason to visit and in many cases, the reason to visit.

## The rise of small-town culinary destinations

There are several factors creating this shift in food tourism. The first of which is the quest for authenticity. Travelers crave immersive experiences that showcase local flavors and traditions. They are prioritizing the undiscovered over the must-see. Social media also has a profound impact on culinary tourism. Instagram and TikTok have turned off-the-beaten-path restaurants into viral sensations overnight. Food bloggers and influencers are spotlighting mom-and-pop establishments, drawing visitors eager to taste what they've seen online, but not just for the food...to be part of the story. And finally, diners are becoming more conscious of where their food comes from. They're prioritizing restaurants and brands that source locally, support regional farmers and practice sustainability.

## How the local food scene fuels local economies and tourism growth

A thriving food scene doesn't just benefit restaurants—it uplifts entire communities. When a town becomes a food destination, it sees increased visitor spending as well as growth in its hospitality sector, from the emergence of new boutique hotels to guided culinary tour companies. As more new businesses emerge to support the influx of food travelers, a destination will see more job creation and local investment.

Culinary tourism also helps small towns preserve their heritage and support local producers. Restaurants sourcing ingredients from nearby farms strengthen regional agriculture, while food festivals celebrating historic dishes keep local traditions alive. Investing in a vibrant food scene often means reinvigorating a town's identity, making it a destination rather than a detour.

## Leveraging PR and storytelling to spotlight small-town culinary scenes

The key to positioning a small town as a culinary hotspot lies in storytelling. The most successful campaigns highlight what makes a destination unique, whether it's a century-old family recipe, an unexpected fusion of cultures, or a chef redefining a certain cuisine. Tourism boards and destination marketing organizations play a crucial role in amplifying these stories. By integrating these angles into their marketing strategies, they can attract culinary travelers who might otherwise overlook their smaller destination.

At Hemsworth, we offer a unique specialization in food and beverage and destination marketing, helping brands craft compelling narratives that showcase their unique culinary offerings to travelers looking to create long-lasting vacation memories. From orchestrating immersive

culinary press trips to developing tailored F&B-themed social media campaigns, our team understands how to turn local flavors into national headlines.

For small-town destinations to gain regional or national recognition, a strong public relations strategy is essential. Some proven tactics include:

**Press trips and media tastings.** Inviting journalists and influencers—qualified, vetted ones!—to experience a destination firsthand ensures authentic storytelling and high-quality content



Lacey Outten

**Strategic collaborations.** Partnering with well-known chefs, brands, food writers or social media influencers can lend credibility and expand your reach

**Seasonal and event-based pitches.** Leveraging food festivals, restaurant weeks and seasonal ingredients found in your destination can create timely media opportunities to attract travelers

**Digital storytelling.** Blogs, social media campaigns and video content help engage culinary enthusiasts worldwide, turning curiosity into visitation

Small towns are no longer just stop-overs—they're becoming primary tourism destinations. By leveraging strategic PR, creative storytelling, and a focus on authentic experiences, tourism leaders can elevate their communities and attract the right type of traveler to their destination, prompting future growth and success for their local business owners and brands.

Lacey Outten is an Associate VP at Hemsworth. ○

## FOOD'S JOURNEY

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## The path forward

As curiosity about food sourcing continues to rise, brands have an unprecedented opportunity to educate, engage and connect with consumers in meaningful ways. By implementing strategic, integrated marketing communications initiatives that emphasize authenticity, engagement and open communication, food brands and agricultural companies can strengthen trust, enhance brand loyalty and drive long-term success.

Steve Halsey is Chief Growth Officer at MorganMyers, a G&S Agency, specializing in strategic communications in the food and agriculture sectors. ○

## SCIENTISTS BECOME STORYTELLERS

— Continued from page 14

microbes, but rather as a relentless pursuit of human hope. By connecting simply and emotionally with the public about people who have been saved by research—the stories of our parents, children, friends and neighbors, we have a chance to protect science funded by the people, for the people.

If we fail, the exploration and research that has until now protected Americans' health will be at risk of being eliminated to satisfy the short-sighted pursuit of efficiency for efficiency's sake.

John Bianchi is a Partner in the FINN Partners Global Health Practice, where he heads editorial services. His writings have appeared in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and leading health-sector business trades. ○

# The role female athletes play in the food PR playbook

Why partnering with female athletes can bring new, valuable perspectives and visibility to food and beverage campaigns.

By Victoria Renwick

This isn't a fleeting moment, and it isn't merely a trend: Women in sports, from collegiate to Olympic to professional, are finally getting the recognition they deserve. The value system has shifted: female athletes are drawing more fans, more airtime, more endorsements and, in many sports, more pay. There's no doubt there's more progress to be made to create equity with their male counterparts, but it's undeniably an exciting time for women athletes.

As marketers, we're in a unique position to make the flywheel turn faster by including female athletes in our communications playbooks. Female athletes can bring new, valuable perspectives and visibility to campaigns spanning a variety of products, services and missions—not just sports and athletic apparel.

Exemplifying health and wellness, female athletes bring immediate interest to a product's potential nutritional benefits, of course, but we can peel the layers further, too. These athletes are pushing boundaries and breaking stereotypes—speaking to complex topics such as mental health, for example—all while being incredible ambassadors of their sport, good teammates, sometimes busy moms and more.

Recently, our team at 360PR+ had tremendous success working with WNBA player Aaliyah Edwards as the voice of a campaign for client Nasoya tofu. Called The Power of 9, our premise was that much like female athletes can be underestimated,

so too is tofu. Even though it contains all nine essential amino acids, which makes it a complete protein—the same as any animal-based protein—tofu and plant-based diets are often dismissed as not robust enough for athletes and the rest of us, especially women.

Our spokesperson criteria included a professional athlete committed to a plant-based diet. While plenty of plant-based male athletes are at the top of their games, we believed that working with a female athlete who's breaking stereotypes added the emotional resonance we wanted.

It's also worth mentioning that this new generation of female athletes grew up in the age of social media, living public lives and sharing their experiences with their followers. They're natural storytellers, remarkably open and engaged with fans and receive an outpouring of support in return. This two-way street of engagement is an added benefit for brands who partner with female athletes.

With Power of 9, Aaliyah authentically shared how tofu fuels her high-octane life. For example, we timed her social content with the inaugural Unrivaled tournament, which is helping extend the reach of women's basketball. Her "day-in-the-life" style posts, which included everything from morning yoga to her skills in the kitchen were exceptionally engaging and well-received.

While there are some superstar household names that may not be a match for all,

brands with smaller budgets don't have to sit on the sidelines. There are thousands of emerging athletes that could be perfect for your brand or campaign.

Peter Raskin at Rubicon Talent said he's seen a rise in brands and their PR agencies jumping in with both feet to work with NCAA and professional female athletes. "We've represented some of the biggest names in female sports for over two decades—but we've noticed a huge shift in the past few years. There's a wide interest like never before that expands far beyond just female endemic categories—brands across the board are looking to team up with female ambassadors to connect with their consumers," said Raskin.

The next time you recommend a celebrity or other influencer partnership, consider female athletes. Their unique perspectives, strong social media presence and media appeal with their ability to connect with diverse audiences can make them a valuable partner in your marketing strategy.

By doing so, you'll lift your brand—and be part of an inspiring movement that's lifting up female athletes and creating more gender equity in sports. "Everyone watches women's sports" isn't just a slogan, it's the reality.

Victoria Renwick is Partner at 360PR+. ○



Victoria Renwick

## U.S. ad market faces slump in 2025

Trump's threats to impose tariffs on U.S. trade partners could result in an advertising and marketing slowdown this year, according to a recent report.

By Jon Gingerich

It appears that some brands are already beginning to dial back their advertising and marketing budgets in anticipation of Trump's proposed tariff policies.

The latest forecast released by market research firm PQ Media reflects ongoing fears that Trump's tariff threats may have deleterious effects on the U.S. ad and marketing industry this year.

Growth in U.S. advertising and marketing expenditures is expected to fall by 4.3 percent this year, according to PQ's "Global Advertising & Marketing Spending Fore-

cast 2025-2029" report, accounting for 5.4 percent growth in 2025, compared to 9.7 percent growth in 2024.

To what degree Trump's proposed tariffs will have on U.S. ad and marketing spending remains uncertain, but the report notes that U.S. ad spending was expected to turn down this year anyway, now that the 2024 election cycle is behind us.

Global ad and marketing spending growth, meanwhile, is on track to fall by 3.4 percent this year, with anticipated growth of 5.3 percent in 2025, compared

to 2024's 8.7 percent growth (or about \$1.8 trillion).

The forecast notes that traditional advertising and marketing revenues worldwide fell 4.1 percent in 2024 (to \$841 billion) but remain on pace to rise about 0.2 percent in 2025.

The U.S. generated the highest advertising and marketing spending in 2024 and will retain its share of the global ad market this year, which accounts for almost 40 percent of the world's advertising and marketing expenditures. ○





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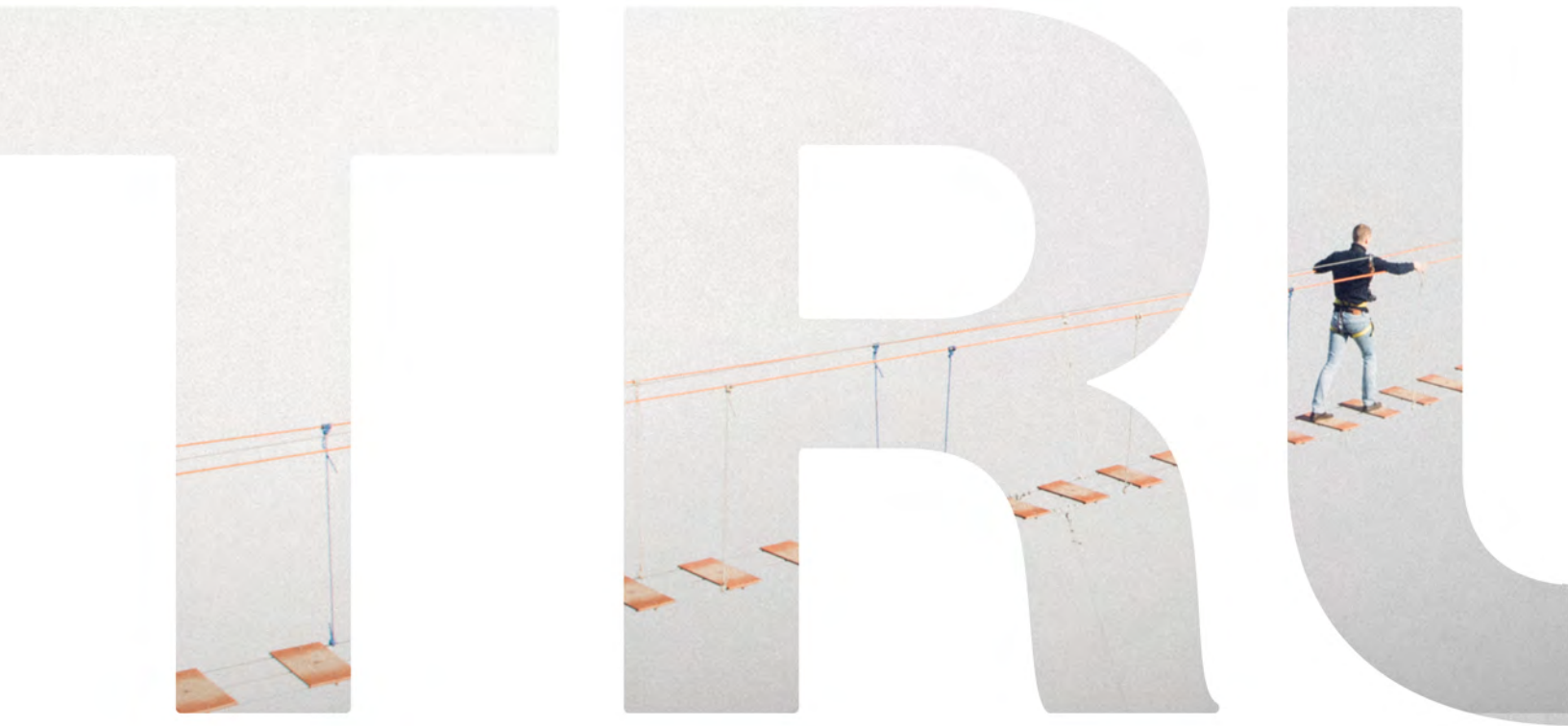
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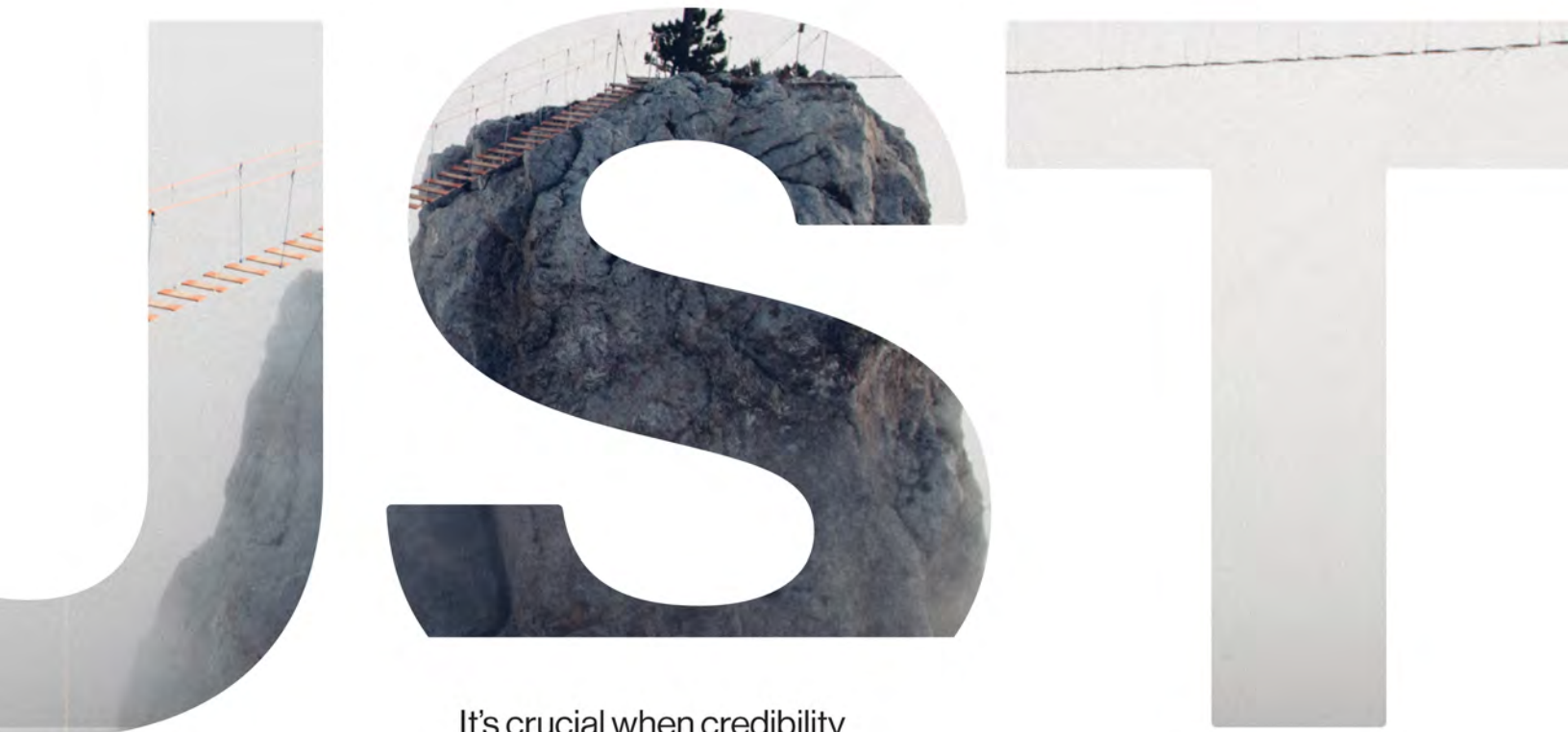
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# Navigating uncertainty through leadership

How a shifting political climate creates new opportunities for food and beverage companies in the private sector to step up and adopt a leadership role.

By Lauren Hoffman

Familiarity with healthy sustainable food systems is rising, but with recent changes to U.S. government leadership, many are wondering: “In a rapidly evolving political climate, what does the future hold for sustainable food systems?”

The Trump administration has requested the removal or downgrading of mentions of climate change across the U.S. government, with websites of several major departments pulling down references to anything related to sustainability, climate and the environment pending “further review.” This includes ongoing projects intended to assess science as well as pathways for integrating sustainability considerations into the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. At the same time, severe reductions in foreign aid and domestic agriculture support related to climate resiliency and food assistance programs are anticipated to affect tens of millions of farmers and vulnerable individuals around the world.

Without question, U.S. policy changes will have consequences for food systems globally. The shifting landscape also presents an opportunity for food, beverage and health organizations to take a leadership role.

Here are three ways you can add value.

## Cultivate trust

Distrust in media, corporations and government is at an all-time high. According to Accenture’s Life Trends 2025 report, 62 percent of consumers say trust is an important factor when choosing to engage with companies, up from 56 percent in 2023. Organizations can cultivate trust with their audiences by promoting authenticity and transparency. Things like using on-pack seals and certifications, providing more detailed sourcing and supply chain information, making visible product formulation changes and forging partnerships with public health and environmental organizations were rated by consumers as the top ways to build trust and influence purchase decisions.

## Reaffirm nutrition and sustainability commitments

While the government steps back, consumers will be looking for the private sector to step up.

According to the FoodMinds 2024 Conscious Consumption Index, most consumers want food and beverage companies to lead the way in food systems transformation. Food and beverage brands that put a clear and credible stake in the ground regarding their nutrition and sustainabil-

ity commitments can build loyalty with key target consumers. Actions consumers would like to see companies take include improving access to healthier foods, promoting environmentally sound practices and decreasing food waste.

## Serve as a science and data hub

Consumers express interest in learning more about the impacts of their food purchases and which foods are considered healthy and sustainable. While the future of federal funding and public access to nutrition and sustainability research remains uncertain, the private sector can help fill the void. More than ever, food and beverage companies can serve as a resource for science and data, by funding new research, providing open access to research findings and partnering with academic or medical centers of excellence to enhance public understanding of these topics.

*Lauren Hoffman, MBA, RD, is a Vice President at FoodMinds and leads the organization’s healthy, sustainable food systems platform. ○*



Lauren Hoffman

# Food costs undercut Americans’ desires to eat healthier

As food prices continue rising, consumers are rethinking their meal planning, with value and healthier options compelling many to opt for home-cooked meals over fast food, according to a recent study.

By Jon Gingerich

Americans want to eat healthier, but food prices and a lack of affordable options often undermine these intentions, according to a recent survey by retail data science platform 84.51°.

84.51°’s survey found that cost influences the types of foods Americans eat more than anything else. In total, nearly three-quarters of shoppers (73 percent) said that food costs are the top factor that influences their eating decisions, while 53 percent cited foods that are available where they shop and 44 percent cited the time it takes to prepare food.

The survey discovered that Americans have a desire to eat healthier, with two-

thirds (66 percent) of shoppers claiming they want to eat more fruits and vegetables, 54 percent wanting to cook at home more often and 51 percent saying they wanted to limit processed foods.

However, Americans’ health intentions are often beset by a lack of affordable solutions, with more than a third (36 percent) citing food costs as the single biggest challenge they face when it comes to healthy eating.

84.51°’s findings also discovered that nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of those surveyed said they want to spend less money at restaurants and on carry out in the new

year, the top category among any other cost-savings measure.

A separate 84.51° survey found that while a majority (74 percent) of meals are made at home, the time required to prepare food is often cited as a main reason for why Americans choose to dine out, with 20 percent reporting a lack of time to cook as a reason for opting for a restaurant.

84.51°’s “Real Time Insights” report was based on a survey of 400 participants who have shopped at a Kroger grocery store at some point within the past three months. The survey was conducted by 84.51°’s Consumer Insights and Loyalty department. ○



# Numbers show PR headed for solid 2025

Despite headlines to the contrary, a series of reports suggest that the U.S. economy will be strong this year, indicating an increased investment in the communications sector.

By Dustin Siggins

The blizzard of tariff threats coming out of the White House has many communicators concerned that reduced corporate profits could mean fewer contracts for agencies and tighter budgets for in-house teams.

"Tariffs threaten to disrupt production capabilities, increase costs for businesses and consumers and create global supply chain problems," said Stephanie Roberts, Head of Global Communications for manufacturing company Hitachi Industrial Equipment Systems Co. Ltd. "From executives to employees, our entire company is concerned about the impact of tariffs."

However, a number of global economic reports—as well as insights from industry insiders—indicate that while tariffs are concerning, there's a lot more good news out there for the overall economy and, especially, the communications sector.

## U.S. economy on the rise

"Profitability and cash on hand are up," economist Mike Feuz told me in December. "Combine that with further inflationary easing, lower interest rates and increased consumer spending in the next six months, and the second half of 2025 will be exceptionally strong."

This news is a breath of fresh air after three years of corporate belt-tightening that forced in-house teams to do more with less and put agencies in low or no-growth periods. The IMF report strengthened Feuz's analysis with a prediction that U.S. real GDP will increase by 2.7 percent in 2025, the fastest growth among advanced economies. The report also said anticipated deregulation by the Trump administration and a likely extension of the 2017 tax cuts could significantly improve these numbers.

And while the IMF report does acknowledge the tariff factor, a Deloitte report indicates that the blanket threats promised during the presidential campaign are unlikely to become reality. Early evidence from the Trump administration seems to have validated this theory, as tariffs have been used as negotiating tools rather than sledgehammers.

## Corporations recognize value of comms.

When economies shrink or markets are uncertain, the marketing and branding budget is one of the first to go. This is especially the case for public relations, which is often seen as a "nice to have" rather than a

necessary part of company strategy.

But as the global and U.S. economy grows, DHR Global Managing Partner Jessica Bayer said companies are investing more in communications. "Communications overhiring in 2021 and 2022 led to a slowdown for the next two years," she said. "The last few months, however, have seen the creation of many new executive-level communications roles. Combined with an expected surge in IPOs and M&As and board requests for communicators in the boardroom, this indicates positive momentum for the communications function."

Bayer's experience matches several corporate executive surveys published since the middle of 2024. The first, published over the summer, showed increased respect for Chief Communications Officers among the C-Suite. Instead of being siloed, CCOs were being asked to integrate the communications function across many departments.

And executives know they need the integration because they're scared of volatility in the global economy. A survey published by The Weber Shandwick Collective shows that just 17 percent of corporate executives are "very confident" that their communications team can handle wars, violent incidents and attacks from political leaders. Eight out of 10 executives said their teams are "somewhat equipped."

You don't have to read between the lines to see that executives know their teams need more resources. That's why at least 41 percent of executives intend to increase their internal philanthropic- and citizenship-oriented communications, 31 percent plan an increase for external comms and just 10 percent plan a decrease, according to the Conference Board. This is especially true for DEI-related communications, the needle that corporations have been threading for years.

## Agencies seeing the same trend

Like many agencies, mine had a tough 2024. But we've seen a shift that's accelerating with the return of two old clients and the onboarding of three new ones, along with interest from several significant prospects.

And we're not alone.

"Despite recent big agency layoffs and some national trends, we're seeing great momentum in the heartland," said Candor President Ally Glavas. "Clients are hungry

for more affordable and agile agencies that can meet them in the moment. We've already added two FTEs since the start of the year and our pipeline doesn't indicate we'll be slowing down growth anytime soon."

Notably co-Founder Carin Warner, whose company "had a solid 2024" due to industry diversification, said the same thing. "Since December, we have seen a consistent increase in new business and prospect interest in virtually all sectors—from AI to CPG. Additionally, we have had to delay start dates for several new clients because we are so busy. We are therefore bullish about our agency's prospects in 2025."



Dustin Siggins

Even the economic uncertainty of tariffs, global conflicts and AI may benefit the communications functions. "There is a palpable feeling that impactful changes are afoot on a massive scale," said Red Banyan CEO Evan Nierman. "These changes are domestic and international, economic and military, technology and political—and none have simple solutions. We are hearing from a lot of companies that know meeting those challenges requires investing in effective and forward-looking communications."

## Good times are ahead

2024 was just as hard on those looking for work as it was for those seeking budget to hire and expand their teams. A former client's PR point person landed a job earlier this month at a major bank, and PR freelancer Jake Ciccarelli said several months of silence from potential employers ended in January.

"I've applied for dozens of jobs since September. Things were stalled until the New Year, when the spigot opened," he told me. "I'm in the interview process for five jobs across multiple verticals, including three in communications."

Senior roles, of course, fill more slowly. But that's also a good sign, said KC Partners Founder Brooke Kruger.

"The communications hiring market has picked up, with many more open positions than there were at this time last year," she told me. "We expect this trend to continue in 2025 as companies expand and continue to invest in communications, though the hiring process is often longer because companies are taking their time to hire in a competitive market."

Dustin Siggins is a former Capitol Hill journalist and Founder of the public affairs and PR firm Proven Media Solutions. ○



**5W** partnered with **BERO**, a premium non-alcoholic beer brand founded by actor Tom Holland, to support its U.S. launch and upcoming expansion into the U.K. BERO is a 5W client.

## 5WPR

3 Park Ave., 19th Flr.  
New York, NY 10016  
212/999-5585  
www.5wpr.com

**Leigh Ann Ambrosi**, Managing Partner & Executive Vice President, Consumer Lifestyle  
**Matthew Caiola**, CEO, 5WPR

5WPR is a full-service PR agency known for cutting-edge programs that engage with businesses, issues, and ideas. Founded in 2003, 5W has been named a top US and NYC PR Agency by leading industry publication *O'Dwyer's* and continuously brings leading businesses a resourceful, bold, and results-driven approach to communication. The agency has more than 250 professionals serving clients in B2C (Beauty & Fashion, Consumer Brands, Entertainment, Food & Beverage, Health & Wellness, Travel & Hospitality, Technology, Nonprofit), B2B (Corporate

Communications and Reputation Management), Public Affairs, Crisis Communications and Digital Marketing (Social Media, Influencer, Paid Media, SEO). In addition to its business accolades, 5W was named to the 2024 Digiday WorkLife Employer of the Year list and brings leading businesses a resourceful, bold, and results-driven approach to communication.

## 360PR+

60 Charlton Street  
New York, NY 10013  
212/729-5933  
Additional offices:  
Boston, Philadelphia  
www.360PR.plus  
Linkedin.com/company/360PRplus

**Jenni Brennan**, SVP, jbbrennan@360pr.plus  
**Victoria Renwick**, EVP and Partner, vrenwick@360pr.plus  
**Laura Tomasetti**, CEO, ltomasetti@360pr.plus

At 360PR+, you could say that

food and beverage is our bread and butter given our proven success representing brands spanning every aisle of the grocery store, not to mention food service, food media, countertop appliances and more. We're passionate about helping home cooks, foodies and other consumers eat, entertain and celebrate.

Our Food & Beverage team members are in constant contact with the tastemakers and experts shaping the food and beverage landscape, including editorial decision-makers, social media influencers, chefs, sommeliers, restaurateurs, nutritionists, cookbook authors and others. With a winning combination of breakthrough, integrated campaigns, thought leadership in areas such as nutrition and sustainability, and always-on storytelling, we build brands and drive success for our clients.

It's why some of the most beloved and innovative food and beverage brands have chosen 360PR+ as their partner—America's Test Kitchen, Bob's Red Mill, Little Leaf Farms, Louis Latour, Nasoya, Vermont Creamery, Milo's Tea Company, SUNNYD, Juicy Juice, Salad and Go, Primo Hoagies and

Yogurtland, to name a few. Invite us to your table and see what we can do for your brand.

360PR+ is an award-winning, certified women-owned business and PROI Worldwide partner, offering clients reach and expertise in 100+ cities across the U.S. and globally.

## ARTISAN PRODUCTION HOUSE

347/351-4804  
www.artisanproductionhouse.com  
vimeo.com/artisanproductionhouse

**Erin Lahey Schwitter**, Producer/Partner, erin@artisanproductionhouse.com  
**Kara Leibowitz**, Producer/Partner, kara@artisanproductionhouse.com

Artisan Production House is a full-service production house specializing in food & lifestyle publicity as well as publishing and health. We create brand content that resonates with your audience and keeps them engaged. Our innate understanding of story relevance and personal relationships with TV producers and media in-



**360PR+** teamed its client, **Nasoya**, with rising **WNBA** star, **Aaliyah Edwards**, for its **Power of 9** campaign. As a plant-based athlete, Edwards spotlighted the nutritional benefits of tofu, a complete protein with all 9 essential amino acids.





This fall, Artisan Production House, in collaboration with Breville, helped with the publicity launch around the publication of Tieghan Gerard's new best-selling cookbook "Half Baked Harvest: Quick & Cozy." Artisan produced a multi city Satellite Media Tour in top 50 media markets across the country.

fluencers throughout the country gets your story heard. We'll help you deliver your messages seamlessly and with style.

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, and

commodity boards ranging from the National Onion Association to Grapes from California.

## AVAANS MEDIA PUBLIC RELATIONS

Los Angeles, CA

**Tara Coomans**, Principal  
**Justin Simon**, VP, Strategy  
**Anu Kher**, VP, Client Relations

Avaans means advantage. *Inc.* Power Partner Avaans Media Public Relations is the home to the PR Sprints, the high-impact, low commitment PR campaign exclusively for consumer products.

The 3-month PR Sprints are offered in the Spring and Fall only and are ideal for product launches or seasonal offerings.

For brands with more tailored PR requirements, our team of 100% executive-level PR experts work with companies with the most ambitious goals including IPO and mergers and acquisitions.

Clients love working with the Avaans Media team, our 5-star rating on Clutch and the *Inc.* Power Partner awards are both the result of independently confirmed client reviews. Work with the team who is big enough to be connected and small enough to care. [avaansmedia.com](http://avaansmedia.com).

## BLAZE PR

1427 Third Street Promenade  
Suite 201  
Santa Monica, CA 90401

310/395-5050  
[mkovacs@blazepr.com](mailto:mkovacs@blazepr.com)  
[www.blazepr.com](http://www.blazepr.com)

**Matt Kovacs**, President

BLAZE is the go-to PR agency for lifestyle brands hungry for a real piece of the marketshare. Fresh and seasoned, our boutique agency is comprised of veteran practitioners who stay one step ahead of trends and will not rest on the laurels of past successes. Our media strategies are meaty, creative and on-point because they are backed by a thoughtful process that considers the particular world of each brand.

Recent Awards: *PR Week*, Best Places to Work; *LA Business Journal*, Best Places to Work; *Inc.*, Best Places to Work.

Clients include: Boxed Water is Better, Bushwick Kitchen, Clark Foods, Electrolit, Golden West Food Group, Mary's Gone Crackers, NadaMoo!, Pickle Juice and Skinny Butcher.

## CAROLYN IZZO INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS (CIIC PR)

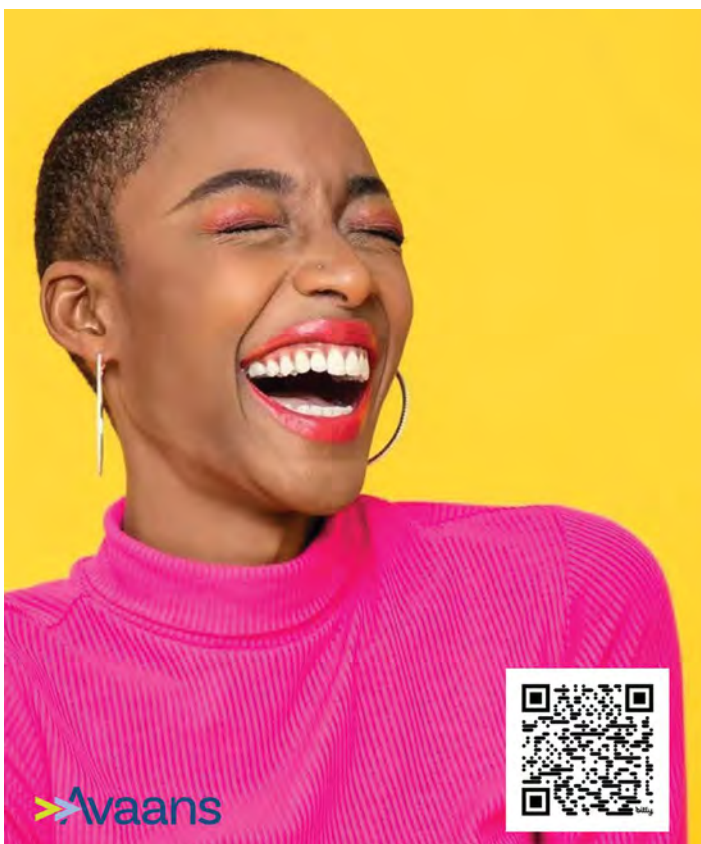
NY + Miami + LA  
845/358-3920 x11  
[www.ciicpr.com](http://www.ciicpr.com)  
**Carolyn Izzo-Feldman**, Founder & CEO  
**Amy Sedeño**, Vice President & Partner

PR & Social Media for the food & beverage, travel & tourism, hospitality, and lifestyle industries.

CIIC PR is an award-winning, full-service public relations, social media and communications firm specializing in creating dynamic campaigns for the food & beverage space. For over 28 years, our agency has been dedicated to servicing some of the top food & beverage brands with dynamic public relations campaigns and award-winning results.

CIIC got its start by putting Krispy Kreme Doughnuts on the map when they first launched in the Northeast. Since then, our agency has represented many leading F&B brands, including Jovē Water, Stadacone Gin, Barton & Guestier Wines of France, Sovány Beverage Company, Florida Wine Academy, 305 Wines, The Original Soupman, Opal Apples, Bibigo Foods, Morton's The Steakhouse, Kona Red Beverages, Coney Island Brewing

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**Avaans**

Avaans Media PR Sprints for Consumer Products.



## CIIC

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Company, New Leaf Beverages, California Pizza Kitchen, Bohlsen Restaurant Group, and more.

We are adept at launches, openings, and franchisor relations, and are known for our networking expertise and extensive contacts in the trade, media, and influencer categories, which we leverage to increase the level of reach, media coverage and access for our clientele. From working with key influencers and A-list media, to arranging appearances on network television shows, managing product sampling, and planning top-level events in your key markets, our goal is to strategically and creatively deliver the best results at the best value.

CIIC is a woman-owned & operated business (WBENC Certified) and a proud member of latamPR, furthering our reach in Mexico and Latin America for brands looking to expand their footprint.

For more information or to inquire about new business opportunities, contact 845/358-3920 x11 or email [connect@ciicpr.com](mailto:connect@ciicpr.com). Learn more about us at [www.ciicpr.com](http://www.ciicpr.com).

## CHAMPION

4621 Ross Ave., Suite 110  
Dallas, TX 75204  
972/930-9933  
[www.championmgt.com](http://www.championmgt.com)

**Ladd Biro**, Founder & Principal  
**Eric Spiritas**, Principal  
**Courtney Mazzella**, Vice President, Client Services  
**Adam Reed**, Vice President of Strategy



CIIC PR & the BGPL USA team celebrate a successful launch at the Grand Tasting at South Beach Wine & Food Festival (SOBEWFF) in Miami.

**Carrie Layne**, Vice President, Digital Marketing

Restaurant brands looking to ignite their stories, dominate the headlines, captivate through content, amp up franchise sales and drive traffic—both on-premise and online—partner with Champion.

Established in 2002 and proud to be the leading PR agency in the restaurant space, Champion is a fully integrated, omni-channel marketing firm providing best-in-class public relations, local restaurant marketing, franchise development lead generation, organic social and paid digital media, influencer/NIL marketing and crisis communications support to a blue-chip roster of brands from our centrally located offices in Dallas.

(By the way, we love New York and California, but our calls, texts and emails get to producers and editors there just as quickly as the high-priced agencies based on the East and West Coasts.)

We win plenty of awards for our work, but Champion's true measure of success is the long-term partnerships we've forged with extraordinary brands like Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers, Twin Peaks, Bar Louie, Golden Corral, Dog Haus, FreeRange Concepts, SPB Hospitality and JINYA Ramen Bar—to name only a few.

Don't know Champion? Ask around. Our stellar and scrappy team has built a reputation for excellence marked by principal-level attention to every client, an outstanding network of national and

local media relationships spanning the country, innovative social media content, traffic-driving digital advertising and high-quality lead generation for our franchised brands.

Find out why *We Are the Champions, my friend ...*

## COYNE PUBLIC RELATIONS

5 Wood Hollow Road  
Parsippany, NJ 07054  
973/588-2000  
[www.coynepr.com](http://www.coynepr.com)

501 7th Avenue  
New York, NY 10018  
212/938-0166

**Thomas F. Coyne**, CEO  
**Rich Lukis**, President  
**Tim Schramm**, Executive Vice President  
**Jackie Peskin**, Vice President

The food and nutrition space has been a cornerstone of Coyne PR since the agency's inception more than thirty years ago. We are makers and strategists obsessed with creativity, leading with imagination and enthusiasm, and refining with the discipline of predictive outcomes. Our team of 140+ culturally diverse minds includes developers, producers, writers, designers, animators, social specialists, and communication experts who utilize best-in-class research, measurement, and AI tools to perfect each element.

We convert consumers from brand loyalists to evangelists through culture tapping, newsjack-



Champion regularly places our clients on national and local TV programs, like Fox & Friends, to build brand awareness and promote traffic-driving messaging.



ing, and creating meaningful connections through purpose-driven and inspirational programming. We capture audience attention with powerful earned storytelling and socially informed strategies. We recognize that it is no longer enough to communicate through single-channel approaches. In today's multi-screen society, we reach your target precisely where they find information and discover inspiration.

Our depth of knowledge in the industry and forward-looking strategies successfully positions brands in the food and beverage space.

## EDELMAN

250 Hudson St., 16th Floor  
New York, NY 10013  
212/768-0550  
Fax: 212/704-0117  
www.edelman.com

Edelman is a global communications firm that partners with businesses and organizations to evolve, promote and protect their brands and reputations. Our 6,000 people in more than 60 offices deliver communications strategies that give our clients the confidence to lead and act with certainty, earning the trust of their stakeholders. Our honors include *PRWeek's* Global Agency of the Year (2023); *PRovoke's* Global Agency of the Year (2022); Cannes Lions Grand Prix awards for PR (2016) and the Entertainment Lions for Sport (2021); a Gold Lion in the Brand Experience & Activation category (2023); a Gold Lion in the Sustainable Development Goals category (2022); Cannes Lions Independent Agency of the Year for the Entertainment Track (2021); Cannes Lions Co-Independent Agency of the Year for the Good Track (2022); and *Advertising Age's* 2019 A-List. Since our founding in 1952, we have remained an independent, family-run business. Edelman owns specialty companies Edelman Data x Intelligence (research, data), Edelman Smithfield (financial communications), Edelman Global Advisory (advisory), and United Entertainment Group (entertainment, sports, lifestyle).

The May issue of O'Dwyer's will profile our ranked PR firms. If your firm is ranked with O'Dwyer's and you would like to be featured in the profiles section, contact Associate Editor Steve Barnes at 646/843-2089 or [steve@odwyerpr.com](mailto:steve@odwyerpr.com)



**StarKist's "Flex with StarKist" campaign, featuring Emmy Award-winning celebrity Derek Hough and over 100 diverse influencers, successfully reinforced the brand, a Coyne client, as a leading protein company. This integrated campaign resonated with health-conscious audiences and generated over 2 billion impressions, solidifying StarKist's presence in the protein space.**

Photo: StarKist

## EVINS COMMUNICATIONS

600 5th Avenue, Suite 200  
New York, NY 10020  
212/377-3590  
[info@evins.com](mailto:info@evins.com)  
www.evins.com

**Mathew L. Evins**, Chairman  
**Louise R. Evins**, CEO  
**Jacqueline Long**, President  
**David Harrison**, Executive VP  
**David Abrams**, Head of Media and Development  
**Michelle Kelly**, VP

Evins is an independent PR and marketing agency that champions an integrated approach to communications. For lifestyle brands that seek to inspire the world, Evins delivers disruptive creativity and personalized experiences, informed by technology.

Evins has a track record for providing consequential business, marketing and promotional strategies for leading luxury, beverage, lifestyle, hospitality and spirits brands. We transform market data into intelligence, insights and programming for clients, pairing blue sky thinking with bottom line accountability. Since our founding,

we've forged enduring client partnerships, with an average tenure of more than eight years and several in excess of three decades.

## FOODMINDS

404 South Wells, 2nd Floor  
Chicago, IL 60607  
312/258-9500  
[foodminds.com](http://foodminds.com)

**Andrea Carrothers**, MS, RD,  
Senior Vice President, Group Lead  
**Allison Mikita**, MS, Senior Vice  
President, Group Lead

FoodMinds is a leading global food and nutrition agency, providing strategic science, policy, and influencer communications programs that achieve clients' business goals while also doing good for public health, people and the planet.

We put passion into practice across health & wellbeing, global food and nutrition affairs, and sustainable food systems, to affect change and impact behaviors. FoodMinds is a destination where talented food, nutrition, public health and sustainability experts come together to leverage science & insights, stakeholder relationships, consumer values and multi-dimensional commu-

nications to produce meaningful results. FoodMinds employs nutrition experts, policy wonks, trend watchers and storytellers—and is the only agency with 15+ registered dietitians and a Global ExpertBench™ of nutrition science, policy, and communication professionals—to help our clients tell a better story.

FoodMinds works with food, nutrition & wellness companies, leading brands, commodity boards and associations globally, including several *Fortune* 500 companies. FoodMinds is a division of Padilla, a full-service agency that transforms brands and organizations through strategically creative communications, advertising, digital and social marketing, investor relations and brand strategy. Contact us at [foodminds.com](http://foodminds.com) to get started.

## FRENCH/WEST/VAUGHAN

112 East Hargett St.  
Raleigh, NC 27601  
919/832-6300  
www.fwv-us.com

**Rick French**, Chairman & CEO  
**David Gwyn**, President / Principal  
**Natalie Best**, Chief Operating Officer / Principal

French/West/Vaughan (FWV) is the Southeast's leading public relations, public affairs, advertising and digital media agency, a distinction it has held since 2001. Headquartered in Raleigh, N.C., and founded in April 1997, FWV has received 36 Global or National Agency of the Year honors over the past 28 years. Its food & beverage practice area is ranked among the 15 largest in the country.

FWV specializes in creating maximum brand exposure through integrated campaigns that include earned media, promotional partnerships, celebrity endorsements, sponsor relations, event management, social media, influencer marketing, experiential activations and trade shows. The firm has vast experience with product launches in B2C and B2B channels, as well as in strategic counsel on issues related to environmental topics, supply chain, manufacturing and product recalls.

This broad range of expertise, including the evolving communications and content technologies utilized by consumers and the industry, has enabled FWV to support some of the most sought-after

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## FRENCH/WEST/VAUGHAN

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F&B brands in the world, including Melitta Coffee, Moe's Southwest Grill, BurgerFi, Certified Angus Beef, The Coca-Cola Company (NESTEA, Gold Peak, Minute Maid, DASANI, Simply Orange), 3 Loves, ConAgra (Slim Jim, Pemmican Beef Jerky), Nabisco Foods, Brinker International (Maggiano's Little Italy restaurants), Elevation Burger, Community Coffee, Steakhouse Elite, House-Autry, Atlantic Natural Foods, Lidl, Whole Foods Market, Smithfield Chicken 'N Bar-B-Q, the N.C. Pork Council and North Carolina SweetPotato Commission. Our past and present client roster in the beer, wine and spirits category includes Proximo (Pendleton Whisky), Brown-Forman (Jack Daniel's), Diageo North America (Bulleit Bourbon), Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits (Josh Cellars, Yellow Tail, The Calling), BRAND Napa Valley, Grain and Barrel Spirits, Mother Earth Brewing, St. Michelle Wine Estates and the N.C. Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association. The agency has also produced award-winning campaigns for celebrity chefs Christine Hazel, Jeff Mauro, Lorena Garcia and Aliya LeeKong, among many others.

FWV is the parent company of fashion and lifestyle PR firm AMP3 (New York City); mobility and transportation practice FWV Detroit; pet and animal health practice FWV Fetching and feature film development imprint Prix Productions. FWV employs more than 140 public relations, public affairs, social media, advertising and digital marketing experts between its Raleigh, N.C., headquarters and offices around the country.

## G&S INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

New York | Chicago | Raleigh | Waukesha | Waterloo  
www.gsimc.com  
www.gscommunications.com  
www.morganmyers.com

**Steve Halsey**, Chief Growth Officer  
shalsey@gscommunications.com  
**Anne Green**, CEO

G&S Integrated Marketing Communications Group fuels transformation for innovative brands through our two agencies, G&S Business Communications and

MorganMyers, a G&S Agency. We provide strategic communications, public relations, branding, digital marketing, creative and advertising, and reputation management solutions for businesses shaping the future.

G&S Business Communications specializes in B2B storytelling, simplifying complex topics to engage audiences. The agency serves *Fortune* 500, mid-market, and start-up companies across six key industries: Advanced Manufacturing & Energy, Agribusiness, Healthcare & Wellness, Home & Building, Landscaping & Outdoor Living, and Professional & Financial Services.

MorganMyers builds, promotes, and protects food and agriculture brands, fostering demand and trust from "field and farm to food and fork." With deep category expertise, the agency moves companies from where they are to where they want to be.

As an independent, mid-sized group, we remain agile while delivering senior counsel and deep strategic insights. Our PROI Worldwide partnership provides global reach with in-language and in-time zone support across 60 countries and 165 cities, including London, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, Rio de Janeiro, and Tokyo.

Learn how we help brands tell their stories and drive business growth at [www.gscommunications.com](http://www.gscommunications.com) and [www.morganmyers.com](http://www.morganmyers.com).



**HUNTER helped introduce King's Hawaiian's first-ever snack with the ultimate snack break. In collaboration with New York football legend Eli Manning and the nonprofit organization Street Vendor Project, we took over hundreds of street carts across New York City for the day, swapping out the usual pretzels with King's Hawaiian Soft Pretzel Bites.**

## HEMSWORTH

Samantha.Jacobs@Hemsworth-Communications.com  
954/319-1787  
HemsworthCommunications.com  
Instagram.com/HemsworthPR  
Facebook.com/HemsworthCommunications  
Linkedin.com/company/hemsworth-communications

**Samantha Jacobs**, Founder & President  
**Michael Jacobs**, Chief Operations Officer  
**Cathy Angel**, Vice President  
**Lacey Outten**, Associate Vice President, Food, Wine & Spirits  
**Kayla Atwater**, Associate Vice President, Travel & Hospitality

Celebrating a decade of award-winning PR and social media innovation, Hemsworth is a top-ranked agency that specializes in partnering with chefs, restaurants, food/wine/spirits brands and leading global franchises to drive buzz and business. With locations in Atlanta, Charleston, Chicago, Fort Lauderdale, New York City, Philadelphia and Tampa, as well as a network of vetted freelancers in other top media markets globally, Hemsworth crafts tailored programs that encompass brand strategy, media relations, social media, influencer marketing, event programming, thought leadership, crisis communications, strategic alliances, and more. The Hemsworth team is comprised of experts from across the industry—including

former restaurant owners, operators, brand marketers, restaurant franchising professionals and top PR and social media strategists—who share unprecedented passion, insight and connections to surpass client expectations, delivering personal service and powerful results.

## HUNTER

One World Trade Center, Floor 68  
New York, NY 10007

**Grace Leong**, CEO  
**Gigi Garcia Russo**, Chief Innovation and Growth Officer  
**Julie Sternberg**, Managing Director, CPG Food and Beverage

Contact: [smormar@hunterpr.com](mailto:smormar@hunterpr.com)  
**Samara Farber Mormar**, CMO

HUNTER is an award-winning consumer marketing communications firm with a rich history of working with globally recognized food + beverage brands. With offices in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and London and partnerships that extend our reach globally, we've earned recognition as a "Best Place to Work" and "Consumer Agency of the Year." Our 380+ team serves renowned brands including Danone, Smithfield, Post, Pompeian, and TABASCO Brand Pepper Sauce—our first client 36 years ago and still a client today.

Frequently ranked among the top three food & beverage practices in the US, our firm employs a powerful blend of marketing solutions including strategic planning, social and digital media, talent and influencer engagement, media relations, experiential and multicultural marketing, and content creation and distribution for all platforms and channels to earn consumer attention and corporate reputation.

From mouthwatering chef collaborations to exclusive first taste events to #FoodTok, food and beverage is in our DNA. Eating, drinking, cooking and dining are critical parts of every consumer's pursuit of family connection, entertainment, self-care and happiness. Through a powerful blend of our staff's passion for food culture, relationships with food and bev influencers, and prowess for strategic consumer marketing, we help brands show up in the cultural conversations, trends, and events that matter most to consumers when choosing what to eat and drink today.

In addition to our core competencies, we offer specialized services tailored to food and beverage clients, including recipe development and photography, strong relationships with bartenders, mixologists,





As a full-service agency integrating public relations, marketing and digital expertise, Inspire PR Group is nationally respected by clients for its food, agriculture and restaurant expertise.

chefs, and celebrity food influencers across both social and traditional media, and strategic partnerships with government and non-profit organizations that are shaping today's food and beverage conversations.

## ICR

685 Third Ave., 2nd Flr.  
New York, NY 10017  
646/277-1200  
www.icrinc.com

Established in 1998, ICR partners with public and private companies to execute strategic communications and advisory programs, and manage complex transactions and corporate events to enhance long-term enterprise value and corporate reputation. The firm's highly-differentiated service model, which pairs capital markets veterans with senior communications professionals, brings deep sector knowledge and relationships to hundreds of clients across more than 20 industry groups. With more than 400 team members, ICR is one of the largest and most experienced independent communications and advisory firms, maintaining offices in New York, Connecticut, Boston, Baltimore, San Jose, London, and Beijing. Learn more at [icrinc.com](http://icrinc.com). Follow us on LinkedIn and on X at @ICRPR.

Clients: Shake Shack, Authentic Restaurant Brands, Potbelly, Dutch Brothers, Fogo de Chao, Tom's Watch Bar, Panera, Burger King, Portillo's, The ONE Group (STK, Kona Grill, Benihana, etc.), California Pizza Kitchen, Katz's Delicatessen, P.J. Clarke's and Thompson Hospitality.

## INK LINK MARKETING

4846 Sun City Center, #262  
Sun City Center, FL 33573-6281  
305/631-2283  
www.inklinkmarketing.com/  
services  
Linkedin.com/company/  
ink-link-marketing

**Kim Miller**, CEO & Founder  
**Brianne Barbakoff**, Vice President, Client Services  
**Kampi Chaleunsouk**, Vice President, Client Services

Ink Link Marketing began around a table, as all the best things do. Led by visionary Kim Miller, this small, women-owned venture has blossomed over the past 13 years into a thriving medium-sized firm that caters to multimillion-dollar corporations. Operating in Florida, Georgia, New York, Texas, California, and Spain, Ink Link Marketing's success is based on 75 years of combined senior-level experience, effectively blending industry knowledge with innovative ideas that push creative boundaries.

Our team is deeply engaged in local communities, actively participating on boards and maintaining valuable media contacts. This scrappy approach empowers us to source nearly any element needed for grand openings or event management at preferred rates. We focus on generating traffic and sales while ensuring our budgets are constructed with a keen eye toward a positive return on investment.

It's why some of the most loved food brands and food adjacent have chosen Ink Link Marketing

as their partner: Perkins American Food Co., Handel's Homemade Ice Cream, Huddle House, Krispy Krunchy Chicken, Atlanta Community Food Bank, and The Dairy Alliance, to name a few.

## INSPIRE PR GROUP

6120 South Sunbury Road  
Columbus, OH 43081  
614/532-5279  
www.inspireprgroup.com  
Linkedin.com/company/inspire-pr-group  
Instagram.com/inspireprgroup  
Facebook.com/inspireprgroup

**Hinda Mitchell**, Founder & President  
**Hana Bieliauskas**, Senior Vice President & Partner  
**Diane Hurd**, Senior Vice President & Partner  
**Katie Lundy**, Vice President

Inspire PR Group (Inspire) is a multi-service, public relations and marketing communications firm serving clients nationwide. We know how to make food, agriculture, restaurant and retail clients stand out.

With nearly 100 years of combined experience working directly with farmers, state and national commodity organizations, food brands and agribusiness organizations, our firm has developed unparalleled agriculture experience. We know how to tell food and farming stories in an honest, compelling and relevant way.

Inspire also has decades of experience working with both full-service and quick-service restaurants, and we support respected regional restaurant brands and leading independent restaurants.

We have strong relationships with top culinary and food media and influencers, which we regularly leverage to provide value to clients.

Our commitment to our clients is unmatched. We firmly believe in the importance of relationships, and that's why most of our clients have relied on the Inspire team for more than a decade. That kind of loyalty only occurs when the firm evolves with its clients, continues to deliver fresh and innovative thinking, and becomes more than just a vendor to serve as a trusted partner.

## JPR GROUP, LLC PUBLIC RELATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

330 Passaic Avenue  
Fairfield, NJ 07004  
973/980-0100  
jgenauer@jprgroup.com  
www.jprgroup.com

**Jeanine Genauer**, Founder and Principal

For over a decade, JPR Group Public Relations has established itself as a powerhouse in the supermarket and food retail industry. Our expertise shines in our long-standing partnership with Allegiance Retail Services and the co-op members, where we have celebrated store openings, shared the journeys of company leaders, and highlighted community initiatives that enrich and unite local neighborhoods throughout New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

As a certified Women Business Enterprise led by seasoned PR professional Jeanine Genauer, we bring a boutique agency's personal touch with enterprise-level impact. Our team excels in crafting authentic narratives that resonate with local media, turning everyday moments into meaningful connections that build lasting relationships and positively impact the communities.

JPR Group's comprehensive services include strategic media relations, community-focused storytelling, event management, and award submissions while also supporting conference events for the restaurant supply chain industry. Recognized as a Leading Brand Builder by Leading Women Entrepreneurs and honored with the Great Oak Award in *New Jersey Monthly Magazine*, we continue to strengthen the bonds between food retailers and the communities they serve through compelling communication and timely media engagement.



## PADILLA

612/455-1700  
PadillaCo.com

**Erin DeSimone**, Executive Vice President

Padilla's Food, Beverage + Nutrition Practice is one of the strongest and most experienced in the country. Balancing deeply rooted expertise with cutting-edge insights and technology, Padilla's team navigates complex challenges and delivers impactful solutions.

Located in the world's media capital—we represent beloved brands and marketing cooperatives for all audiences: consumer, food-service, retail and beyond.

Our award-winning team of credentialed culinary, beverage and nutrition experts, food and lifestyle media specialists, and business pros are skilled in making the consumer's decision easy by leveraging data and insights to capture the rational and emotional "why" that defines your unique value proposition.

Padilla is a full-service agency that transforms brands and organizations through strategically creative communications. Padilla operates in seven cities in the U.S. through its family of brands, which includes SHIFT (performance communications), FoodMinds (food and nutrition affairs) and Joe Smith (brand strategy). As an AVENIR GLOBAL company and a founding member of the Worldcom Public Relations Group, the agency provides services to clients through 115 offices worldwide. Transform with purpose at PadillaCo.com.

## POLLOCK COMMUNICATIONS

450 Lexington Ave., Floor 4  
New York, NY 10017  
212/941-1414  
www.lpollockpr.com  
Instagram.com/pollockpr  
Linkedin.com/company/pollock-communications

**Louise Pollock**, Founder & President  
**Christina Deecken**, Vice President

Pollock Communications is a full-service public relations agency specializing in food, beverage, nutrition and wellness. With over 25 years of experience, we partner with brands, commodity boards and industry organizations to navigate the evolving media landscape. Through science-based communi-



**JPR Group Public Relations are experts in promoting grocery and allied industries, delivering strategic communications that drive success! Turn to JPR Group for all public relations, social media and marketing communications needs.**

cations, influencer engagement and strategic storytelling, we create meaningful impact and drive consumer action.

What sets us apart is our proven ability to translate complex nutrition science into compelling, consumer-friendly messages that resonate with media, health professionals and consumers alike. Our annual "What's Trending in Nutrition" survey, conducted with *Today's Dietitian*, polls hundreds of RDNs to uncover emerging food and health trends, positioning us at the forefront of industry insights.

Our expertise extends beyond communications to public policy efforts that shape the food and nutrition landscape. We have experience working with the USDA and FDA on key nutrition initiatives, providing clients with strategic guidance on policy development and advocacy efforts.

From securing top-tier media coverage to developing innovative digital activations, Pollock Communications stays ahead of industry trends to help clients build credibility, grow awareness and drive demand. Whether launching a new product, advocating for health benefits or engaging key opinion leaders, we deliver measurable results that place your product front and center with key target audiences.

## RF|BINDER

950 3rd Ave., Floor 8  
New York, NY 10022  
212/994-7600

www.rfbinder.com  
atalanta.rafferty@rfbinder.com  
rebecca.binder@rfbinder.com

LinkedIn: @rfbinder  
Instagram: @rfbinder

**Amy Binder**, Founder and CEO  
**Atalanta Rafferty**, Co-Founder and Head of Food, Drinks & Nutrition Practice  
**Craig Blakaitis**, Senior Managing Director, Food, Drinks & Nutrition Practice  
**Rebecca Binder**, President

At RF|Binder, we don't just build buzz—we drive measurable impact. From sparking social media conversations to driving headlines in top-tier outlets, our creative campaigns transform food and beverage brands into pantry staples and cultural icons. Every program we design is grounded in strategy and fueled by insight, tapping into influencers, social communities and cultural moments to spark authentic engagement and deliver real business results.

Our award-winning work spans the entire food and beverage landscape—from CPG, QSR and restaurant brands to retail, B2B ingredients, wine, beer, and spirits, as well as country trade groups and industry associations. As the industry faces supply chain resiliency concerns and inflationary prices, we specialize in supporting category disruptors, emerging innovators in food tech, and brands rooted in heritage and authenticity. Whether it's reputation-building or a crisis response, our team has deftly managed everything from product recalls and in-store inci-

dents to customer complaints and activist campaigns. When you partner with RF|Binder, you tap into a powerhouse of expertise that drives growth, shapes culture, and protects your brand.

RF|Binder is a fully integrated communications and consulting firm—powered by strategy, creativity, analytics and purpose. We are independent, entrepreneurial, and woman-owned.

## SPM COMMUNICATIONS

2332 Irving Blvd., Ste. 110  
Dallas, TX 75207  
214/379-7000  
info@spmcommunications.com  
www.spmcommunications.com

**Suzanne Parsonage Miller**, President and Founder  
**Loren Rutledge**, General Manager

For over 25 years, SPM has helped build and protect food, beverage and restaurant brands, including national household names like Chuck E. Cheese, innovative better-for-you chains like DIG and Clean Juice, hot-again franchise systems like Shipley Do-Nuts and legacy CPG brands like Utz.

SPM was Whataburger's first PR agency of record, helping the legacy brand define and leverage their place in the burger landscape for over a decade. We went on to launch Chipotle in Texas, got lines out the doors to 500-plus bakeries to celebrate a Nothing Bundt Cakes brand milestone, introduced the nation to Chuck E. Cheese's \$350 million fun center refresh and generated buzz to bolster Zapp's first-ever line expansion in brand history.

We dig deep to create innovative campaigns that move the needle for our clients, integrating media relations, influencer partnerships, executive positioning, franchise development and social media strategy. Through our robust crisis communications and issues management, we've helped our clients navigate through over 7,000 crises, and our media protocol is currently deployed in restaurant locations nationwide.

Current food, beverage and restaurant brand clients include Chuck E. Cheese, DIG, Clean Eats, Clean Juice, Karbach Brewing Co., la Madeleine, Little Woodrow's, Nothing Bundt Cakes, The Melting Pot, Miller's Ale House, Peter Piper Pizza, Philz Coffee, Pollo Campero, Shipley Do-Nuts and Utz Brands.





**Taylor client, Crown Royal, in its fourth year as the NFL's official whisky sponsor, closed out the season with the Crown Royal Rig Tour, culminating at Super Bowl LIX in New Orleans. The campaign generated 4.6 billion PR impressions—a 206% year-over-year increase—with major coverage in *Forbes* and *Billboard*. Key moments included the launch of the exclusive Crown Royal x Starter NFL Super Bowl LIX Satin Jacket at the Starter House, highlighted by a performance from Mannie Fresh and Juvenile. NFL legend Drew Brees amplified the brand's presence on Radio Row and at a local bar appearance, engaging fans around Crown Royal's generosity.**

## TAYLOR

101 Greenwich, #404  
New York, NY 10006  
212/714-5700  
[www.taylorstrategy.com](http://www.taylorstrategy.com)

**Tony Signore**, Chairman  
**Maeve Hagen**, CEO & Mng.  
Partner  
**Mike Costabile**, Chief Client Officer & Mng. Partner  
**Christina Merritt**, Chief Strategy Officer  
**Brad Mancuso**, EVP, Creative

As “Shapers of Possibility,” Taylor helps the world's leading brands lean into the edge of their purpose to unlock opportunities for growth. Named “Consumer Agency of the Decade” by *The Holmes Report*, Taylor is headquartered in New York. The agency provides a full array of services including: consumer insights; brand planning; creative; digital strategy and social media; strategic media relations; measurement and evaluation; event creative and production; and talent procurement and media training.

For more than 40 years, Taylor has developed and executed marketing communications programs for category-leading food and beverage brands, including Diageo, a global leader in beverage alcohol. Via social campaigns, content production, and strategic media relations, Taylor has successfully launched new products, reinvigorated iconic brands, and sustained

momentum in the marketplace for Diageo adult beverage favorites such as Crown Royal, Guinness, Captain Morgan, and Smirnoff, among others.

Most recently, Taylor expanded its food and beverage portfolio by taking on the Chobani social business, further reinforcing its expertise in driving engagement and brand affinity through compelling storytelling and digital-first strategies.

The agency also partners with leading consumer packaged goods brands under P&G for a wide range of services, including sports sponsorship activations for brands such as Gillette, Head & Shoulders, Old Spice, and Tide.



**Award-winning boutique PR firm WordHampton Public Relations, located in The Hamptons.**

## TREVELINO/KELLER

Interlock Tower  
1042 Northside Drive, Suite 960  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
404/214-0722  
[dtrevelino@trevelinokeller.com](mailto:dtrevelino@trevelinokeller.com)  
[gkeller@trevelinokeller.com](mailto:gkeller@trevelinokeller.com)  
[www.trevelinokeller.com](http://www.trevelinokeller.com)

**Dean Trevelino**, Founder & Co-CEO  
**Genna Keller**, Founder & Co-CEO

Trevelino/Keller continues to be a one-shop solution for its food, beverage, restaurant and franchise clients, leveraging all practices—public relations, growth marketing and creative services—to serve some of the most iconic and recognizable brands in the industry. Leading the way is the company's franchise area of expertise which includes brands like Nathan's Famous, Roy Rogers, Frisch's, Steak 'N Shake, Bad Ass Coffee of Hawaii and more. The agency is often sought after because of its ability to support both b2b [franchise sales in the case of franchise brands] as well as consumer engagement at the grassroots level driving loyalty, delivery and in-store sales.

With a long-standing experience base in food-tech with brands like Tillster, Naranga, Humrun and more, clients benefit from having the team at the table to negotiate promotional programming with the likes of Uber Eats, Door Dash and Grubhub. Beyond restaurant and franchise concepts, the firm has a base of experience with wine and spirits, having introduced the first Spotify-enabled wine label in the US, one of the first modern art distilleries and the oldest operating distillery in Georgia since prohibition. The firm is also known for its long-running Winepreneurs club

which brings entrepreneurs together throughout the year to connect over some of California and Europe's finer wines.

Trevelino/Keller's sweet spot is emerging brands having launched and scaled brands like Moe's Southwest Grill, Shane's Rib Shack, Planet Smoothie, Mama Fu's, Boneheads, Original Hot Chicken, Doc Green's as well as its work refreshing concepts like Johnny Rockets, Steak 'N Shake, TCBY, Paris Baguette, Roy Rogers and Corner Bakery Café.

## WORDHAMPTON PUBLIC RELATIONS

512 Three Mile Harbor HC Rd.  
East Hampton, NY 11937  
631/329-0050  
[www.wordhampton.com](http://www.wordhampton.com)

**Nicole Castillo**, President

WordHampton Public Relations is an award-winning boutique PR firm located in the Hamptons servicing the NY metro area. Specializing in signature hospitality, lifestyle, real estate and Hamptons businesses, WordHampton has been building client reputations and revenues for over 30 years. Our team creates a customized approach for every client utilizing strategic and creative thinking, deep media and community relationships and social media expertise.

WordHampton's robust client roster includes several signature restaurants in the Hamptons including Nick & Toni's, Rowdy Hall, Almond, Lulu Kitchen, Duryea's, The Clam Bar, Arthur & Sons, Navy Beach and The Beacon as well as signature restaurants on Long Island including Mirabelle Restaurant and several Lessing's Wedding properties. The firm is the driving force behind the award-winning tri-annual event Long Island Restaurant Week coordinating all elements of the event. WordHampton has represented several beverage brands including Origen Holistic Spirits, Bedell Cellars winery and Diplomatico Rum among others.

Known as Hamptons Insiders, WordHampton has developed long-term relationships with the media, government and community offering a deep knowledge of the unique seasonal market. The firm has launched countless businesses, pop-ups, products and more, resulting in success. The team is spirited, progressive and determined, the ultimate recipe for success. **O**

# O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

## FOOD AND BEVERAGE PR FIRMS

Firm	Net Fees (2023)	Firm	Net Fees (2023)
1. Edelman, New York, NY	\$148,274,000	26. BizCom Associates, Plano, TX	\$311,511
2. Zeno Group, New York, NY	36,882,127	27. cenario Communications, Los Angeles, CA	300,000
3. Hunter, New York, NY	23,200,000	28. Buchanan Public Relations, Bryn Mawr, PA	288,115
4. Ruder Finn Inc., New York, NY	15,640,000	29. Fish Consulting, Fort Lauderdale, FL	265,000
5. Padilla, Minneapolis, MN	14,799,891	30. L.C. Williams & Associates, Chicago, IL	201,683
6. MikeWorldWide, New York, NY	11,183,275	31. O'Malley Hansen Communications, Chicago, IL	192,596
7. Finn Partners, New York, NY	10,000,000	32. Rasky Partners, Inc., Boston, MA	183,725
8. APCO, Washington, DC	9,200,000	33. Franco, Detroit, MI	173,515
9. Taylor, New York, NY	7,100,000	34. Red Thread PR, Philadelphia, PA	136,700
10. 5W Public Relations, New York, NY	5,800,000	35. Inkhouse, Waltham, MA	135,463
11. Jackson Spalding, Atlanta, GA	4,700,944	36. Tunheim, Minneapolis, MN	130,420
12. Coyne PR, Parsippany, NJ	4,695,900	37. Otter PR, St. Petersburg, FL	122,255
13. 360PR+, Boston, MA	4,675,500	38. Slide Nine Agency, Columbus, OH	117,446
14. French   West   Vaughan, Raleigh, NC	3,304,115	39. MP&F Strategic Communications, Nashville, TN	104,593
15. Hahn Agency, Austin, TX	2,983,090	40. Beehive Strategic Communication, St. Paul, MN	94,428
16. Vault Communications, Plymouth Meeting, PA	1,863,345	41. Trevelino/Keller, Atlanta, GA	90,000
17. Bader Rutter & Associates, Inc., Milwaukee, WI	1,722,570	42. Stanton Communications, Washington, DC	82,147
18. Zimmerman Agency, Tallahassee, FL	1,650,000	43. TruePoint Communications, Dallas, TX	81,993
19. MMGY Wagstaff, Los Angeles, CA	1,285,752	44. PSC (Princeton Strategic Communications), Trenton, NJ	78,000
20. Avoq, Washington, DC	1,002,777	45. 3E Public Relations, Pine Brook, NJ	77,350
21. SPM Communications, Dallas, TX	782,542	46. Ehrhardt Group, The, New Orleans, LA	70,000
22. LaunchSquad, San Francisco, CA	630,000	47. Shiftology, Springfield, OH	23,546
23. IW Group, Inc., West Hollywood, CA	526,947	48. Hemsworth, Fort Lauderdale, FL	18,000
24. rbb Communications, Miami, FL	407,939	49. Lawlor Media Group, New York, NY	18,000
25. Pierpont Communications, Houston, TX	395,501	50. Tier One Partners, Boston, MA	15,640



# O'DWYER'S RANKINGS

## PR FIRMS SPECIALIZING IN RESTAURANTS

Firm	Net Fees (2023)	Firm	Net Fees (2023)
<b>1. Zeno Group</b> , New York, NY	<b>\$9,129,924</b>	<b>10. Inspire PR Group</b> , Westerville, OH	<b>\$404,350</b>
<b>2. Jackson Spalding</b> , Atlanta, GA	<b>9,123,974</b>	<b>11. Wordhampton PR, Inc.</b> , East Hampton, NY	<b>369,440</b>
<b>3. Champion Management Group</b> , Dallas, TX	<b>5,282,541</b>	<b>12. French   West   Vaughan</b> , Raleigh, NC	<b>201,565</b>
<b>4. Fish Consulting</b> , Fort Lauderdale, FL	<b>2,504,000</b>	<b>13. Otter PR</b> , St. Petersburg, FL	<b>109,380</b>
<b>5. IW Group, Inc.</b> , West Hollywood, CA	<b>2,330,042</b>	<b>14. Ehrhardt Group, The</b> , New Orleans, LA	<b>92,101</b>
<b>6. Edelman</b> , New York, NY	<b>2,193,000</b>	<b>15. Lawlor Media Group</b> , New York, NY	<b>71,745</b>
<b>7. MMGY Wagstaff</b> , Los Angeles, CA	<b>1,767,400</b>	<b>16. O'Malley Hansen Comms.</b> , Chicago, IL	<b>46,000</b>
<b>8. SPM Communications</b> , Dallas, TX	<b>1,499,237</b>	<b>17. TruePoint Communications</b> , Dallas, TX	<b>20,460</b>
<b>9. Trevelino/Keller</b> , Atlanta, GA	<b>420,000</b>		

# The PR advice Trump doesn't want

By Fraser Seitel

It's ironic with the price of eggs going up, how many of them Donald Trump manages to break each week.



**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*.

- He shuts down the Agency for International Development and fires 1,400 people.

- He promises to take over the Gaza "Riviera" strip and lets that murdering Putin keep the land he's stolen in Ukraine.

- He frees all the January 6 Capitol rioters and throws in that thievin' Mayor Adams for good measure.

This President is breaking an egg a minute!

Whether you're part of the 70 million who love the guy or the other 70 million who hate his guts, you've got to admit Donald Trump has been plenty busy.

Much of what the once and current President has started to do—rein in immigration, cut out government waste, bring the wars to an end, bid adieu to wokeness—all make sense and got him elected.

But ... the Presidency is a four-year gig, and Trump has three years and 11 months left to earn his spot as either one of the greatest presidents of all time or one of the worst in history or just another of the many, like Joe Biden, who proved themselves to be fiercely mediocre.

As positive as several of Trump's early initiatives have been—reestablishing the border, locking up illegal immigrant gang members, securing big U.S. tech investments, forcing Mexico and Canada and soon the Europeans to contribute more on joint issues, reopening the White House to media scrutiny, etc.—he's also made several telling mistakes. Such as:

- Pardoning every January 6 rioter, including the thugs who attacked police, was a grievous error.

- Ditto pardoning Mayor Adams, who clearly broke the law.

- Taking an Elon Musk meat cleaver to federal employees was, if not unconstitutional, certainly unnecessary.

- Using the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport crash to lash out at D.E.I. policies was jaw-dropping.

All of these boneheaded blunders underscore Trump's Achilles heel: He simply doesn't listen to anyone else.

That seemed not to be the case during the campaign, when Trump frequently heeded the advice of his experienced campaign managers, Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles. But now that he's President again, Trump has appeared to shed the shackles of thoughtful counsel and revert to his prior never-in-doubt self.

While he already has chalked up several victories in a few short weeks, what Donald Trump desperately needs for the longer term is sound, reasonable and professional public relations advice.

In this new term, Trump has surrounded himself with supplicants who either accept on faith his pronouncements or, if they have a quarrel, are too afraid to challenge their cock-sure chief.

His 27-year-old Press Secretary, Karoline Leavitt, is a great example. She's good, glib, smart and secure beyond her years. The difference in confidence and competence between Leavitt and her tentative Biden administration predecessors is night and day.

But Trump's young press aide is an interpreter not a counselor, an accepter not a challenger. MAGA through and through. What the boss says is always right. And she communicates it clearly and with commitment. Hers is not to ask questions.

And so it goes throughout the new Trump administration hierarchy; true believers who won't push back. The only potential "disruptor" may be Wiles, who Trump named White House Chief of Staff. But so far, she's been rarely seen or heard.

The job of a public relations counselor is to challenge decisions and to vet possible outcomes, including worst case scenarios. With no one to play that role in the new Trump administration, the President leaves himself open to exposing several glaring faults as a leader. Among them:

## He lacks discipline

In speeches and impromptu sessions with the press, he regularly hurts himself by letting his bad impulses prevail. The American Airlines-helicopter crash press conference was a case in point. While Trump tried mightily to express sorrow for the crash victims, he ultimately succumbed to his worst instincts to blame "woke" policies for putting the wrong people in the cockpit and air traffic control. A strong public relations advisor would have cautioned him in advance to save that jab for another venue.

## He doesn't study

Trump is and has always been a "seat of

the pants" operator. He has little use for briefing papers, boring experts and range of choices. He works hard but is a lazy student. He's the boss and now he's the "law." So, who needs somebody to ward him away from potential trouble spots?

Elon Musk's annihilation of federal workers is a glaring example of how consultation with advisors, schooled in corporate cutbacks, would have been eminently better than the wholesale beheadings that are taking place and will likely be overturned in court. Trump's vision to reduce the bloated bureaucracy is universally applauded, but the way he's gone about executing the federal workforce is dumb.

## He's too black and white

Trump doesn't do nuance. Fire them all! Cut out the agency! Get rid of their security clearances. Pardon the whole bunch of 'em! All wrong and entirely preventable if he had a public relations counselor who didn't fear him. It's just a matter of time before one of these absolute decisions bites him in his presidential buttocks.

## He doesn't accept responsibility

As any experienced public relations counselor will tell you, the hardest thing for most CEOs to admit is they were wrong. Accordingly, CEO and now President Trump has always been loath to acknowledge he made a mistake. Rescinding the budget freeze on federal programs during the first week was a rare occasion when he reversed a decision. Perhaps it was Chief of Staff Wiles who got through to him. If so, that's a hopeful sign.

Again, it all comes down to the fact that Donald Trump doesn't listen. And that's a real problem if you've got another 46 months to go.

The President was sent back to Washington to break eggs, and so far, he's doing just that. But his high-wire act will get progressively more perilous as the days go by and the job gets harder. Without an experienced, tough-minded, trusted counselor to protect him, Donald Trump increasingly risks making one foolish decision too many which may, like Humpty Dumpty, send him falling face first right off the wall. ○

## PR brief

### C Street does Zips chapter 11

C Street Advisory Group handles Zips Car Wash as the nation's largest privately held car wash operator declares Chapter 11.

The Plano, TX-based company has 260 locations and owns the Zips, Rocket Express Car Wash and Jet Brite Wash brands. It blamed the need to file for bankruptcy on high interest rates, rising labor costs and cutthroat competition from the 900 car washes that open each year.

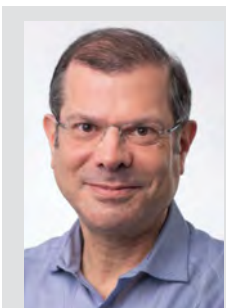
The reorganization is expected to slash Zip's debt load by \$279 million and raise \$15 million to support strategic initiatives.



# Nuance is out—it needs to come back

By Paul Oestreicher

In today's world, nuance is rapidly disappearing. Politics, media and public debate have become dominated by black-or-white, yes-or-no thinking and communication. Leaders and decision-makers no longer have patience for complexity; instead, they opt for sweeping, sometimes incendiary language that may look decisive but often creates more harm than good.



**Paul Oestreicher, PhD,** is a renowned public relations and public affairs professional known for strategic communications, thought leadership development, crisis and reputation management and third-party relationship building.

The consequences of this shift can be seen in political rhetoric, media coverage, corporate decision-making and public policy. From government leaders passing policies without considering long-term

effects to social media reducing issues to simplistic slogans, the ability to grapple with complexity has all but vanished.

This lack of nuance isn't just frustrating—it's dangerous. It leads to policies, leadership decisions and public conversations that fail to acknowledge the full scope of reality. It's time to examine why nuance has fallen out of favor and how we can restore it before losing our ability to think and communicate critically altogether.

## How media, politics reward oversimplification

One of the biggest drivers of binary thinking is the modern media landscape. The 24-hour news cycle and social media algorithms can prioritize engagement over accuracy, meaning the most extreme, emotionally charged language gets the most attention.

Consider the recent coverage of the White House's decision to suspend all federal grants and loan disbursements. While some outlets reported the White House's justification—that the move was necessary to prevent public funding of "wokeness" and programs it deemed wasteful—others highlighted concerns from critics who labeled it an unconstitutional overreach that would undermine essential programs. The framing of the issue quickly devolved into a polarized debate—either a bold crackdown or a reckless assault on public funding—rather than an analysis of the policy's mechanics, trade-offs or potential compromises. Few discussions ex-

amined the long-term implications or the specific programs affected, reducing the conversation to partisan conflict instead of policy substance.

Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's research on cognitive biases helps explain another factor contributing to this mindset. People naturally prefer certainty over ambiguity. Instead, they want to avoid wrestling with complexity and seek quick, straightforward answers. Media outlets and politicians exploit this tendency by simplifying issues into a good versus evil narrative, where one side is entirely right, and the other is completely wrong.

## Musk's NIH overhaul: a case study in oversimplification

An example of the dangers of eliminating nuance in decision-making is Elon Musk's attempt to restructure the National Institutes of Health. Musk, known for his aggressive and combative leadership style, took a "wood chipper" to the indirect research costs paid to grant recipients.

Instead of carefully studying potential reform measures, he slashed funding, jeopardizing ongoing and future studies as well as the employment of scientists, medical researchers and support staff across the country. His goal was to make the NIH more efficient. However, his approach ignored the social contract between the government and universities and the complexity of biomedical research, which often requires long-term investment rather than immediate results. The result? Chaos.

Many critical NIH programs were abruptly halted, scientists scrambled for new funding and even private-sector partners expressed concern about the long-term impact on medical innovation. What Musk framed as a bold, decisive move was an oversimplified gutting of an institution whose work does not fit neatly into a profit-driven model.

This is the kind of false clarity that dominates leadership today. Instead of making thoughtful, informed adjustments, leaders increasingly favor sweeping, disruptive action—a "move fast and break things" approach that disregards complexity.

## The death of complexity in public policy

This problem isn't unique to Musk. Across government and business, leaders are rejecting incremental progress in favor of dramatic, attention-grabbing moves.

Consider Donald Trump's recent tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China. The tariffs were presented as a decisive strategy to pressure foreign governments on immigration and trade issues. However, the reality was far more complex: retaliatory tariffs from Canada and Mexico, disruptions to sup-

ply chains and an absence of clear benchmarks for success. Instead of tackling the root causes of economic and immigration challenges, the tariffs acted as a symbolic, high-impact maneuver with uncertain long-term consequences. This type of performative, surface-level decision-making creates the illusion of action while failing to address the underlying issues.

## How to elevate the conversation

If I weren't such an optimist, I'd say we're too far gone—too many are invested in and profiting from the current state, where crude, simplistic messages persuade people to act against their self-interest and undermine democracy. We must find ways to elevate how we communicate and interact to restore civility and evidence-based decision-making. This will require a declaration of the need for change and a commitment to a range of efforts from various stakeholders over an extended period. Here are a few key steps communicators, policymakers and business leaders can take:

**Encourage complexity in public discussions.** Rather than presenting false binaries, leaders and the communicators who advise them should emphasize educating the public about trade-offs and long-term consequences.

**Prioritize incremental change over blunt action.** Policy and decision-makers should recognize that big problems require thoughtful, long-term solutions.

**Acknowledge that emotional appeals can oversimplify issues.** Emotions are a powerful tool in communication, but they can be even more effective when combined with rational analysis. Journalists and communicators must counter the clickbait, outrage-driven news model.

**Teach critical thinking and media literacy.** The public needs better tools to recognize when issues are being flattened into false binaries. This process should begin early by teaching students how to evaluate sources, recognize biases and engage with complexity.

Nuance is fading because it's tougher to sell, more challenging to explain and harder to act upon. Additionally, it requires time. In a world where leaders seek quick results, the media wants engagement, the public craves certainty and complexity has become inconvenient. However, the cost of ignoring nuance is massive. If we want better leadership, policies, and public discourse, we must resist the urge for quick, flashy, or frenzied explanations and responses. We must embrace complexity, acknowledge trade-offs, and have the patience to address issues with the depth they deserve. ○

## Ballard Partners blasts off with Blue Origin

**B**allard Partners has signed on Jeff Bezos-backed Blue Origin rocket company to handle issues related to commercial spaceflight.

The company, which competes with Elon Musk's SpaceX, is in the midst of a restructuring to focus more on launches rather than research and development.

That revamp is expected to result in a cut of 1,000 employees from its 11,000-member workforce, according to a Bloomberg report.

Blue Origin CEO Dave Lamp said Blue Origin will make the second launch of its New Glenn rocket in the Spring. A launch last month resulted in the loss of New Glenn's booster.

He also expects Blue Origin's Blue Moon lunar lander to reach the Moon later this year.

Brian Ballard, a top Trump fundraiser, heads his firm's Blue Origin team that includes Dan McFaul, ex-Aide to Florida Republican Congressmen Joe Scarborough and Matt Gaetz; and Mat Forrest, former Events Supervisor for West Palm Beach.

The firm is the former home of Attorney General Pam Bondi and Trump Chief of Staff Susie Wiles. ○

## Ballard Partners shoots for the gold

**B**allard Partners has picked up the Los Angeles Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games as a client.

The devastating Southern California wildfires led some to question whether LA can accommodate the estimated 15 million visitors who plan to attend the Games, while restoring destroyed infrastructure.

None of the Olympic sites were damaged by fires, though the Rose Bowl was in an evacuation zone for the Eaton Fire.

The Palisade Fire, which was between Malibu and Santa Monica, triggered an evacuation of Riviera County Club, site of host the golf competition.

Casey Wasserman, who heads LA28, visited Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago in January to update the President on the planning for the Games.

Trump predicted LA will host the greatest Olympics ever and that the Games will go off without a hitch.

Brian Ballard, a top Trump fundraiser, heads his firm's lobbying team that includes Patrick Kilcur, former Executive VP-U.S. Government Affairs at the Motion Picture Assn; and Michael LaRosa, who was Communications Director for Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Press Secretary for First Lady Jill Biden. ○

## Global Strategy Group adds Labor Dept. alum

**G**lobal Strategy Group has named former U.S. Department of Labor Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Julie McClain Downey as VP in its Washington, D.C. office. Before joining the Biden Administration in February 2023, Downey was VP of Strategic Communications at Democratic

PAC American Bridge, leading communications during the 2022 election cycle. She has



Julie McClain Downey



also served as Senior Director of Advocacy Communications for Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Senior Director of Campaign Communications at EMILY's List. ○

## DCI Group taps Sununu's ex-chief of staff

**D**CI Group has hired Jayne Millerick, former Chief of Staff for New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu, to lead its outreach to state governors and attorneys general.

Millerick worked for Sununu during his two terms in office, in which he managed the response to COVID-19, cut taxes while balancing the budget, and grew the economy.

Before Sununu, she was chairperson and Executive Director of the NH State Republican Party.

In that capacity, she helped devise statewide public affairs messaging and performed crisis management duties. ○



Jayne Millerick

## Levinson Group adds D.C. vet Schapitl

**A**shley Schapitl, a 15-year veteran of Congress and the Executive Branch, has joined The Levinson Group as Managing Director in its D.C. office.

Most recently, she was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Treasury Dept., where she managed communications related to the Inflation Reduction Act, special events and U.S. travel for Secretary Janet Yellen.

Schapitl did an eight-year run as a Senate staffer. She was Communications Advisor at both the Finance and Judiciary Committees, and Press Secretary for California Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

She also served as Press Secretary for California Congresswoman Lois Capps, and began her D.C. career as press intern in the office of Sen. Ted Kennedy. ○



Ashley Schapitl



## Panama Canal Authority lawyers up

The Panama Canal Authority has retained Vinson & Elkins for legal and strategic advice, according to its one-year contract that went into effect on Jan 26.

The pact calls for V&E to deal with “congressional inquiries, legislative actions, executive decisions, treaties, laws, and U.S. policy relating to the Panama Canal.”

The law firm also may engage with U.S. government officials on behalf of the PCA, which is an autonomous public entity charged with the exclusive responsibility for the administration, operation, conservation, maintenance and modernization of the Panama Canal and its related activities.

President Trump has threatened to take back the Canal. The State Dept. on Feb. 6 posted on X that U.S. government ships would get free passage through the Canal. An average 40 U.S. Navy vessels use the canal each year. The tab is about \$13 million.

The PCA and Panama President Jose Raul Mulino denied the existence of any deal with the U.S. “I am incredibly surprised by yesterday’s statement,” Mulino, who toured the Canal with Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier this month, called the U.S. statement “lies and falsehoods.”

Nick Henchie, Partner-International Construction Disputes, coordinates V&E’s team.

PCA has paid V&E \$7 million for its representation, according to the firm’s FARA filing. It has made disbursements of \$3.9 million.

The Government of Panama last month signed a one-year contract worth \$205,714 with BGR Government Affairs for strategic counsel and outreach to U.S. officials.

Republican-connected BGR is the home of Haley Barbour. He’s a former political advisor to President Reagan, Chair of the Republican National Committee, and two-time Governor of Mississippi. ○

## Checkmate speaks for Canadian premiers

Checkmate Government Relations has signed to represent Canada’s Council of the Federation, which is composed of the country’s 13 provincial and territorial premiers, for D.C. representation.

The move comes as President Trump has “paused” his plan to impose 25 percent tariffs on imports from the Great White North until March 4.

Ontario’s premier Doug Ford will lead the Federation’s mission to Washington on Feb. 12.

He also put a pause on the retaliatory measures that Ontario had planned to institute on US goods in reaction to Trump’s play.

Canada’s most populous province was going to ban the sale of American liquor, beer, wine and seltzer—a \$685 million market—and prohibit US companies from competing for provincial contracts.

Ford also ripped up a \$70 million contract with Elon Musk’s Starlink to provide Internet services to rural areas of Ontario.

“We have temporarily averted tariffs that would have severely damaged our economy, giving time for more negotiation and time for cooler heads to prevail,” Ford said in a Feb. statement. “With the U.S. pausing tariffs, Ontario will also pause our retaliatory measures.”

On the D.C. trip, Canada’s premiers are to meet with members of the Trump admin. and business leaders to talk opportunities and threats to the \$1 trillion U.S./Canada economic relationship. The U.S. sells more goods to Canada than China, Japan and Germany combined.

The firm’s contract with the Canadians went into effect on Feb. 1. It carries an \$85,000 monthly fee. ○

### 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](http://www.fara.gov).

**Gephardt Group Government Affairs, LLC**, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 14, 2025 for Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States**, Washington, D.C., regarding providing government services assisting TECRO to maintain strong relations with the U.S. Congress and to seek mutually beneficial legislation in support of the relationship.

**Green River Public Affairs LLC**, Rockville, Md., **registered Jan. 20, 2025 for Embassy of the State of Qatar**, Washington, D.C., concerning providing public relations advice and assistance, as directed by the Embassy.

**Gunster Strategies Worldwide**, Bethesda, Md., **registered Jan. 29, 2025 for Minister of Interior of Pakistan, Embassy of Pakistan**, Washington, D.C., regarding a visit from Mohsin Naqvi, the Minister of Interior of Pakistan, January 17-25, 2025, to the United States.

### 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](http://www.senate.gov).

**9th Street Strategies**, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb., 4, 2025 for Mortgage Bankers Association**, Washington, D.C., regarding issues related to housing finance and mortgage banking.

**Ballard Partners**, Washington, D.C., **registered Feb. 10, 2025 for Blue Origin, LLC**, Arlington, Va., concerning advocacy on issues related to commercial spaceflight and guidance on opportunities to utilize Blue Origin capabilities.

**Miller Strategies, LLC**, Buda, Texas, **registered Feb. 3, 2025 for American Hotel & Lodging Association**, Washington, D.C., regarding general issues related to the hospitality industry, labor issues and tax policy.

**Mutch Government Relations**, Denver, Colo., **registered Feb. 5, 2025 for Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments**, Colorado Springs, Colo., regarding transportation, aging, air quality, defense and budget issues.

## Sloane co-CEO Clay joins Longacre Square

**W**hit Clay, Co-CEO of Sloane & Company for the past nine years, will move to Longacre Square Partners on March 1 as Partner and head of its New York office.

Sloane has named Darren Brandt as sole CEO of the firm.

During his career, Clay has advised clients across a broad sector of the economy with a particular focus on media, entertainment, sports and technology sectors.

He has counseled Liberty Media, Atlanta Braves MLB team, IMAX, and Apollo Global Management Founder Leon Black. Prior to joining Sloane in 1999, Clay was at Edelman Financial Worldwide.

Sloane is part of Stagwell. ○



Whit Clay

## Kekst CNC recruits Meta/Twitter alum

**K**ekst CNC has named Sean Evins, a veteran of Meta and Twitter, as a Partner in its London office.

He will counsel clients on emerging technologies, digital transformation and issues related to the convergence of technology, geopolitics and policy.

In a more-than-eight-year run at Meta/Facebook, Evins rose to the Director of Global Affairs, Policy AI and Emerging Technology Experiences position.

At Twitter, Evins led global politics, government and news partnerships. He has also served as a Congressional staffer at the House Administration Committee.

Kekst CNC is part of Publicis Groupe. ○



Sean Evins

## AARP vet Clark joins APCO

**B**ill Clark, who spent more than a dozen years as campaign director at AARP, is joining APCO as a Senior Director in its D.C. headquarters.

He had spearheaded prescription drug and family caregiving campaigns at AARP.

Clark, who has more than 30 years of advocacy and government relations experience, served as a principal at both Podesta/Mattoon and Weber Merritt working on strategic communications and PA efforts.

He also worked in the federal government at the White House Presidential Personnel Office and at the Department of Homeland Security, where he was Director of Legislative Affairs.

Clark's late wife, Alicia Peterson Clark, was Deputy Managing Dir. of APCO's Washington office before she died in 2017. ○



Bill Clark

## Int'l trade vet Padilla joins Brunswick Group

**B**runswick Group has named Chris Padilla, a veteran of IBM and the US Commerce Dept., as a senior advisor in its Washington office.

He exited a 15-year run at IBM as VP-government and regulatory affairs, responsible for teams in more than 35 countries dealing with trade issues and sanctions compliance matters.

Padilla served in the George W. Bush administration as Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, and as Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Export Administration.

He also was Assistant United States Trade Representative, a Senior Advisor at the Department of State, and a member of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

Earlier, he had international trade, business development, and marketing jobs at AT&T and Eastman Kodak. ○



Chris Padilla

## Enero Group names Ian Ball COO

**E**nero Group, which includes Hotwire Group as well as adtech platform OB-Media and creative agency BMF, has named Ian Ball Chief Operating Officer.

Ball was previously COO and Head of Strategy and M&A at live entertainment, ticketing and tech company TEG. He has also served as an Operating Partner at Sil-

ver Lake and CEO & Managing Partner at professional services company Cardno.

At Enero, Ball will oversee the operational and financial aspects of the business, in addition to taking over the strategic review of OB-Media. ○



Ian Ball

## Kingsland takes EVP post at Trident

**E**mily Kingsland, who was previously VP of Communications at D.C.-based investment firm Revolution, joins Trident DMG as an EVP.

At Revolution, Kingsland worked with investors, founders, CEOs and startups on media relations, thought leadership, policy initiatives and risk mitigation and management.

Before coming to Revolution in 2019, she served as Communications Director, Policy and Advocacy at the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and Communications Director for the National Center on Education and the Economy. Earlier in her career, Emily worked at Edelman and Widmeyer, a FINN Partners Company.

At Trident DMG, Kingsland will advise firm clients on corporate communications, strategic communications and public affairs campaigns, issues and stakeholder management and navigating sensitive situations. ○



Emily Kingsland

## KAOH calls MacAfee CEO

**K**AOH Media, a renewable energy communications firm, has named former Porter Novelli CEO and Senior Partner Brad MacAfee, as its CEO.

At Porter Novelli, MacAfee helped transform the firm from a generalist agency to one focused on purpose and social impact. More recently, he founded Mission + Cause, a consultancy and executive search firm aimed at assisting PR agencies and in-house communications departments in aligning workplace culture for purpose-driven and results-oriented expansion. ○



Brad MacAfee



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Public relations, social media strategy, photography, content creation, influencer relations, brand partnerships, and crisis communications.

Employees: 111. Founded: 2005.

**Agency Statement:**

Owned by Jamie Lynn O'Grady (California) and Sarah Evans (New York), J/PR is a global communications agency specializing in travel, hospitality, and lifestyle. With a trend-setting team of 110 members across the US, UK and Toronto, J/PR represents world-renowned brands while offering a boutique approach with big access and results. Many clients and team members have worked with the agency for years; a testament to the agency's personalized approach and award-winning campaigns.

Jamie Lynn O'Grady, Founding Partner; Sarah Evans, Partner; Ali Lundberg, President



Jamie Lynn O'Grady & Sarah Evans, Partners

**J/PR in the news with O'Dwyer's:**

**Accounts in Transit: MMGY NJF Picks J/PR for Biz**

...roster include Apple Leisure Group, Montauk Chamber of Commerce and is named agency of record for the Inter Buckhead Atlanta. ...

**News of Firms: J/PR Launches 20Two Studio**

... J/PR launches 20Two Studio, a creative storytelling affiliate focused on public relations and social media...

**News of Firms: J/PR Scoops Up Sadler & Co.**

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\*79% of consumers want to know where their food comes from. Research conducted by G&S Integrated Marketing Communications Group September 4–5, 2024 of 357 U.S. adults who are their household's decision maker for groceries. The survey has a +/- 5 point margin of error.